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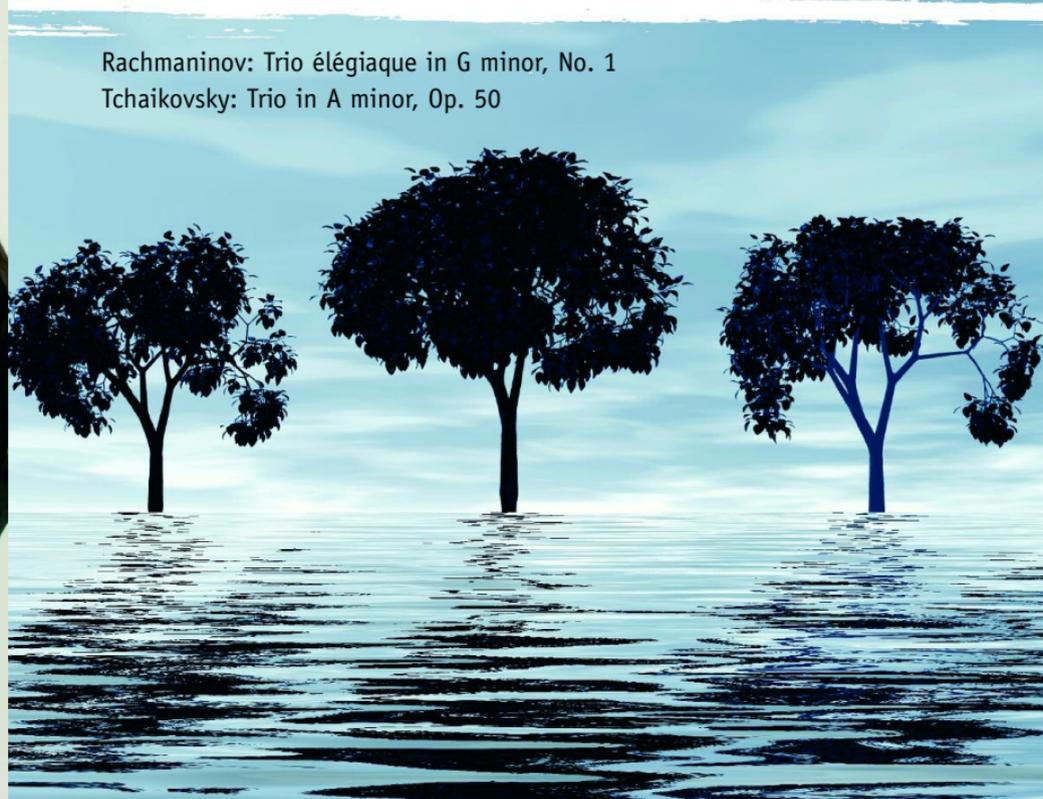


CHAMPS HILL
RECORDS

Gould Piano Trio

Rachmaninov: Trio élégiaque in G minor, No. 1

Tchaikovsky: Trio in A minor, Op. 50



Gould Piano Trio

Rachmaninov Trio élégaique No. 1 in G minor

1 Lento lugubre 15:21

Tchaikovsky Trio in A minor Op. 50

2 I Pezzo elegiaco. *Moderato assai* 18:55

3 IIa Tema con variazioni. Tema. *Andante con moto* 01:02

4 *var.1* 00:56

5 *var.2 Più mosso* 00:37

6 *var.3 Allegro moderato* 00:58

7 *var.4 L'istesso tempo* 01:06

8 *var.5 L'istesso tempo* 00:46

9 *var.6 Tempo di Valse* 02:38

10 *var.7 Allegro moderato* 01:16

11 *var.8 Fuga. Allegro moderato* 02:41

12 *var.9 Andante flebile, ma non tanto* 03:35

13 *var.10 Tempo di Mazurka* 01:52

14 *var.11 Moderato* 01:52

15 IIb Variazioni Finale e Coda. *Allegro risoluto e con fuoco* 11:35

From their early success at the Charles Hennen and the inaugural Melbourne Competitions, through being selected as British "Rising Stars" in 1998, the Gould Piano Trio has emerged as one of the finest chamber ensembles, boasting an impressive discography, with festival appearances at Edinburgh, Cheltenham, City of London, Bath, Aldeburgh, Spoleto and the BBC Proms.

