

Total performance time: approximately 60', with no interval

Astatine Trio I

Jelena Horvat violin

Riya Hamie cello

Berriya Hamie piano

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Piano Trio No.2 in C, Op.87 (1880–82) 29'

- i. Allegro*
- ii. Andante con moto (Tema con variazioni)*
- iii. Scherzo: Presto – Trio: Poco meno presto*
- iv. Finale: Allegro giocoso*

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975)
Piano Trio No.2 in E minor, Op.67 (1944) 28'

- i. Andante – Moderato – Poco più mosso*
- ii. Allegro con brio*
- iii. Largo*
- iv. Allegretto*

The **Astatine Trio** is a Britten Pears Young Artist for 2023–24 and a participant on Chamber Music in Residence at Snape Maltings.

Formed at the Royal College of Music in 2021, the Astatine Trio was unanimously awarded first prize at the 2022 Senior Intercollegiate Piano Trio Competition. It went on to win the first prize and Luigi Boccherini Prize at the International Virtuoso & Belcanto Chamber Competition (Lucca, Italy) in 2022 and was joint first-prize winner at the Birmingham International Piano Chamber Music Competition, also in 2022. Most recently, the trio was the youngest finalist in the 2023 Lyon International Chamber Music Competition and was awarded the SEAM prize for contemporary music.

The trio's past and upcoming engagements include performances at Wigmore Hall, St James's Piccadilly, St George's Bristol, the Austrian Cultural Forum and St Mary's Perivale. It is grateful for the support of Maggie Grimsdell (Music at Longhill Road), Philip Carne, ChamberStudio, the Piano Trio Society and the Nicholas Boas Charitable Trust.

The trio will be working with guest violinist Jelena Horvat for this residency.

Brahms: Piano Trio No.2

Brahms was just 21 when he wrote his first piano trio but the second was a product of his middle age and found him in very different circumstances. He had at last emerged from the shadow of Beethoven and had published two highly successful symphonies, after which his international reputation was assured. He had also achieved financial security and was settling into the role of established composer rather than that of piano virtuoso, which had previously supplied his bread and butter. But he still knew how to write for the piano and in the summer of 1880 he began work on a four-movement trio, with a Hungarian gypsy theme forming the basis for the second-movement variations. Brahms was famously self-critical so it comes as something of a surprise to find him not only calling the trio the most beautiful he had yet written, but also telling his publisher – rather smugly – that he was ‘unlikely to have published its equal in the last ten years’.

We are now a world away from the domestic origins of chamber music in the Baroque era. Subsequent composers, particularly Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, had gradually developed the genre and the instruments were now considered equal partners. Brahms being a pianist, the keyboard might be expected to dominate but there are many occasions throughout the work when a theme is introduced by violin or cello long before it reaches the piano. It was the keyboard part, incidentally, that almost scuppered the trio's success. Brahms himself played at the premiere but his lack of practice was obvious: according to Clara Schumann, his playing was ‘nothing but bump, bang and scramble’. The work as a whole, however, impressed her: it was, she said, ‘a great musical treat’.

Shostakovich: Piano Trio No.2

Shostakovich was still in his teens when he produced his first piano trio – a one-movement work that remained unpublished till the 1980s. This second one, however, was conceived on a much larger scale and clearly reflects its era. He began work on it late in 1943, when Russia was exhausted by years of brutal war and traumatised by the deaths of almost a million people during the siege of Leningrad. On a personal level, Shostakovich himself was soon to suffer a devastating bereavement with the loss of his closest friend. Ivan Sollertinsky had been a brilliant polymath and an outspoken

supporter of the composer, at a time when the Soviet authorities were denouncing his music as ‘degenerate’. Shostakovich was shattered by his death: ‘It’s impossible,’ he said, ‘to express in words the grief which engulfed me on hearing the news’. Instead, he chose to express it in music and dedicated the new trio to his friend’s memory.

The unearthly, cello lamentation establishes a bleakness that pervades the whole work, with snatches of Russian folksong providing only momentary relief. Then comes a fierce, almost menacing Allegro, which Sollertinsky’s sister claimed was an ‘amazingly exact’ portrait of her brother. One early performer complained about its ‘unplayable’ speed but Shostakovich said the tempo marking was best ignored. His ancient metronome, he said, was thoroughly unreliable but was such an old friend that he could not bear to part with it. The third movement Largo was played at his own funeral: a deeply-felt lament that leads directly into an agitated finale. Here, Shostakovich uses a Jewish-style melody to create an impassioned ‘dance of death’, said to reflect his horror at reports that Jewish prisoners in Nazi camps were being forced to dance beside their own graves.

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