

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 26 June 2022 7.30pm

Leonore Piano Trio

Benjamin Nabarro violin

Gemma Rosefield cello

Tim Horton piano



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This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Trio in G HXV/25 (1795)

I. Andante • II. Poco adagio • III. Finale 'Rondo all'Ongarese'. Presto

Woldemar Bargiel (1828-1897)

Piano Trio No. 1 in F Op. 6 (1851)

*I. Adagio – Allegro energico • II. Andante sostenuto •
III. Scherzo. Presto • IV. Allegro con fuoco*

Interval

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor Op. 49 (1839)

*I. Molto allegro agitato • II. Andante con moto tranquillo •
III. Scherzo. Leggiero e vivace • IV. Finale. Allegro assai appassionato*

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When **Haydn** began writing keyboard trios in the 1760s, they were usually performed within the homes of the supposedly refined classes. The pianist or harpsichordist, often the lady of the house, would be accompanied by friends or staff members on the violin and cello (the strings were always regarded as subsidiary to the keyboard). By the time Haydn came to write his last piano trios in the 1790s, the newest keyboard instruments had stronger lower registers, theoretically freeing the cello from having to reinforce the bass line throughout. And in London, at least, where public concerts had become part of the capital's life, piano trios were no longer confined to household entertainment.

However, observe the billing for the first London edition of the Trio in A flat, HXV/14, published in 1792: 'A Favourite Sonata for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord with Accompaniment for a Violin and Violoncello as performed by Master Hummel at Mr Salomon's Concert, Hanover Square, composed by Dr Haydn.' That was the prevailing view, and even as innovative a composer as 'Dr Haydn' was not yet ready to treat the three instruments as equals.

That said, there are moments in the G major Trio HXV/25 where the strings are given a fair degree of independence. It was composed in 1795, towards the end of Haydn's second visit to London, and is one of a set of three dedicated to the widow Rebecca Schroeter, to whom the unhappily married composer had a close attachment at the time. The first two movements are relatively restrained and polite, but the finale avails itself of some Gypsy-style fire. Haydn would have heard plenty of Roma bands and Hungarian folk music while living in Hungary in the employ of the Esterházy family.

Born in the year that Schubert died, and dying the same year as Brahms, **Woldemar Bargiel** was the younger half-brother of Clara Schumann. Their mother, Mariane, had been married to Friedrich Wieck, a domineering and obsessive man who determined from the outset that young Clara would be a money-spinning piano virtuoso. After nine years the Wiecks' marriage ended in divorce and Mariane (herself a fine pianist and signer) married the musician Adolphe Bargiel. Their son Woldemar was soon brought into the circle of Robert and Clara Schumann and their friend Felix Mendelssohn, who in due time helped him receive a thorough musical education at the Leipzig Conservatory.

Bargiel's First Piano Trio dates from 1851, shortly after he had left Leipzig for Berlin. While revising it for publication in 1855 he had the benefit of advice from Robert Schumann. It soon became a much played and admired work. The first movement's intense and introspective introduction ushers in an *Allegro* that alternates a stiffly formal march theme with sonorous and broad melodic material of a melancholic cast. The *Andante*'s first tune is

introduced by the cello over deep, tolling piano chords. The theme passes between this instrument and the violin during the course of the movement; there is also a restless middle section.

The *Scherzo*, with its equestrian rhythmic patterns, inhabits the same world of goblins and sprites we find in equivalent movements by Mendelssohn, but with a heavier tread. Its trio section looks longingly to a more heavenly realm. The finale begins with a brief, jaunty flourish, then immediately embarks on fugal material. Full of richly varied themes, the movement ends with a joyful shout.

The compositional process of **Mendelssohn's** D minor trio illustrates the artistic tensions of the time, in which Classical formality had not yet given way to Romantic expressive freedom. Having, as he thought, completed the score in 1839, the composer showed it to his friend Ferdinand Hiller, a composer in his own right and a friend of Liszt and Chopin. Hiller dared to suggest, politely, that Mendelssohn's arpeggiated piano writing was 'old-fashioned'. The criticism stung, and Mendelssohn revised the entire keyboard part that same year. The result was successful, since the trio gained instant popularity.

The work opens with an imposing theme passing from cello to violin, then receiving an answer from the piano that causes general agitation. A calmer transitional theme leads to an A major second subject. The constant motion of the piano part in the development creates the effect that elements of both subjects (voiced by violin and cello) are being tossed on turbulent waters. The recapitulation pauses unexpectedly, throwing the transitional theme into prominence as a subject in its own right.

The first theme of the slow movement is very much a 'song without words'. Each of its two sections is played first by the piano, then by the strings with the piano's support. The middle section takes us into the minor and mirrors the rapid mood swings that friends noted in Mendelssohn. It also makes subtle use of a violin line that the composer has already introduced as a countermelody in the first-movement recapitulation.

The rapidly scurrying *Scherzo* becomes aggressive at times, and offers no lyrical trio as contrast. The *Finale* begins with a rather furtive theme, given an effective foil by a graceful and expansive tune that arrives out of nowhere, but seems utterly at home. Few composers other than Mendelssohn could deal with such disparate material and create an effect so logical and natural. If the movement begins a little quaintly, by its close it achieves genuine grandeur.

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