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Lakeside Arts at The Royal Concert Hall

# LEONORE PIANO TRIO

Thursday 24 June, 7pm

## Programme Notes

Beethoven Piano Trio in G major, Op.1 No.2  
Suk Elegie, Op.23  
Dvořák Piano Trio No.3 in F minor, Op.65

### Acknowledgements and Thanks

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## Piano Trio in G major, Op.1 No.2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1828)

1. Adagio – allegro vivace
2. Largo con espressione
3. Scherzo. Allegro
4. Finale. Presto

In 1792 Beethoven left his native Bonn for Vienna with the purposes of studying with Haydn and establishing himself as a pianist and composer. For his first major publication, three years later, he chose three piano trios, which had already been played and enthusiastically received. It was a move calculated to make an impact. Firstly, the set was dedicated to Prince Karl von Lichnowsky, a fine amateur pianist who organised regular musical gatherings, and the first of Beethoven's Viennese patrons. Secondly, piano trios at that time were generally lightweight pieces in three movements, intended for amateur groups, and with the string parts, especially the cello's, subordinate to the piano. Here, however, was a set of four-movement works, symphonic in structure and powerful in their expressive scope, which placed the three instruments on an equal footing. Beethoven had already established himself as a brilliant pianist; he could scarcely have announced his arrival as a composer in a more striking way.

The first movement of No.2 opens with a spacious slow introduction (another novelty in the trio repertoire) which drops a few hints as to the shape of the theme that opens the main quick part of the movement. This, when it arrives, is buoyant and energetic, with an engagingly light and airy second theme, first played by the violin. The movement ends with a substantial coda, beginning with a harmonic side-step into the key of E flat.

The expansive scale is echoed in the following *largo*, which Beethoven placed in the distant key of E major, and whose expressive depth must have come as another surprise to Beethoven's public. When the music reaches the recapitulation – the point at which the music returns to its opening key – the main theme is heard in the cello's upper register (against staccato rising scales on the piano), a sign of just how far the instrument has moved from simply reinforcing the piano's bass line, its usual role in trios by Haydn and Mozart. It also has the honour of setting the third movement in motion. This is a typically dynamic Beethoven scherzo, prone to sudden off-beat accents which, again, must have startled the work's first hearers. It amusingly runs out of steam at the end.

The finale is a Haydnesque affair of irrepressible high spirits, deriving much of its energy from the rapidly repeated notes at the start. The recapitulation is a particular delight, with the violin insisting on restating the main theme almost before the harmonic structure is ready for it. The other trios of Op 1 may strike a more generally profound note, especially the tense, edgy No.3 in C minor, but the G major work makes a delectable centrepiece.

### ***Elegy* for piano trio, Op.23**

**Josef Suk (1874-1935)**

Suk is one of the most important of the group of Czech composers who studied with Dvořák. After graduating from the Prague Conservatoire in 1891 he stayed on for a further year to study chamber music and composition. He became Dvořák's favourite pupil, and also his son-in-law, marrying his daughter Otilie in 1898.

Given his chamber music studies, and the many years he spent as the second violinist in the Bohemian (later re-named Czech) String Quartet, he wrote surprisingly few chamber works, particularly after the turn of the twentieth century. Though it dates from 1902, *Elegy* is one of the last of them. He composed it for an event commemorating the Czech writer Julius Zeyer (1841-1901), for two of whose plays he had composed incidental music. It was originally written for violin and cello, with string quartet, harmonium and harp, but in the same year Suk produced this more conventionally scored version; the original remains unpublished.

The work is subtitled, "Under the impression of Zeyer's *Vyšehrad*", a reference to the writer's epic poem recreating old Czech legends (*Vyšehrad* – pronounced 'vish-er-rad' – is the name of a ruined castle, overlooking the River Vltava as it flows into Prague, which is evoked in the first movement of Smetana's sequence of orchestral tone-poems *Ma Vlast*). The main theme has a passionate, yearning quality enhanced by the piano's insistently throbbing accompaniment. There are two brief, more vehement, episodes; the second one quotes a theme from Dvořák's opera, *Rusalka*, before a short chorale-like passage leads to the final return of the main theme, and the work's quiet, withdrawn conclusion.

