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## **A “virtual” Coffee Concert recorded at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford**

**Sunday November 1, 2020 at 11:15**

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**We very much hope you enjoy this concert. If you would like to become a patron of the Oxford Coffee Concerts or make a donation to help support our “virtual” concerts, please get in touch with us via the contact page at [coffeeconcerts.com](http://coffeeconcerts.com).**

This is the last of the four virtual Coffee Concerts recorded in late September and streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings over the following weeks. (They will also be available for a limited time after release and, of course, there are more to come.)

### **The Leonore Piano Trio**

- **Beethoven: Piano Trio in E flat major, op 1 no 1**
- **Brahms: Piano Trio no 3 in C minor, op 101**

Benjamin Nabarro (violin)  
Gemma Rosefield (cello)  
Tim Horton (piano)

Formed in 2012, the Leonore Piano Trio bring together three internationally acclaimed artists whose piano trio performances as part of Ensemble 360 were met with such an enthusiastic response that they decided to form a piano trio in their own right. The Trio have since given concerts both at home and in many other parts of the world, combining a comprehensive repertoire of works by the celebrated classical and romantic composers; an unrivalled exploration of lesser-known and forgotten pieces from the 19th century; exciting and innovative performances for young audiences and a range of contemporary and new works.

The Leonore Piano Trio record for the Hyperion label and have released seven CDs for that

label in as many years, including unjustly neglected or forgotten works, receiving praise and critical acclaim such as this from The Gramophone Magazine both nationally and internationally: “You’ll be purring with satisfaction at this exemplary new release from the Leonore Piano Trio. Enthusiasm isn’t always enough to prevent recordings of unfamiliar music from sounding raw but these performances feel fully matured — fresh, intelligent and strikingly stylish; edgy when they need to be and opening out generously when Parry’s romantic impulse demands it.”

In 2015 the trio performed Beethoven’s complete Piano Trios at Kings Place, London, and initiated an even broader project including all his duo sonatas for piano with violin and cello. In 2019 they finished a complete cycle of trios and duos for Music in the Round, Sheffield.

*Continued from page 1*

The members of the Leonore Trio are keen exponents of contemporary music and have performed works by distinguished composers including Harrison Birtwistle and Huw Watkins. They gave the first performance of *Holkham Beach*, a piece written for and dedicated to them by Simon Rowland-Jones. Their recording of the complete piano trios by David Matthews, for Toccata Classics, was hailed by the composer as “definitive”. As part of their

commitment to education and outreach, the trio commissioned a narrated work for young audiences from Rachel Leach, based on the book by Steven Isserlis “Why Beethoven Threw the Stew”. It has proved to be an entertaining introduction to the music of Beethoven and the power of chamber music for all ages.

More information:

<https://www.leonorepianotrio.com/>

## **Piano Trio in E flat major, op 1 no 1 by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

**1. Allegro; 2. Adagio cantabile; 3. Scherzo. Allegro assai; 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 of symphonic dimensions 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 E flat trio has a relaxed, outgoing quality which, in the finale, becomes positively playful. The crisp opening theme is based on a rapid ascending arpeggio figure which gives the music much of its energy. The smoother

second theme has only a limited role in the middle part of the movement. Instead it is used to launch the long concluding coda, an early example of a characteristic feature which would appear in many of Beethoven’s later works.

The adagio is a rondo with a somewhat Mozartian main theme, the generally tranquil flow ruffled by two episodes, both of which feature duets for the violin and cello. The first is amiable, with the piano adding a delicate commentary. Following the return of the rondo theme, the minor-key second episode is more melancholy, building to an impassioned climax. The rondo theme then brings the movement to a hushed close.

It is followed by a quick, playful scherzo which takes a few bars to settle into its main key. The trio section is quiet, calmer and slightly mysterious, and the reprise of the movement’s opening is followed by a brief coda in which Beethoven, with a wry smile, simply allows the music to run gently out of steam.

The finale is full of the kind of bubbly high spirits that suggest Haydn’s influence. A brief

*Continued from page 2*

moment of turbulence is soon shrugged off, and there's a moment of genuine comedy to come, when the music hesitates for a while

before slipping off into the wrong key, only to be forcibly dragged back again a few moments later.

## **Piano Trio in C minor, op 101** **By Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

### **1. Allegro energico; 2. Presto non assai; 3. Andante grazioso; 4. Allegro molto.**

It was Brahms's habit, particularly in the later part of his career, to spend his summers away from Vienna, in idyllic, usually lakeside, surroundings. It was in these circumstances that the initial creative work on his major scores was generally done. In 1886 he spent the first of three summers at a villa overlooking Lake Thun in Switzerland. It was a remarkably productive time, in which the Op 101 Piano Trio was conceived, alongside the Cello Sonata, Op 99 and the Violin Sonata, Op 100, as well as first thoughts towards the Violin Sonata Op 108.

The C minor is the most compact of Brahms's piano trios, typical of the concision for which he was aiming increasingly in his later years. The first movement is one of the most aggressive pieces he wrote, its blunt energy having a sharply defiant edge. Even the smoother contours of the lyrical second theme have a degree of expressive terseness and severity to them.

The second movement, though quick, is not the light-hearted contrast that might have been expected. The strings are muted, the piano plays in bare octaves for much of the time, and the music has a subdued, almost furtive character. The central section, with more chordal piano writing and edgy

syncopations, is allowed to flare up briefly at the end, but immediately it is reined in again for the return of the opening music.

Brahms's continuing interest in rhythmic devices reaches a new level in the tranquil third movement. The predominant pattern consists of one three-beat bar followed by two two-beat bars, producing the effect of an overall 7/4 metre, changing to a five-beat metre in the central section. This has prompted Brahms's biographer Jan Swafford to speculate that he might have "had some experience with more authentic Hungarian folk music than what was usually played in Vienna cafés." The feeling is gently wistful, mostly with the strings and piano alternating, often completing one another's phrases. The loud, sonorous final cadence is completely unexpected.

The finale is propelled by a driving vigour and concentration. The tempo slows for a contrasting second theme, lyrical but hardly expansive, and a C major episode towards the end lightens the atmosphere somewhat, but the final impression is one of exhilarating but brusque power.

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