

CHAMBER MUSIC



Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

RACHMANINOFF & FRIENDS: LEONORE TRIO

Friday 4 March 2022 7–8pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Serge Rachmaninoff Trio *élégiaque* for piano,
violin and cello No 2 in D minor

Leonore Trio

Trio *élégiaque* for piano, violin and cello No 2 in D minor Op 9

Serge Rachmaninoff

- 1 **Moderato**
- 2 **Quasi variazione**
- 3 **Allegro risoluto**

Serge Rachmaninoff's second piano trio was composed in the autumn of 1893, just over a year after he had graduated from the Moscow Conservatory with the highest honours and the Great Gold Medal. His final year as a student had been immensely productive: his compositions had included a first piano trio (also designated '*élégiaque*'), his First Piano Concerto, a group of piano pieces, one of which was the soon-to-be-famous Prelude in C-sharp minor, and a one-act opera, *Aleko*, based on Pushkin's narrative poem *The Gypsies*. To Rachmaninoff's delight, his hero Tchaikovsky – who as a member of the Conservatory's examining board had been much impressed with Rachmaninoff's progress during his student career and had predicted a successful future for him – helped to persuade the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow to mount a production of *Aleko* in May 1892, the month of Rachmaninoff's graduation. A year later Tchaikovsky accepted the dedication of Rachmaninoff's new *Fantaisie-tableaux* for two pianos, and also promised to feature another new work by his protégé, a symphonic tone-poem entitled *The Rock*, in his programmes on a forthcoming European tour.

On the evening that the news of Tchaikovsky's death came through in 1893, Rachmaninoff, deeply distressed, started work on a second Trio *élégiaque*, dedicated 'To the memory of a great artist'. The piece was completed before the end of the year, and first performed in Moscow on 31 January 1894 by Rachmaninoff at the piano, with the cellist Anatoly Brandukov and violinist Yuly Konyus.

The Op 9 Trio is closely modelled on Tchaikovsky's A minor Piano Trio, composed in memory of his own mentor, Nikolai Rubinstein. As in Tchaikovsky's work, an initial plangent minor-key lament furnishes the basis for the whole of the large-scale opening movement. Towards its end, the virtuosic piano part – designed for Rachmaninoff himself – explodes into an impassioned cadenza, as if its grief can no longer be contained. The central movement, in F major, pays homage to its exemplar with a set of variations. Its theme is derived from *The Rock*, the tone-poem Tchaikovsky was to have conducted, but also has echoes of Tchaikovsky's own second-movement theme. It is introduced by the piano alone, while the second of the eight variations is also for solo piano (Rachmaninoff originally wanted to incorporate a harmonium in this movement, but had second thoughts in a revised edition published in 1907). The piano also dominates the relatively brief finale, in which the opening movement's lament returns after a dramatic climax, first in fragmentary form, then in full. Cello and piano alone bring the work to a reflective conclusion.



Leonore Trio

Formed in 2012, the Leonore Trio brings together three internationally acclaimed artists whose piano trio performances as part of Ensemble 360 were met with such an enthusiastic response that they decided to form a piano trio in its own right. The Trio has since given concerts throughout the UK, Italy, Norway (Bergen International Festival and Oslo Concert Hall), Denmark and in New Zealand. Whilst in New Zealand they played to and coached a group of young musicians as part of the Sistema Aotearoa programme, and were adjudicators of the Royal Over-Seas League New Zealand Chamber Music Competition. Their concert in Hamilton was broadcast on Radio New Zealand.

The Trio's debut recording for Hyperion of piano trios of Anton Arensky was released in March 2014. The disc received critical acclaim both nationally and internationally with praise for the Trio's 'revelatory playing' (*The Observer*) and 'impressively wide range of timbres' (*Limelight Magazine*). Their second and third discs for Hyperion – works by Lalo, and Rimsky-Korsakov and Taneyev, respectively – were warmly received, while their disc of David Matthews' complete piano trios, released on Toccata Classics, was described by the composer himself as 'definitive'. Continuing their affinity for unearthing hidden treasures within the piano trio repertoire, they released a disc of Johann Peter Pixis' piano trios in late 2017 and a 'fresh, intelligent and strikingly stylish' (*Gramophone*) account of complete Parry Trios in 2019.

The Leonore Trio's members are keen exponents of contemporary music: they gave the first performance of *Holkham Beach*, a piece written for and dedicated to the Trio by Simon Rowland-Jones; and they play the piano trios of distinguished composers including David Matthews, Harrison Birtwistle and Huw Watkins.

Recent highlights include a performance of the complete Beethoven piano trios at Kings Place, and an even broader long-term project, including all the works by Beethoven for piano trio, piano and violin, and piano and cello for Music in the Round in Sheffield. The Trio also returned to Istanbul's Süreyya Opera House, Wigmore Hall, St David's Cardiff, Royal Concert Hall Nottingham, and Sage Gateshead. Their latest disc for Hyperion, of works by Henry Charles Litloff, was released in February 2020. It was warmly praised by critics, was in *Presto Classical's* top 100 recordings of 2020, and was awarded Editor's Choice by *Gramophone*.

In the current season, they perform at Wigmore Hall, Oxford Coffee Concerts, and Music in the Round, and continue to record for Hyperion.

Coming Up: Saint-Saëns' Circle

A new series of concerts with BBC Radio 3 begins on 18 March. We dive into the chamber music of one of the most gifted composers of his era, who influenced a generation of French composers. In this series, Saint-Saëns' music is paired with works by students, friends and contemporaries.

Friday 18 March 1pm

SANDRINE PIAU

A programme of French mélodie, to be announced.

Friday 18 March 6pm

PAVEL KOLESNIKOV & SAMSON TSOY

Selections for piano duo by **Saint-Saëns, Rameau, Bizet, Fauré** and **Leonid Desyatnikov**.

Friday 25 March 1pm

NASH ENSEMBLE

Saint-Saëns Caprice sur des airs danois et russes
Saint-Saëns Tarantelle in A minor Op 6
Fauré Piano Quartet in G minor Op 45

Friday 25 March 6pm

GOULD PIANO TRIO

Saint-Saëns Piano Trio No 2 in E minor
Fauré Piano Trio in D minor Op 120

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