### **Piano Trio in F minor, Op.65**

**Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

1. Allegro ma non troppo
2. Allegro grazioso
3. Poco adagio
4. Finale. Allegro con brio

The F minor Piano Trio was written at a critical time in Dvořák's career. By the beginning of the 1880s he had achieved a considerable amount of international success, particularly in Vienna and Berlin. But growing fame also presented him with a dilemma: whether to stay true to his roots by remaining in Prague or to move closer to the Austro-German mainstream by settling in Vienna, as admirers such as Brahms, the violinist Joseph Joachim and the influential critic Eduard Hanslick were urging him to do by. In the end, the temptation to pursue international fame by that particular route was outweighed by loyalty to his native Bohemia.

While it is not always wise to read a composer's circumstances into their work too closely, the F minor Trio is undeniably stormy. Dvořák finished writing out the only surviving manuscript score at the end of March 1883, though he extensively revised the work after that date, including reversing the original order of the two middle movements. It was published and first performed in the autumn of that year.

The first movement's turbulence is immediately established by the darkly passionate theme that opens the first movement, initially on the violin and cello. When the music eventually relaxes, the second main theme emerges on the cello, broad and lyrical but still with a degree of restlessness. Lyrical moments continue to provide poignant contrast, but the overall mood remains urgent and tempestuous.

Instead of a quick scherzo, the second movement is gently paced. It begins with the strings setting up an accompanying pattern whose rhythm contradicts that of the piano's main theme. Rhythmic tension takes a different form in the slower central section, with a syncopated accompanying figure in the piano's right hand which, the Dvořák scholar John Clapham suggested, has its origin in a type of traditional Slovak dance.

Another broad, lyrical theme for the cello opens the third movement. Contrast comes with a brief flare-up of energy and a strenuous new idea shared between the violin and cello; flickering accompaniment patterns on the piano suggest the sound of a cimbalom, a dulcimer-like instrument common in Eastern Europe. These reappear as the music begins winding down to its gentle ending.

A mood of brisk determination, though still darkly coloured, characterises the start of the finale. Dance rhythms underpin the movement, in the quieter passages as much as the more energetic ones. Eventually they propel the music towards a climax marked by two swift build-ups, each followed by an abrupt cut-off and a moment's silence. The music eventually picks up speed again, with the violin and cello reminding us of the opening theme of the first movement. As so often with Dvořák, there is a quiet, introspective moment before the vigorous final bars.

## Leonore Piano 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 enthusiastic responses 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 Leonore Trio's debut recording for Hyperion of the piano trios of Anton Arensky in March 2014. The disc received critical acclaim both nationally and internationally with praise for the Trio's "rev-elatory playing" (*The Observer*) and "impressively wide range of timbres" (*Limelight Magazine*). Their follow up disc – a recording of Edouard Lalo's piano trios – was equally well received and was chosen as BBC Radio 3 Record Review's 'Disc of the Week', and their next disc of David Matthews complete piano trios, released on Toccata Classics, was *Gramophone's* Editor's Choice, with the composer himself describing their performances as "definitive". In January 2017, the Leonore Trio's third disc for Hyperion was released. The trio were described as 'fine interpreters' of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Sergei Taneyev with this disc of their piano trios. A disc of Johann Peter Pixis' Piano Trios was released in late 2017, expanding their catalogue of interesting and undiscovered works in the piano trio repertoire. Two discs of Parry Trios were released in 2019 on Hyperion, and were lauded by critics as "fresh, intelligent and strikingly stylish" (*Gramophone*) and "fine recordings" (*BBC Record Review*).

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, the Sage Gateshead, Bath Mozartfest, Durham MUSICON series, Eaton Square Concerts and a tour of Scotland. 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* for its "engaging music, played with striking advocacy from the outset, beautifully recorded".

In the current season, they give live streamed performances for Wigmore Hall, Oxford Coffee Concerts, and Music in the Round, and continue to record for Hyperion.

[rayfieldallied.com/artists/leonore-piano-trio](http://rayfieldallied.com/artists/leonore-piano-trio)