



Britta Byström: Doppelgänger Music

Interview with the composer

To which extent did the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann inspire your new work? Was it mainly „The Devil's Elixirs“ or more the „Die Doppelgänger“?

It was mostly the Doppelgänger as an idea that inspired the composition – the thought of a musical voice being "shadowed" by another voice – but also the "mood" of the book: a fantastic story told in a very precise way.

Can you please explain how you translate the idea of a “doppelgänger” into music?

I have used the Doppelgänger idea as an inspiration for counterpoint in the music. As you can see, there are a lot of imitations between the parts, often in different tempos. For example, in the very beginning (of 1st movement) the violin and cello are playing the same rhythm, but the cello is doing it in half tempo, like a slower shadow. The third movement is written as a double canon in two tempos: one canon between violin and piano right hand, and one – the same music, but in half tempo – between cello and piano left hand.

Could you tell us something about the specific musical characters of the different movements of your trio?

It is a quite traditional form, with a dreaming, more introvert second movement surrounded by two more rhythmical and intense movements. The idea of separate voices imitating and shadowing each other is the same in all three movements, though (in opposite to treating the ensemble more like one body of sound).

While composing a new piece, do you try out ideas on an instrument (piano), or do you put your ideas directly into paper / computer?

I certainly need a piano, especially when I'm writing for piano! But I always start with sketches at the piano, also in orchestral works. Then, when I have found something that I like, I move the piece into the computer (I'm working with the notation programme Finale) and develop the composition there.

The piano trio genre mainly belongs more to the tradition of the 19th-century chamber music; many contemporary composers are more interested in other formations. In your eyes, how relevant is it to create a composition for the formation of a piano trio?

I love the piano trio as an ensemble! There are so many possibilities within its frame. 20 years ago, I wrote a piano trio called "Symphony in Yellow", where the title indicates how I felt about the ensemble: as a small, bright orchestra, for which you could write a kind of chamber symphony. This time I somehow felt that the ensemble was perfect for Hoffmann's story: the two singing voices with the piano echoing around them.