In their regular and extensive tours to the U.S.A. they have covered the major venues in New York including the Lincoln Center, Frick Collection and Carnegie Hall. In Europe, highlights have included the Queen's Hall - Edinburgh, Concertgebouw - Amsterdam and the Palais des Beaux Arts - Brussels, as well as recitals in Paris, Cologne, Athens and Vienna, while regularly playing at London's Wigmore Hall and King's Place.

But whether at home or in the Far East and New Zealand, the trio have constantly striven to engage new audiences through outreach programmes, often working with school children - as filmed by the BBC during the 2006 Leeds International Piano Competition. A recent tour of North America's West Coast saw them giving a presentation of James MacMillan's trio, *Fourteen Little Pictures*, to students in the University of Southern Oregon, a piece they have championed since performing it at the BBC Symphony Orchestra's MacMillan Festival at the Barbican.

Indeed, while playing most of the established master-works of the trio repertoire - their discography includes the complete trios of both Mendelssohn and Brahms - they have an artistic ambition to extend boundaries, challenging audiences (and themselves!) with contemporary works and commissioning such trios as *Chapman's Pool* by Judith Bingham and *Radical Light* (clarinet and piano trio) by Benjamin Wallfisch. Their connection with clarinettist Robert Plane, with whom they established the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival, has borne fruit in the Trio's Naxos project of recent years to record the late English Romantics, combining the piano trios of Stanford, Bax and Ireland with their clarinet chamber music, which was short-listed for a Gramophone award.

The Trio's special affinity with the romantic composers is enhanced by the discovery of their lesser-known contemporaries such as Niels Gade (BBC Radio 3 from Glasgow) and Robert Fuchs ("Editor's Choice" in *Gramophone*), viewing the more popular repertoire of composers such as Schumann and Dvorak in a new perspective.

The Gould's three-year residency at the RNCM in Manchester gave them the opportunity to build relationships with young ensembles, introducing them to a wider repertoire, probing deeper into the meaning of the scores and giving regular performances in the city's busy concert schedule.



Tchaikovsky wrote comparatively little chamber music, yet his **Piano Trio in A minor, Op. 50**, with its kaleidoscopic succession of moods, is probably the first important piano trio by a Russian composer; and it proved very influential. Up to his forties Tchaikovsky had felt an antipathy to the piano trio-combination, and had refused to write one for his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck (whose resident piano trio included, as pianist, a French teenager called Claude Debussy). The occasion that caused Tchaikovsky to change his attitude was the death in March 1881 of the pianist and pedagogue Nikolai Rubinstein, founder of the Moscow Conservatoire, who had not only been a friend but one of Tchaikovsky's sternest critics and most faithful supporters. Deeply affected by losing this significant figure in his life, for a while Tchaikovsky seemed quite unable to compose. He planned a new opera, but then found himself composing the Piano Trio as a tribute to Rubinstein's memory – the dedication actually reads 'in memory of a great artist'. Tchaikovsky told Countess von Meck that he selected the genre as a means of 'testing himself', perhaps in order to assure himself that he was still fulfilling Rubinstein's exacting standards.

The Trio was composed in Rome during the winter of 1881-2; Tchaikovsky wrote to his brother Anatoli that he was 'completely engrossed in my new trio, and attracted by this new form of music which I have not tried before and is quite new to me'. After he had finished it he wrote again that 'it pleases me greatly. Later, maybe, I shall renounce it, and hate it as much as I hate most of my works. At the moment, however, I am proud of it, it satisfies me, and raises me in my own esteem. Lately I felt sure I should not be able to compose any more and life without creative work is pretty pointless.'

