Our first story is one of tragedy and political outrage.

Since 1901 there had been demands for a Czech University to give domestic students a chance to receive higher education in their own language rather than in the German, which was the language of the country’s Austrian rulers. The Czech people wanted it to be built in Brno; but the Austrians felt this would dilute Brno’s predominantly Germanic character so called for German speakers to attend a rally in the city on 1st October 1905. 20,000 Czech speaking students staged a counter-demonstration in the city’s Besední dům. Inevitably the two sides clashed and the Imperial army was called in to restore order. Things might have passed off and the event forgotten once tempers had cooled and the physical wounds healed, but there was a fatality. A 20-year-old carpenter by the name of František Pavlík was bayonetted by one of the soldiers on the steps of the Besední dům. Whether that young carpenter was taking part in the demonstration or was merely in the square on legitimate business, nobody seems to know for certain, but it catapulted the whole issue of the imperialist government’s suppression of citizens’ rights to the very forefront of popular consciousness, and a crowd estimated at around 80,000 people turned up to witness Pavlík’s funeral in Brno – making it the largest funeral the city ever saw during the 20th century. 20 years later a memorial plaque was erected at the spot where he was killed, which went on to become the symbolic meeting place for those working to rid their homeland of the succession of oppressive rulers under whom it was to suffer throughout the 20th century.

Leoš Janáček had been in the thick of the action, supporting those who opposed the German speakers and, in the words of one eye-witness, had to be “forcibly pulled aside” when the soldiers with fixed bayonets arrived on the scene to restore order. He was therefore across the street when Pavlík was killed (hence the work’s subtitle) and was so moved and outraged that he
straightaway set out to compose a piano sonata to express his solidarity with František Pavlík and other fighters for Czech rights.

He cast the three-movement Sonata in the key of E flat minor which, according to Christian Schubart’s *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst* of 1806 signifies “Feelings of anxiety of the soul’s deepest distress, of brooding despair, of blackest depression, of the most gloomy condition of the soul. Every fear, every hesitation of the shuddering heart, breathes out of the horrible E flat minor. If ghosts could speak, their speech would approximate this key”.

Certainly Janáček found it extremely distasteful, and on the very day of its planned first performance – given in Brno on 27th January 1906 by Ludmila Tučková (like today’s soloist, a post-graduate Conservatory student) – he snatched the third movement funeral march from her and threw it into the fire. Days after the performance of the two remaining movements, he took them and threw them into the River Vltava, where one poetic commentator suggested they “floated away like white swans”. However, in 1924 Ludmila Tučková revealed that she had kept a copy of these two movements and played them privately to the composer on his 70th birthday. Janáček agreed to have them published and to that end prepared a short introductory note to explain the title of the work; “The white marble of the steps of Besední dům here in Brno. The ordinary labourer František Pavlík falls, stained with blood. He came merely to champion higher learning and has been slain by cruel murderers”. On 23rd November 1924 *1 x. 1905* was performed for the first time in Prague by the pianist Jan Heřman.
Referring to 1 x. 1905 the noted Janáček scholar, John Tyrrell, suggests that it is “earthy and gutsy, and today this aspect is valued more than the superficial trappings of piano-friendly technique”. That the writing is decidedly un-pianistic is obvious from the very first page of the 1st movement (see above), and the implications of the title easily be identified in this music, which veers violently from jagged rhythmic outbursts to moments of quiet contemplation. The 2nd movement is a highly emotional reflection on the void left by a young man’s death. At the start that is physically represented by a rest in each bar, while the focus on the loss of just one young man is emphasised by the fact that the entire movement is built around the plaintive theme heard at the very start. The music ends pianississimo, representing the silence of the grave.
Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

Verklärte Nacht, Op.4

Stories which begin in light and end in darkness usually have a sad ending. Not this one. Here, as we move from the light of day to the darkness of night, we move from sorrow and grief into great joy. This is story which tells us about, as the German title translates it, a “Transfigured Night”.

Richard Dehmel is our story-teller. He was born in 1863, worked for a time as an insurance official before, in 1893, turning to poetry. Having spent much of his childhood in the woods and forests of his native Brandenburg, where his father was a forester, it was natural that many of his poems focused on woodlands, nature and the hard life led by the rural folk. He was also obsessed with the idea of self-sacrifice, of striving towards some idealistic goal, and of the ecstasy achieved through unconditional love and especially of the conjugal union of a man and woman. Typical of his philosophy was this quote; “A little kindness from person to person is better than a vast love for all humankind”.

In a letter to Dehmel dated 13th December 1912 Arnold Schoenberg wrote; “Your poems have had a decisive influence on my development as a composer. They were what first made me try to find a new tone in the lyrical mood. [...] My first attempts to compose settings for your poems contain more of what has subsequently developed in my work than there is in some of my later compositions”. The most famous of Dehmel’s poems to inspire Schoenberg at the very start of his composing career (Shortly after he had resigned from his
job as a bank official) was *Verklärte Nacht* which comes from a collection published in 1896 as *Weib und der Welt* ("Woman and the World"). Schoenberg first devised it as a work for string sextet in 1899, but it was not performed until 18th March 1902 and even then was a failure. In 1917 he returned to the work and rescored it for string orchestra.

