

{ WORLD PREMIERE }

GOOD THINGS COME IN THREES

Benjamin Martin finds it easier to say what his new work isn't than what it is

Trinitas is a short triple-concerto scored for strings and violin, viola and piano solo but it's perhaps easier to state what *Trinitas* isn't than what it is; for example, it isn't a political work – in the sense of referring to any specified event – nor is it a programmatic work, nor particularly autobiographical. It does not refer to any particular part of the Australian landscape. Moreover, its title, despite religious ramifications, is not meant in any literal or liturgical sense.

It is true that *Trinitas* was written during a period when my father was critically ill (and shortly after passed away) and it would be absurd for me to suggest that this experience did not hold sway over the creation of the work itself. However, the musical result cannot be said to yield any such conscious endeavour on my part; I did not intend to write this work as a kind of premonition or summation of grief.

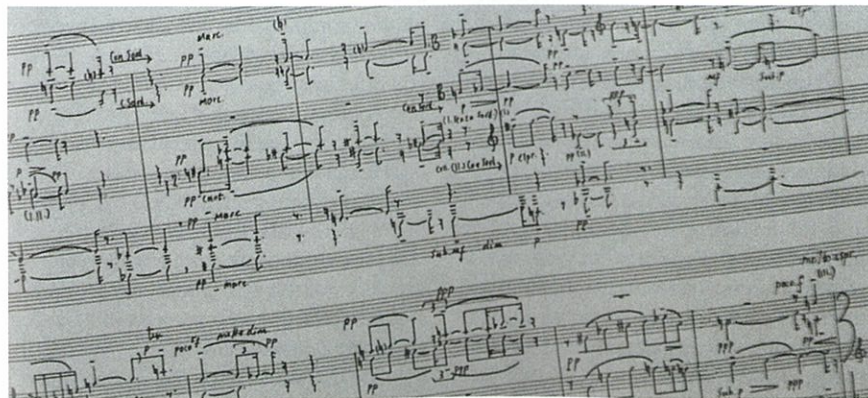
What I can say about *Trinitas* is that it celebrates the spirit of the individual; the

wildness of one's imagination embracing timeless ritual in the face of clockwork routine and the notion that two minds are better than one.

I wrote this piece shortly after completing the score of *Trinitas* and still feel this way about it. It's true that on a technical level the work's structure has something to do with threes. However, discussing one's craft in detail usually makes for highly uninteresting reading, to me at any rate. When I read such things by a composer I worry that they have taken leave of their senses.

I should add that not a note of *Trinitas* was written to provoke, shock, or offend, and if anyone is upset or disturbed by it then they can rest assured it wasn't intentional. I know a number of people who believe that art is meant to provoke in an extreme sort of way, and as much as I respect their views I find this aspect to their thinking rather strange.

Trinitas ends loudly, not softly. The *quasi niente* finish is generally not my thing. It's actually much harder to write a work that ends *forte* – in the affirmative – since the material must play itself out convincingly so as to warrant a dignified exit. The other kind tends to slink away, muttering incoherently to itself as though it had plenty more to say, but now's not the time. Of course some great music disappears at the end of it all, but that's when there's truly nothing more to say. Finally, I am particularly touched that a musical maverick such as William Hennessy and the prodigious musical forces courtesy of the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra have chosen to perform this work.



WORK *Trinitas* **COMPOSER** Benjamin Martin **SCORED FOR** Piano, violin, cello and orchestra **COMMISSIONED BY** Melbourne Chamber Orchestra **PREMIERE** November 3, Melbourne Recital Centre **PERFORMERS** Benjamin Martin p, MCO



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Requiem

JÁNOS STARKER 1924–2013

Legendary cellist János Starker has died at the age of 88. One of the greatest 20th-century masters of his instrument along with Casals and Rostropovich, the Budapest-born Starker was given his first cello at the age of five. He trained at the Franz Liszt Academy where his teachers included Weiner, Kodály, Bartók and Dohnányi. At the age of 14 he stood in at three hours notice for a professional soloist playing the Dvorák Cello Concerto. During the war he spent three months in an internment camp, narrowly escaping the fate of his brothers, who were murdered by the Nazis.

