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## Trio Zimbalist

JOSEF ŠPAČEK, violin

TIMOTHEOS GAVRIILIDIS-PETRIN, cello

GEORGE XIAOYUAN FU, piano

2:30 pm, Sunday, November 13, 2022

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

University of the Pacific

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**ANTON ARENSKY PIANO TRIO IN D MINOR, OP. 32 (1894)**

(1861-1906) Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Elegia: Adagio

Finale: Allegro non troppo

— INTERMISSION —

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN PIANO TRIO IN B $\flat$  MAJOR, OP. 79, "ARCHDUKE" (1811)**

(1770-1827) Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Allegro

Andante cantabile, ma però con moto

Allegro moderato

Curtis Institute of Music, 1726 Locust St., Philadelphia, PA, (215) 717-3129

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*Season Sponsor: C. A. Webster Foundation*

### ARTIST PROFILE



Trio Zimbalist has garnered critical acclaim for its "precision and feverish intensity" (Greece's EfSyn). The group was lauded for its "liveliness and vigor of playing" and performances that were "pure enjoyment!" (Athinorama) at the Nights of Classical Music at the Gennadius Library festival in Athens, where it served as ensemble in residence during a Fall 2021 tour of Greece, Germany, and France.

Members of the trio—violinist Josef Špaček, cellist Timotheos Gavriilidis-Petrin, and pianist George Xiaoyuan Fu—are all distinguished alumni of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. In demand across Europe and the U.S. as soloists, chamber musicians, and recitalists, they form an inimitable ensemble with repertoire spanning Romantic masterworks to today's most lauded composers.

The trio takes its name from famed violin virtuoso Efrem Zimbalist, a towering presence at the Curtis Institute of Music as faculty and director for a combined forty years. Trio Zimbalist carries on the violinist's storied legacy through its commitment to artistic excellence. The group draws upon the lineage of previous world-class ensembles formed at Curtis. Its members have studied with faculty representing the Guarneri Quartet, the Beaux Arts Trio, and the Chicago Chamber Musicians. With regular appearances at the La Jolla Music Society, ChamberFest Cleveland, Marlboro, and Moritzburg music festivals, they are active composers, adventurous and multidisciplinary collaborators, and passionate advocates for the impact of music on communities across the globe.

## **Arensky: Piano Trio, Op. 32**

Arensky came from a prosperous, musical family in Novgorod: his father was a strong cellist and his mother an admirable pianist, who gave him his first piano lessons. At age 9, he was already composing and at 16, after the family had moved to St Petersburg, he began study of composition with Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Three years later, after graduating with a gold medal, he secured a professorship in harmony at the Moscow Conservatory, where he was actively supported and aided by Tchaikovsky, and in turn he taught Rachmaninoff, Scriabin and Glière. Rimsky-Korsakov did not care for Tchaikovsky's influence on Arensky's developing style. He later wrote: "In his youth Arensky did not escape some influence from me; later the influence came from Tchaikovsky. He will quickly be forgotten."<sup>1</sup>

Returning to St. Petersburg in 1895, Arensky became director of the Imperial Chapel on Balakirev's recommendation. From 1901 on, obtaining an income from the chapel, Arensky devoted himself to composing and to appearances as a conductor and pianist. Addicted to alcohol and gambling for a significant time, his life became more and more disjointed (at least according to Rimsky-Korsakov). He spent his final years in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Finland, dying in 1906 at the age of 45.

His first opera, *Son na Volge* (A Dream on the Volga), attained the greatest success of his three operas, but his reputation generally rests on a few shorter works and brief piano pieces at which he excelled.

Arensky's music did go through a phase of disregard, perhaps because he was not seen as having an adequately characteristic voice, but today's D-minor Piano Trio is one of his compositions that now enjoys merited admiration.

Elegiac piano trios were flourishing at that time in Moscow. Tchaikovsky's 1882 Piano Trio was written in remembrance of Nikolai Rubinstein; Rachmaninov wrote

two, one in 1892 as a tribute to a still-alive Tchaikovsky, and the second in 1893 following Tchaikovsky's death. Arensky wrote his trio the following year. As well as showing the influence of Tchaikovsky, the Arensky Trio also recalls Mendelssohn, particularly in the assured advancing movement of its beginning theme.

Arensky wrote his D minor Piano Trio in 1894 and dedicated it to Karl Davidov (1838–1889), mathematician, composer and "the Tsar of cellists", who had been principal cellist of the St. Petersburg opera and later director of the conservatory there. Parenthetically, Davidov was given a Stradivarius cello that now carries his name; it was subsequently owned by Jacqueline du Pré and is now being played by Yo-Yo Ma.

This work might be thought of as a "chestnut" because of how recognizable it has become, but this is a feeling of familiarity that may be experienced even by one who hears the piece on the first encounter. The work suggests other composers in certain places—the opening theme of the *Finale*, for example, suggests the "Polonaise" in the last movement of Tchaikovsky's Third Orchestral Suite, and the trio of the *Scherzo* reminds one of Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto. Despite these influences, Arensky's Trio could not have weathered the test of time without its own distinctive individuality.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, is in the convention of late German Romanticism. It is a large movement constructed around three themes and opens with a very remarkable subject (you can hear Tchaikovsky's influence). It features triplets in the piano played to a melodious phrase in the violin that will instantly captivate your attention. This reappears during the movement as well as in the coda where it continues into a memorable sonata form with the adagio statement of the opening theme becoming a striking feature closing the movement.

