

TRIO ANIMA

9-10 May 2025

Bridport Arts Centre, Ilminster Arts Centre, The Dance House Crewkerne

From the very outset of their programme, a performance of the *Elegiac Trio* by Arnold Bax, one gained the immediate impression that the players of *Trio Anima* had an understanding not only of the composition but also a warmth of understanding that comes from musicians who have experienced many fulfilling performances together. The current trio – Matthew Featherstone (flute), Rosalind Ventris (viola), Anneke Hodnett (harp) - have performed together for thirteen years.

The *Elegiac Trio* and the concluding work Debussy’s *Sonate pour flûte, alto et harp* were written within two years of each other (1917 and 1915), and for the same unusual combination of instruments. But that is where the similarity ends in terms of style and intention. The Bax trio has its heart very much in the mist, legends, and contemporary politics of Ireland, while the Debussy *Sonate* is focussed on the interplay of colourful sonorities and the structural fusion of melodic motifs, reminding one of a stained-glass window with different shades of brighter and duller hues. The Irishness of the *Elegiac Trio* was much in evidence by Arnold Bax’s wonderful writing for the harp. Here we were treated to, not only fine playing by Anneke Hodnett, but a sense of a natural rapport with the *Trio* by the Irish harpist.

Trio Anima performed *Between Earth and Sea,* an evocative piece by Sally Beamish, written in 1997. Beamish who has made Scotland her home takes her inspiration for this composition from the Celtic lament and the call of the redshank. Its atmospheric design asks the performers to conjure up a picture that moves from a sense of loneliness to passages of high mobility that finally dissolves into a haze of high sonorities. The picture was more successfully achieved in the slightly more generous resonance of the Ilminster Arts Centre than the Dance House.

Debussy’s *Syrinx* for solo flute revealed Matthew Featherstone’s impressive ability to produce flawless control over phrase endings. His decision to play the Ilminster performance from a resonant room ‘off-stage’ was an inspired idea, asking the listeners to focus on the imagery and sensuousness of the music rather than the performer.

In the arrangement of two well-known songs by Gabriel Fauré – *Aurore* and I *Après un rêve* – we were treated to the enchanting world of the poet’s flights of fancy by Rosalind Ventris’s viola playing, sonorous, warm, and beguiling.

The combination of an arrangement of John Dowland’s well-loved song *Flow, my tears,* written at the turn of the 16th-17th centuries,and then followed immediately without applause by Nathan Dearden’s reflective *Ayre* using the diverse range of moods and styles in Dowland’s music, was very effective. The Welsh composer’s reflection, a commission by Trio Anima in 2022, demonstrated the importance of commissioning and the rewarding addition that can result for this specific instrumental combination.

The programme was well presented with informative introductions to the music and a helpful explanation about the mechanics of a concert harp. Altogether, *Trio Anima* brough*t* to Concerts in the Westrewarding and very enjoyable performances.

Andrew Maddocks 2025