Starker left Hungary in 1946 when the Soviet Union occupied the country, eventually becoming principal cellist of the Metropolitan Opera under Fritz Reiner. He followed the conductor to Chicago in 1952 as principal cellist of the CSO.

From 1958 Starker resumed his successful solo career, making over 160 records including five versions of the Bach Cello Suites. He was renowned for his intense style and enormous technical resources. A famously restrained stage presence, his maxim was "Create excitement. Don't get excited."



DOROTHY TAUBMAN 1917–2013

The formidable music pedagogue who worked with injured pianists including Leon Fleisher (who was forced to play with one hand for many years) has died at the age of 94. Founding the Taubman Institute of New York, she developed what became known as the Taubman Approach to pianism. Her method analysed the motions needed for virtuosic technique and expressive gestures, building a reputation through its uncanny success in curing injured musicians. It provoked controversy, however, by questioning the physiological soundness of some traditional practices of piano teaching. "Playing the piano should feel delicious," said Taubman on one occasion, adding that "blaming the instrument is like saying that writer's cramp is caused by the pencil".

In addition to offering a rational, diagnostic system addressing the physiological problems of her pianist patients, Taubman's techniques have been adapted to aid sufferers of repetitive strain injury (RSI) outside of the music profession, especially those affected by their use of computer keyboards.



A TEACHER OF GENIUS

BENJAMIN MARTIN PAYS TRIBUTE TO TAUBMAN

I was much saddened to hear about the passing of Dorothy Taubman, a teacher of genius with whom I had the privilege to study between 1992–1994. I say "of genius" with the utmost sincerity since it is the term best suited to her extraordinary capacity as a teacher. I would turn up at her Brooklyn apartment once a week for lessons that would go for up to two hours. She insisted that her students bring a cassette in order to record the lesson for later reference (cassettes, well, it was some time ago!). During winter my hands would literally freeze from the walk to her studio. "That shouldn't make any difference, honey", she'd say. "Cold hands doesn't impede good coordination." Then I'd get her to explain why that is (while surreptitiously warming my hands).

She had an incredibly charming manner, warm, trusting, but occasionally abrupt and even damaging. I recall a conversation she had while I was taking off my coat. She was speaking to a teacher in tones of consolation due to an injury he'd sustained. "Oh, you poor man, that sounds terrible, to play in pain, it sounds like a dystonia, however I'd have to see you in person to be sure". However, the temperature suddenly raised dramatically: "WHAT?!? You TEACH?!?! So all your students will end up like YOU? Don't think for a SECOND that you won't be passing on your own bad habits". I was positively startled by such brazen frankness. Yet the moment she got off the phone her mood instantly returned to one of calm compassion. "Oh that poor man, you know it's truly terrible. But you can't be teaching in such circumstances, it's really criminal."



So I suppose it is clear from this that she was not one to beat around the bush when it came to teaching and playing the piano. She had an acute ear and was meticulous – and merciless –

when it came to the craft of one's playing. On one occasion she said to me "Honey, it sounds like you can't play it, that's all, and people will say you can't play it."

Although Taubman

developed a reputation for curing injured students (I was fortunately not one of them) she had no patience for the term "relaxation teacher". "You need muscles to sit up in a chair", she said, "otherwise down you go". Moreover, she regarded it as very misleading since playing the piano well demands a subtly balanced equilibrium of muscle groups which necessarily entails a degree, albeit barely noticeable, of tension.

I should add that she had a wonderful musical imagination and offered many startling insights into a wide range of scores. She will be greatly missed. However, thanks to her tireless and profound dedication as a teacher, a wonderful legacy exists from which generations of students may prosper in the future.

“She was not one to beat around the bush when it came to teaching and playing the piano”