Certainly the Trio is a big, ambitious piece in which the composer sets himself a multitude of challenges in what was for him a new medium. After a private performance in April 1882 Tchaikovsky made some revisions before the public

premiere, which took place at the Moscow Conservatoire on 18 October with Taneyev playing the taxing piano part. The work was not well received by the press, but did not take long to make its way into the repertoire, where it stands to this day as one of the supreme examples of the piano trio in the Romantic era. Tchaikovsky later sanctioned substantial cuts in its formidable length.

The expansive and passionate first movement brims with melodic ideas; it begins with a lyrical tune entrusted to the cello which produces many offshoots in the course of a lengthy exposition. Contrasting with this is a heroic, even martial theme distinguished by massive chordal writing in the piano – indeed the piano part throughout this Trio often resembles the solo part in a concerto. The development section includes a substantial dialogue between cello and piano, and in the coda the opening theme turns elegiac, with a tender duet for violin and cello before the movement finds its calm, sad close.

The slow movement is a Theme and Variations, a form of which Tchaikovsky was already an established master. This E major movement is perhaps the most personal and unusual in inspiration of all his variation-sets. He associated the poised and almost classical theme – first stated by the piano – with Rubinstein himself, and the ensuing eleven variations chronicle incidents in Rubinstein's life and memories of times he and Tchaikovsky spent together. As the composer wrote to his half-brother Modest, 'one variation is a memory of a trip to an Amusement Park out of town, another of a ball to which we both went and so on'. The Amusement Park is probably to be heard in the quicksilver scherzo of the third variation, the ball in the sixth variation's sumptuous waltz – which also refers to Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*. But it is better not to look for particular 'programmatic' connotations in the others. The brief fifth variation, with its high piano writing, is clearly a brilliant evocation of a musical box, according to some commentators – but a 'troika' or

sleigh-ride, according to others. The eighth is a robust fugue, followed by a lamenting ninth variation marked *flebile* (mourning, plaintive) with Aeolian-harp figuration in the piano, and a tenth in lively mazurka rhythm. The eleventh variation closes the movement with an enriched restatement of the original theme.

Though the second movement is over, the variation process is not. Tchaikovsky's third movement opens with what is, in effect, the twelfth variation in the sequence – a splendidly exciting and vivacious one, large and bold enough to initiate a full-scale finale in A major. It enacts a more or less complete sonata design before its triumphal elation is interrupted by the return of the soulful lyric theme that began the 'Pezzo elegiaco' first movement, in drastically afflicted unison on the strings against a turbulently emotional piano part. This sudden outpouring of grief issues in a doom-laden coda marked *lugubre*, where the opening theme is heard for the last time against a Chopinesque funeral-march rhythm in the piano, ebbing away into silence.

Tchaikovsky's Trio, with its function as a memorial for Nikolai Rubinstein, seems to have initiated a Russian tradition of 'elegiac' piano trios – Arensky, for instance, wrote a trio inspired by the death of his (and Tchaikovsky's) friend, the cellist Davidoff. The young Sergei Rachmaninov actually entitled both his early piano trios, composed in quick succession in 1892 and 1893, Trio *élégiaque*; and the second of those was written under the shock of hearing of the sudden death of Tchaikovsky, who had encouraged him while Rachmaninov was still a student. That three-movement Trio in D minor is by far the better known of the two. Its predecessor, the **Trio *élégiaque* No. 1 in G minor**, was written at white-hot speed between 18 and 21 January 1892 and premiered in a recital that the 18-year-old Rachmaninov gave at Moscow Conservatory, where he was still a student, on 30 January. Rachmaninov naturally took the piano part, with his friends the violinist

David Krein and the cellist Anatoly Brandukov (for whom he would later compose a celebrated Cello Sonata.) As far as is known this was its first and last hearing in Rachmaninov's lifetime, and the work was not published until 1947. The fact that it was so speedily written, for performance by the composer himself, probably accounts for the large number of errors in the manuscript and almost complete lack of dynamics in the manuscript, which had to be heavily edited before it was printed.

