

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 15 January 2023  
3.00pm

## European Chamber Music Academy Showcase 2023

The ECMA Showcase has been supported by a gift from the estates of the late Thomas and Betty Elton in memory of Sigmund Elton

### Trio Bohémo

Matouš Pěruška violin  
Kristina Vocetková cello  
Jan Vojtek piano

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Piano Trio in E minor Op. 90 'Dumky' (1890-1)

*I. Lento maestoso – Allegro quasi doppio movimento*  
*II. Poco adagio – Vivace non troppo*  
*III. Andante – Vivace non troppo*  
*IV. Andante moderato – Allegretto scherzando*  
*V. Allegro – Meno mosso*  
*VI. Lento maestoso – Vivace*

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 9 in E flat S379 'Le carnaval de Pesth' (1848)

CLASSIC *fm* Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



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

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The encouragement that **Antonín Dvořák** received from Johannes Brahms was crucial to his career success outside his native Czech lands. Back home, Dvořák was treasured precisely because of the uniquely Czech voice with which his music spoke. The mid- to late 19th Century was the era of nationalism, in art and culture as well as politics. Brahms, too, was a nationalist of sorts: he regarded the unification of Germany as one of the two most significant events of his lifetime. But the Austro-Hungarian tradition into which Brahms had been born had an altogether wider parish, and its roots in art music went back further. The other great event of the age, in Brahms's reckoning, was the publication of the complete JS Bach edition.

It was therefore not surprising that, from his Vienna base, Brahms tried to guide Dvořák towards Teutonic symphonism and sonata form. To an extent Dvořák was willing to go along with this. But it caused tensions within him, if not between him and his distinguished mentor.

These tensions rose to the surface in 1891, the year Dvořák composed his 'Dumky' Piano Trio. A form of resolution would come the following year, when he departed for New York to head up the newly established National Conservatory of Music. As is well known, he caused some controversy on his arrival by suggesting that the United States should base its own national style of music on that of Indigenous Americans and the plantation songs of African-Americans. Other issues aside, he was once again nailing his own colours to the mast as a champion of national rather than international art.

That mindset informs the Piano Trio. Although it appears to have the outline of a fairly conventional four-movement chamber work, its structure is actually quite different. The 'first movement' is not a continuous structure, but a sequence of three *dumkas*. Each of the remaining three movements is another *dumka*.

So, what is a *dumka*? The term has meant different things to different people, and peoples. It has its origins in a melancholic Ukrainian song-form. The Bohemian version that Dvořák pioneered alternates the original slow lament with a contrasting lively section of a highly rhythmical nature. It has nothing to do with Brahmsian Classical discipline – and by using the title *Dumky* (the plural of *dumka*) for his Piano Trio, Dvořák was making something of a statement to that effect. It was, however, neither intended nor taken as an affront to his friend in Vienna, and Brahms himself undertook the role of proof-reader for the publisher.

While working on the Trio, the composer told a friend that 'It will be both happy and sad. At times it will resemble a sombre song, elsewhere a jolly dance;

but taken as a whole it will be light in style or, to put it another way, of a popular nature, so that it should appeal to highbrow and lowbrow listeners.' Indeed, it proved a great hit with audiences, and Dvořák performed it many times on a farewell concert tour of Bohemia and Moravia before his departure for the New World.

**Franz Liszt** was a multi-faceted musical pioneer – taking piano technique to an altogether unprecedented level of virtuosity, practically inventing the solo piano recital, exploiting the cult of personality in a thoroughly modern way, and forging ahead with the 'new' language of music that explored chromatic harmony and plasticity of form. But he was also a child of his time in embracing musical nationalism. Like his fellow artists in several countries, particularly those European nations subsumed into the Habsburg Empire, he sought to re-establish ethnic roots through incorporating local 'folk' culture, in his case the rural dance forms and café band music of his native Hungary.

The most overt examples of this were the 19 *Hungarian Rhapsodies* that he composed for solo piano between 1846 and 1885. Unashamedly showy and conspicuously difficult to play, they are based on the *verbunkos*, a sequence of dances in varied tempo. The *verbunkos* structure may have sprung from peasant soil, but many of the melodies Liszt incorporated, believing them to be traditional, were in fact the crafted compositions of well-off composers living in 19th-century cities. These tunes had been picked up by the ubiquitous Roma bands, who added florid improvisation. That feeling of spontaneous and lavish embellishment was maintained by Liszt (though of course every note was carefully notated), and he skilfully imitated the jangling sound of the cimbalom, the species of dulcimer played by hammers that is so characteristic of Hungarian 'Gypsy' music.

The ninth Hungarian Rhapsody was composed in 1847, and effectively conjures up the atmosphere of the carnival in the town of Pesth – which did not officially become united with Buda and Óbuda until 1873, when Budapest was adopted as the city name. Liszt is said to have attended the event beforehand, noting down the music that he heard. Within months of publication of the solo piano original he arranged the piece, very skilfully, as a piano trio (there is also a version for piano, four hands). The Rhapsody follows the usual *verbunkos* scheme of an imposing and expansive opening, which grows ever more elaborate, followed by a series of soulful recitatives, patiently built climaxes, and fresh beginnings. The opening theme eventually returns in exultation.

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