The music

Joseph Haydn *Piano Trio no44 in E major Hob XV:28*

Rebecca Clarke *Piano Trio*

INTERVAL

Franz Schubert *Piano Trio in E flat major op100 D929*

Tonight's concert presents three contrasting piano trios composed at different stages in the evolution of the genre. Haydn's was one of his last (he wrote some 45 piano trios) and displays his wealth of experience with this combination of instruments. Schubert's is amongst his very last and greatest compositions while Rebecca Clarke's is her sole known excursion into this repertoire, but has nevertheless been described as the finest work in the genre by any British composer.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) *Piano Trio no44 in E major Hob XV:28* (pub. 1797)

Allegro moderato ~ Allegretto ~ Finale: Allegro

The mid-18th century origins of the piano trio lie in so-called "accompanied sonatas" for, mostly, amateur pianists with violin and cello filling in the harmonies. There is a clear evolution from **Haydn**'s earliest examples so that by the time his last trios were published, in the 1790s, there is more equality between the instruments, a greater use of counterpoint, more adventurous harmonies and increased technical demands on the players as can be heard in his *Piano Trio no44*. Probably written in 1795, it was published two years later in a set of three dedicated to Therese Jansen, whom Haydn met on his second visit to London (1794-5). Therese was a brilliant pianist as can be heard in the piano part of this trio.

The **first movement**, *Allegro moderato*, opens with an extraordinarily delicate effect: pizzicato strings, a staccato bass line in the piano left hand and a lyrical, ornamented, melody evoking a folk tune in the right. This is immediately repeated with chromatic elaboration by the instruments now playing in more standard formation. Energetic scales and more lyrical episodes follow and these elements, together with the "folk song", comprise material for the rest of the movement. The development includes a particularly beautiful broad, chorale-like statement of the latter.

The contrasting ***Allegretto*** begins in E minor with a unison statement in all three instruments which is then taken up as a repeated bass line against a winding, ornamented melody in an extended solo passage for piano. The strings join only when the melody has found its way to G major. Subsequently the initial melody and bass line are repeated but inverted so that the melody becomes the bass while the original bass line is on top. The movement then ends somewhat abruptly with several brief flourishes.

The opening theme of the contrasting ***Finale: Allegro*** has justifiably been described as "quirky". It subverts the three-in-a-bar metre (try counting!) and the phrase itself is lengthened beyond what might be expected. The violin initiates the middle section in E minor which, at one point, slips, somewhat outrageously, into the remote key of E flat minor before returning surreptitiously to E minor. The quirky theme returns, interrupted twice by short chromatic episodes before drawing to an emphatic close.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) *Piano Trio* (1921)

Moderato ma appassionato ~ Andante molto semplice ~ Allegro vigoroso

Rebecca Clarke was born in Harrow to a Bostonian father and a Bavarian mother. Chamber music was encouraged in the family; she started playing the violin at the age of eight, and entered the Royal Academy of Music in 1902, subsequently transferring to the Royal College to become Charles Villiers Stanford's first female composition student. It was he who persuaded her to take up the viola and, after some study with Lionel Tertis, it was with this instrument that Clarke made her living. She was one of the first women to play with Henry Wood's Queens Hall Orchestra and was a member of several female chamber groups. Much of her later life was spent in the USA particularly following her marriage to the pianist James Friskin in 1944.

Both of her most famous works, the *Viola Sonata* and the *Piano Trio* were written for competitions held by the heiress and artistic patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. In both cases they were runners-up, although Clarke did quote Coolidge as saying of the judges "you should have seen their faces when they saw it was written by a woman".

It has been suggested that the Piano Trio was in part a response to the recent World War and the dissonant, repeated-note theme heard initially in the ***Moderato ma appassionato*** is indeed redolent of gun-fire. It acts as a motto throughout the entire work – the dark principal theme of this movement is an extended version while the gentler secondary theme has a different tail characterised by a rising and falling fourth like a bugle call.