Two people walk through a bare, cold grove;
The moon glides along with them, they look up towards it.
The moon glides over tall oaks,
No cloud obscures the light from the sky,
Into which the black points of the branches reach.
A woman’s voice speaks:

*I’m carrying a child, but not yours,*
*I walk in sin beside you.*
*I have committed a great offence against myself.*
*I no longer believe I can be happy*
*And yet I had a strong yearning*
*For my life to have meaning,*
*for the motherhood’s joys and duties;*
*so I committed an effrontery,*
*Shuddering, I allowed my sex*
*To be embraced by a strange man,*
*And, on top of that, I blessed myself for it.*
*Now life has taken its revenge:*
*Now I have met you, oh, you.*

She walks on with stumbling steps,
*She looks up;*
*The moon glides along with her.*
Her dark gaze is drowned in light. 
A man’s voice speaks:

May the child you conceived
Be no burden to your soul;
Just see how brightly the universe is gleaming!
There’s a glow around everything;
You are floating with me on a cold ocean,
But a special warmth flickers
From you into me, from me into you.
It will transfigure the strange man’s child.
You will bear the child for me, as if it were mine;
You have brought the glow into me,
You have made me like a child myself.

He grasps her around her ample hips.
Their breath mingles in the air as they kiss.
Two people walk through the lofty, bright night.

Arnold Schoenberg and his wife in 1907

Schoenberg’s work follows the five stanzas of Dehmel’s poem which correspond to the musical form of a “Rondo” (ABACA). The first (A) section represents the “night” in which the couple are walking, as well as the darkness of their innermost thoughts. The second section (B) indicates the passionate outburst as the woman confesses her unfaithfulness, but after some anguished soul-searching the man declares, in music of great warmth and tenderness (the C section), that the love-child will become their own. The night is then transfigured and an exquisite high violin solo above muted and pizzicato strings brings the music to its ecstatic conclusion.
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Petroushka

Here’s a story which has it all; a circus, a crowd of colourful characters, love, jealousy, revenge, political intrigue, murder and a ghostly apparition! No wonder it so attracted Igor Stravinsky that he made a dazzlingly colourful orchestra score out of it, and its premiere was one of the greatest successes of his early career.

The idea for the story actually came from Serge Diaghilev. Born in Russia, he established a ballet company in Paris in 1909 made up almost entirely of émigré Russian dancers, the Ballets Russes, whose first productions were greeted with rapturous enthusiasm as much for their glittering musical scores as for their lavish costumes, opulent scenery and stunning choreography. The following year he asked the then relatively unknown Igor Stravinsky to take over the task of composing the music for a new ballet from Anatoly Lyadov, who had failed to fulfil a commission. That ballet, The Firebird, premiered in Paris on 25th June 1910, brought Stravinsky immediate international acclaim. Shortly afterwards he had a vision in which he saw a girl dancing herself to death in a pagan rite. This he made into one of the most controversial and violent ballet scores ever written, The Rite of Spring, which propelled Stravinsky to international renown.

Between The Firebird and The Rite of Spring Diaghilev asked Stravinsky to write music for another ballet inspired by the sawdust puppets which were a popular feature of Russian travelling fairs. This ballet, Petroushka, was also staged by the Ballets Russes in Paris to huge acclaim on 13th June 1911. It symbolises the persecution and cruelty from which the peasant classes in Russia suffered at the hands of the authorities. In a thinly-disguised allegory of the mood of the common people in the years leading up to the October
Revolution of 1917, the doll Petroushka is killed but returns as a ghost to frighten off the old man who controls it. In less political terms Stravinsky described it as “a picture of a puppet suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggios”. The prominent virtuoso role given to the piano in Petroushka is a legacy of a piano concerto Stravinsky had begun to write at the time, but was never to complete.

In 1947 Stravinsky revised Petroushka for concert use, the four sections of the work running without a break.

**The Shrovetide Fair.** A carnival in St Petersburg in 1830. Surging crowds, an organ-grinder, a dancing girl and a group of revellers. Drummers appear and announce an old and gnarled showman who, before putting on his puppet show, plays a nonsensical little tune on his flute which casts a spell over the audience. On the stage of the puppet theatre three puppets – Petroushka, the Blackamoor and the Ballerina – perform a frantic dance.

**In Petroushka’s Room.** A small prison-like cell. The door bursts open and Petroushka is kicked inside falling flat on his face. His pathetic attempts to escape are depicted by fluttering arpeggios from the piano. The door opens and the Ballerina, with whom Petroushka is in love, dances in.

**In the Blackamoor’s Room.** The Ballerina admires the handsome and powerful Blackamoor and goes to his luxurious room where they embrace (and more!). Petroushka bursts in but is chased away by the Blackamoor.

**The Shrovetide Fair – evening.** There is a commotion in the puppet theatre and Petroushka rushes out from behind the curtain chased by the Blackamoor who kills Petroushka in front of a dismayed crowd. The spell is broken and the showman reminds the crowd that Petroushka is only a puppet. But after the fair has shut and the showman is clearing up, Petroushka appears and threatens him. Terrified the showman runs off into the night.
“Petrushka” by Paraskeva Clark (1898-1986). This draws together the stories from the beginning and ending of this concert. Clark was inspired to paint this scene following reports of five steel workers being killed by police during clashes in the streets of Chicago in 1937 © National Gallery of Canada