

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 8 February 2023  
7.30pm

## Trio Isimsiz

Pablo Hernán Benedí violin  
Edvard Pogossian cello  
Erdem Misirlioğlu piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Trio in E flat HXV/29 (1797)

*I. Poco allegretto • II. Andantino et innocentemente •  
III. Finale. Allemande. Presto assai*

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor Op. 63 (1847)

*I. Mit Energie und Leidenschaft •  
II. Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch •  
III. Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung • IV. Mit Feuer*

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Trio No. 2 in C Op. 87 (1880-2)

*I. Allegro • II. Andante con moto •  
III. Scherzo. Presto - Poco meno presto •  
IV. Finale. Allegro giocoso*

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While serving as factotum to the noted composer and singing teacher Nicola Porpora, young **Joseph Haydn** learned what he later recalled were 'the true fundamentals of composition'. These ranged beyond a thorough knowledge of counterpoint to include an understanding of dramatic tension in music and the part played by individual voices, whether instrumental or human, in its creation and resolution. Porpora's lyrical style, rooted in his Neapolitan training and experience of writing for many of the greatest opera singers of the age, recognised the importance of characterisation as a complement to virtuosic display. Haydn applied what he learned from Porpora not only to his works for the stage and the liturgy but also to his chamber music. His mature piano trios, for example, satisfied the prevailing appetite for flamboyant keyboard writing while ensuring that the piano's string-playing companions were more than bystanders to the musical argument.

Haydn's Piano Trio in E flat HXV/29 was first published in 1797 as one of three works dedicated to Therese Jansen, an outstanding pianist and dance teacher whom the composer met during his first visit to London in the early 1790s. He also wrote two 'grand sonatas' for her and was a witness at her wedding to the art dealer Gaetano Bartolozzi. While the string parts mirror the piano's lines in the E flat Trio's opening, they become more independent or at least more prominent as the first movement unfolds. Haydn has fun with what begins life as a rather dignified march, undermining its serious demeanour with a mock-tragic central section in the tonic minor and encrusting its main theme with ornaments and elaborate variations upon its return. A lengthy coda leads to melancholy territory before the march makes its final appearance. The B major *Andantino's* wistful main theme and shifts into minor mode appear to signal a movement of considerable substance, an impression sustained by Haydn until he takes a sudden leap into the finale. The piece ends with a breezy German *Ländler*, a triple-time romp written to delight its dedicatee.

After the achievements of his so-called *Liederjahr* in 1840 and the year of symphonic composition that followed, **Robert Schumann** paid full attention to chamber music in 1842. He began by studying the string quartets of Haydn and Mozart, and continued by creating three string quartets, a piano quartet and piano quintet. Schumann closed his chamber music year with his first work for piano trio, a set of *Fantasy Pieces*. The latter proved ideal preparation for the two piano trios he composed in the summer of 1847. While the opening movement of the Piano Trio No.1 in D minor calls to be played 'with energy and passion', its prevailing mood is more one of intense reflection than heart-on-sleeve drama, akin to the anticipation of something dreadful that never quite happens. Schumann's sophisticated contrapuntal writing sustains a ceaseless emotional ebb and flow, briefly punctuated in the movement's development section

by exquisite bell-like piano chords and a high-lying cello melody. Two closely related themes, one hallmarked by reiterated dotted rhythms, the other by mellifluous unbroken crotchets, form in the second movement what amounts to a scherzo and trio. Schumann's invention soars in the work's slow movement, conceived for performance 'with heartfelt feeling'. A sense of tragedy takes hold in the opening duet for piano and violin and, despite a shift from A minor to F major, pervades the restless central section. There is no comfort in the return of the opening material; only the finale, with its major-key joviality, offers respite, albeit of a kind marked by the solidity of Lutheran hymn singing.

In June 1880 **Brahms** travelled to the Austrian spa town of Bad Ischl, summer home to Emperor Franz Joseph and the imperial family. The composer, now at the height of his inventive powers, was delighted by Ischl. He marked his visit by working on the Piano Trio No. 2 in C Op. 87, the first movement of which had already been drafted in Vienna. Ideas for the composition developed slowly. Brahms decided to abandon work on a piano trio in E flat major in the winter of 1880 in favour of its intended companion in C major; he did not return to the latter, however, until he revisited Ischl in June 1882. The formal ingenuity, brilliant thematic development and expressive variety of the C major Piano Trio complement the finest piano trios by Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert; indeed, some critics have argued persuasively that Brahms's Opp. 87 and 101 piano trios stand as the genre's highest achievements.

The Piano Trio in C major grows from a theme of heroic grandeur, a melodic idea of Olympian strength, stated in unison by viola and cello and soon enhanced by sonorous piano writing. Brahms imparts high energy to the first movement, not least by exploiting the tensions inherent in a prominent rising semitone interval and the possibilities it opens to complex chromatic harmonies. The work's slow movement comprises a set of five variations on a short theme in folksong style, its Hungarian flavour underlined by the determined independence from the piano part upheld throughout by the two string instruments, even during the reflective penultimate variation, a Brahmsian intermezzo in all but name. Shades of Mendelssohn scamper over the C minor *Scherzo's* surface, beneath which Brahms extends a daringly unstable foundation of chromatic harmonies and unpredictable key relationships. The *Finale's* essential character derives from Brahms's playful development of multiple themes, punctuated by modified returns of the movement's principal theme and crowned by a majestic closing summary of melodic and harmonic ideas drawn from earlier in the movement and from the wider composition.

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