Throughout this substantial sonata-form movement there is a real sense of the three instruments pitted against one another, although it eventually ends in an uneasy calm.

Framed by a violin solo, a much calmer atmosphere prevails in the ***Andante molto semplice*** second movement, though often with an undertow of unease and echoes of the repeated note motto theme. After a chorale in four parts for violin and cello, a folk song-like pentatonic melody emerges from the piano and builds to a climax before the movement ends quietly.

The **third movement** *Allegro vigoroso* starts in cheerfully bucolic mood. A second theme with the strings in octaves over a piano chorale then leads to a climax, before the second theme of the first movement returns softly in the strings. The recapitulation is forcefully interrupted by the repeated note motto and the bugle themes reliving the dissonant declamatory opening of the trio. The recapitulation eventually returns and all seems to wind down until the bucolic music briefly concludes the work in lively fashion.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) *Piano Trio in E flat major op100 D929*

Allegro ~ Andante con moto ~ Scherzo: Allegro moderato ~ Allegro moderato

The developments pioneered by Haydn and his contemporaries in the previous century helped lay the ground for the undisputed masterpieces that are **Schubert**'s two late piano trios some 30 years later. Unusually, the autograph score of the *Piano Trio in E flat major* survives, from which we know that it was completed in November 1827. The work was performed on 26 December that year, by Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Joseph Linke (both members of the famous Schuppanzigh Quartet), together with the pianist Carl Maria von Bocklet. From the autograph score we also have a fascinating insight into the extensive revisions, particularly to the slow movement, along with large cuts to the finale, that Schubert made before arriving at the final version.

The ***Allegro*** opens with strong rhythms and dynamic contrasts but the movement is largely built on a figure soon heard on the cello and on a gently insistent theme, based on softly repeated notes, which follows an unexpected harmonic shift. On returning to a more orthodox key for the second subject there is a short allusion to one of his songs (*Sei mir gegrüsst / I greet you*) before the lingering, nostalgic second subject itself, which is then extensively worked on in the development section. After a relatively conventional recapitulation the coda moves into the minor, shedding new light on the repeated-note motif. The main

theme is then thundered out before the softly repeated notes have the last word.

It has long been thought that the ***Andante con moto***'s melancholy but profoundly beautiful melody, with its march-like piano accompaniment, was based on a Swedish folk melody which Schubert had heard sung by the young Danish tenor Isaak Berg, who was visiting Vienna at the time. Recent research has identified the song as *Se solen sjunker* (*The sun has set*), though Schubert's adaptation, more Hungarian than Scandinavian in flavour, makes the tune entirely his own. The movement has a rondo-like structure which can be summarized as ABACBA. The B section is based on a prominent falling two-note figure from the main theme while the more violent C section contains tremolos, dynamic surges and uncomfortable modulations after which the return of the B section, in an unclouded C major, provides much-needed solace. Then, in the words of the composer and writer Misha Donat "the coda, in a slower tempo, with the Swedish theme's outline played by the piano against a chromatically enhanced harmonisation from the pizzicato strings, provides one of those moments of heartbreaking poignancy, the secret of which Schubert and Mozart alone among great composers seem to have possessed".

Schubert provided the following advice for the **third movement** *Scherzo* "the minuet [!] is to be played in a moderate tempo, and piano throughout; the trio, on the other hand, forcefully". Evoking earlier examples by Haydn and Mozart, Schubert writes much of this minuet in strict canon, with the strings imitating the piano at a bar's interval. The rustic dance-like trio recalls the repeated note theme from the first movement.

Misha Donat describes the **fourth movement** *Allegro moderato* wonderfully: "The movement contains three main ideas: the amiable main theme, a contrasting subject in rapid repeated notes, bringing with it a change in metre (though not in pulse), and a subject in rushing semiquavers accompanied in its latter stages by a 'rocking' two-note figure on the piano. To these, the development section adds one of Schubert's most startling innovations: the return of the slow movement's theme, transformed into the finale's prevailing rhythm and accompanied by the piano's 'rocking' idea. On no other occasion in a work designed in discrete movements did Schubert bring into play a similar use of cyclic form. The slow movement's theme also makes a resplendent return at the end, in a wonderfully transfigured version in the major. It is a moment in which the heavens appear to open before our very ears".

