

Finzi-Clarinet Concerto Op.31

The Clarinet Concerto, Finzi's most widely performed and recorded orchestral work, shows his particular empathy for this solo instrument. Here the clarinet's equal facility for sustained legato melody and rapid virtuosic figuration is supported by and interacts with his ever-imaginative writing for strings. The concerto breathes an air of fresh spontaneity, moving through baroque-inflected pastoralism, aching Elgarian echoes and lively folk-inspired melody. Artists who have become particularly associated with the work in concert and on disc in recent years include Emma Johnson, Richard Stoltzman, Michael Collins and Andrew Marriner. Its string accompaniment makes it ideal for coupling with *Dies natalis* or *Let us garlands bring*, shorter works such as the *Prelude and Romance*, or string orchestra repertoire by Elgar, Vaughan Williams or Britten.

Max Bruch, Op.83, No.1 For clarinet, piano and viola

Bruch composed his *Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano*, Op. 83 in 1909, in his 70th year, for his son Max Felix, a talented clarinetist. Bruch's publisher Simrock brought out the work in 1910 shortly after its completion. The clarinet and viola parts were also arranged for violin and cello, as the publisher felt the customary piano trio combination would appeal to a wider audience. Hence the *Eight Pieces* can be played in four different combinations: by Clarinet, Viola and Piano or Clarinet, Cello and Piano or Violin, Cello and Piano or Violin, Viola and Piano.

The *Eight Pieces* favor rich, mellow instrumental hues and an autumnal maturity of expression, deeply felt but purged of excess. The clarinet and viola are evenly matched, singing together in duet or conversing in dialogue, while the piano serves as an accompaniment. Bruch intended that the *Eight Pieces* be regarded as a set of independent miniatures of various styles rather than as an integrated cycle, and advised against playing all of them together in concert. As a result, Simrock published each piece separately so that players could mix and match. But they were also published together in sets of four and later yet altogether.

Some trios choose to present all eight together and they can easily take the place of a full length trio. Other groups choose a selection where a shorter program work is required. And yet others select one to serve as an encore on its own.