If the later D minor Trio is an elegy for Tchaikovsky, there is no evidence to suggest who might be the subject of the G minor. Its 'elegiac' nature quite possibly arose from Rachmaninov's own current emotional state. The previous August he had caught a fever as a result of swimming in the chilly waters of the River Matir; his health had deteriorated throughout the Autumn and, though he gradually recovered, he had spent much of the winter in a state of depression. This would seem an adequate explanation for the mood of the Trio, which despite a fine show of activity in its central section seems to end in darkness and despair.

The work is in a single movement in a broad sonata-form, with room for some contrasting episodes. Not surprisingly, Rachmaninov assigns pride of place to the piano, making the Trio almost a miniature piano concerto (it was in fact composed shortly after his Piano Concerto No. 1). It opens (with the characteristic expression-mark *Lento lugubre*) with murmuring, wind-blown string figures that create an evocative background to the dolorous – and already highly characteristic – main theme, enunciated by the piano. After the strings have had a chance with this melody the music moves to a more active contrasting subject in story-telling style. The development section, marked *Apassionato*, is principally based on the opening theme and, after a climax and a silence, leads to a full-scale recapitulation of the opening materials. The work concludes with an impressively gloomy coda in the style of a funeral march.

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Lucy Gould

Lucy Gould studied at the Royal Academy of Music and Indiana University, Bloomington, with Gyorgy Pauk and Josef Gingold. Courses at Prussia Cove, Yale Summer School and the Banff Centre for the Arts, working with Andras Schiff, Menahem Pressler and the Amadeus String Quartet were a great inspiration to her.

She has performed much of the concerto repertoire with orchestras such as the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Bournemouth Sinfonietta and the English String Orchestra. She has been guest leader of the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the Hallé, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC NOW and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Lucy plays a Joseph Guarnerius filius Andreae violin from 1703.



Alice Neary

Alice Neary was the winner of the 1998 Pierre Fournier Award and won major prizes in 2001 Leonard Rose Competition, USA and the 1997 Adam International Cello Competition, New Zealand.



Her performances have included concertos with the SCO, RLPO and Israel Symphony Orchestra, and recitals at the Wigmore Hall and the Bridgewater Hall. She has broadcast extensively on BBC Radio 3 and NPR (USA) and recorded the Tovey Cello Concerto with the Ulster Orchestra.

She studied with Ralph Kirshbaum at the RNCM and, as a Fulbright scholar, with Timothy Eddy in the USA and now teaches at the RCM and RWCMD.

She plays an Alessandro Gagliano cello of 1710.

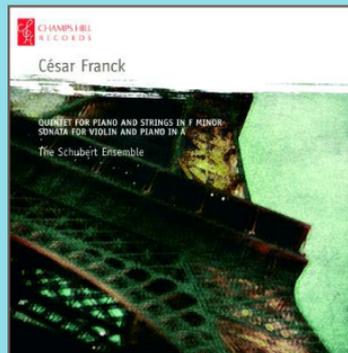
Benjamin Frith

Benjamin Frith won the British National Concerto Competition aged just fourteen. Since then, he has become a first prize winner in the Rubinstein Masters Competition, a prize winner in the Mozart Memorial Competition (London) and was awarded top prize in the Busoni International Piano Competition.

Frith has established himself as an international concert artist with his American and Edinburgh Festival debuts being met with rave reviews. He has worked with many of the world's leading conductors and orchestras. His recordings include a cycle of John Field concertos and Mendelssohn piano works. Five of his discs are represented in the *Gramophone Best CD Guide 2000*.



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