Notes by Martin Cunningham

(Continued on insert) >>

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Programme Notes

GOULD PIANO TRIO

Haydn, Rebecca Clarke and Schubert

8pm, Wednesday October 8th, 2025
Little Missenden Church

65th Little Missenden Festival

The artists

GOULD PIANO TRIO: Lucy Gould *violin*
Richard Lester *cello* **Benjamin Frith** *piano*

The **Gould Piano Trio** has been compared in the *Washington Post* to the great Beaux Arts Trio for their "musical fire" and "dedication to the genre" and has remained at the forefront of the international chamber music scene for over a quarter of a century.

Launched by winning first prize at the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, they were European Concert Halls Organisation "Rising Stars", making a highly successful debut at New York's Weill Recital Hall, described by *Strad Magazine* as "Pure Gould". Their many appearances at London's Wigmore Hall have included the complete piano trios of Dvořák, Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Schubert.

The Trio's passionate belief in the importance of developing new repertoire has resulted in commissioning works from many contemporary composers. Commissions from Sir James MacMillan and Mark Simpson saw premieres at the Bath International Festival and the PRS New Music Biennale in Hull, City of Culture, 2017. Their most recent commission, John Casken's *Lust of Roots*, was premiered at the 2022 Buxton Festival, and at their Cheltenham Festival appearance the same year they performed the Royal Philharmonic Society commission, *ilk*, by Andrew Chen.

They also maintain a lively relationship with promising young chamber players by giving masterclasses worldwide, particularly in association with the Guildhall School in London and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff.

Together with clarinettist Robert Plane, the Trio are artistic directors of the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival in Northumberland which celebrated its 21st anniversary with a much-acclaimed new commission from Huw Watkins for clarinet and piano trio entitled *Four Fables*. The 2024 festival celebrated the 150th anniversary of Schoenberg's birth with an exploration of *Pierrot Lunaire*, and saw the Trio collaborate with composer JP Jofre.

Tours of North America, the Far East, Europe and New Zealand have been interspersed by adventurous recording projects, including releases on *Naxos, Chandos, Somm, Resonus, NMC* and *Champs Hill*. In addition to their highly-praised recordings of the standard works, the Trio have thrown light on long-neglected gems from late romantic British repertoire, such as trios by Stanford and Ireland, plus fascinating works by Bax, Milford, York Bowen and Cyril Scott. More recent additions include John Casken's *Piano Trio*, and a disc of works by Charles Ives, Rebecca Clarke and Amy Beach.

The first volume of their Schubert Piano Trio cycle, in which these sublime masterpieces are juxtaposed with skilful arrangements (by Carl Zellner and Brian Newbould) of the composer's dances, was released on the *Resonus Classics* label in 2021. The Goulds' performance of Leokadiya Kashperova's *Piano Trio*, recorded live at the Edinburgh International Festival the same year, was selected for the Festival's Chamber Music Highlights disc on the *Linn* label, and featured on *Radio 3*'s *Composer of the Week*.

The album of chamber music by Pamela Harrison from the Gould Piano Trio and Robert Plane, curated by Robert Plane, was released by *Resonus Classics* in early 2023, and was featured as one of *Gramophone*'s "best new classical albums this week". The Goulds have now embarked on their next major recording project, the seven Heinrich Marschner *Piano Trios* and two *Piano Quartets*, and returned to the studio earlier this year to record the second album in this series. The first Marschner volume was released in December 2024 by *Naxos*.

"The Gould Piano Trio bring tremendous warmth, precision and integrity to their performance" *BBC Music Magazine*

"It would be hard to improve upon the Gould Piano Trio's irresistibly stylish and fervent advocacy" *Gramophone*

gouldpianotrio.com