The imaginative *Scherzo: Allegro molto*, placed second, frames a trio that reveals

the Russian-Slavic-German fondness for a romanticized kind of waltz. The second subject, presented first by the cello, has the gentle, yet successful refinement of a simple song and an atmosphere of promise. The strings are given a meager theme, which is played in opposition to a swift and sprinting piano part. The complementary trio includes a superb waltz, Slavonic in character, and one of many which this composer wrote. It has become known as a typical example of "The Arensky Waltz."

The third movement, *Elegia: Adagio*, reaches the pinnacles of lyricity. The beautiful but sad initial melody, its melancholy mood heightened by muted strings, is passed from the cello to the violin and then to the piano and back again. It is an intimate dialogue among the instruments, suggesting the composer's friendship with and paying tribute to the memory of Davidov. It follows a triple form with a different return of the "A" section.

The volatile and vivid *Finale: Allegro non troppo*, a real work of art, instantly disperses the plaintive feeling with its lively polonaise-like main theme. The coda brings together the entire work: making use of themes from the preceding as well as those of the first movement.

## **Beethoven: Piano Trio Op. 97**

In the vast literature for violin, cello and piano, Beethoven's Trio in B $\flat$  Major, Op. 97 inhabits a position of distinction: together with Schubert's Trios in B $\flat$  Major and E $\flat$  Major and the Trio in B Major by Brahms, it rates as one of the most dignified and vividly beautiful works of its kind.

The "Archduke" Trio's nickname comes from its dedicatee, Archduke Rudolf Johann Joseph Rainer of Austria. Archduke Rudolph was the youngest son of twelve children of Emperor Leopold II. He had two primary interests in life: religion and

<sup>1</sup> Wow, Nikolai... Ouch!

music. To engage in the first, he entered the clergy, being promoted to Cardinal of Moravia in 1819 and Archbishop of Olmütz in 1820. As for the latter interest, in 1803, at 15 years of age, he chose Beethoven as his piano and composition tutor, and remained his comrade, benefactor and confidant until the composer's death in 1827. As a pianist, The Archduke became adequately skilled to play the relatively straightforward keyboard part in Beethoven's Triple Concerto, Op. 56; he was also modestly successful as a composer.

Nonetheless, Beethoven frequently found these teaching duties tedious, and he had a disposition that was difficult for the Austrian royal family to tolerate. Court correspondence from the time is replete with Beethoven's pretexts for canceling or deferring lessons or not showing up when slated. When Beethoven did appear, he repetitively contravened court protocol, on one occasion smacking his royal pupil on the knuckles and on another having an outburst regarding the procedures required to enter the royal residence.

Apparently, the Archduke had no complaints about this, for in 1809 he joined two other noblemen, Prince Lobkowitz and Prince Kinsky, to guarantee a lifetime stipend to Beethoven. This was to keep him from accepting a court appointment from Napoleon's brother Joseph, who had been made king of Westphalia and to continue making his home in Vienna.

The Archduke undoubtedly respected Beethoven's importance as a composer for he preserved a remarkable collection in which he preserved a comprehensive compilation of donated manuscript copies of his teacher's music. Also obvious was that he expected Beethoven to dedicate some of his best works to him. Beethoven acquiesced with around a dozen compositions including the following: the Fourth and "Emperor" Piano Concertos, the opera *Fidelio*, the *Hammerklavier* and *Les Adieux* Piano Sonatas, the Violin Sonata Op. 96, the *Missa Solemnis*, the

*Grosse Fugue*, and many others including the Piano Trio we hear today. It is unknown why only the trio bears the moniker "Archduke".

With the Piano Trio in B $\flat$  Major, Beethoven arrived at another creative pinnacle. Beginning with the great "Eroica" Symphony, he had been composing turbulent, discord-ridden works in what has been known as his heroic phase. However, just as inventive were several compositions notable for candidness, serenity, and dramatic range, with musical emotions remaining at a more even level. This includes, for example, the opening movement of the charmingly bright "Spring" Sonata, the Sixth Symphony, and the "Kyrie" movement of his Mass in C. Among this group is also this great Piano Trio.

The "Archduke" trio was completed in March 1811 and displays a clear feeling of self-confidence, a feeling that Beethoven no longer needs to prove himself with spectacular moves and actions at every turn. At times, it even ends the intimate constraints of chamber music and takes on concert-like qualities. The music evolves spontaneously, its imaginative surprises developing without specific awareness drawn to them. Perhaps because of this, the trio has garnered significant references in popular culture.<sup>2</sup>

There is a daring scope and majesty about this Trio that places it in a class by itself. Dignity, nobility, and splendor are the qualities most often attributed to the trio; listen for these elements in the piano's opening statement of the main theme of the first movement. Just as remarkable are the trio's recurring deviations from the expected. After the piano statement, listen for the theme to be restated twice, not as a continuance of the original feeling but each time with a different quality and emotion. The development of the first movement comprises two sections, each introduced by the cello. The first portion explores the first phrase of the main theme; the second, the rest of the theme. The second portion

then shifts into an extraordinary passage in which pizzicato notes in the strings are balanced against trills and staccato notes in the piano. This becomes a piano flourish, a diminishing of sound, and the muted reappearance of the main theme.

The primary section of the second movement scherzo is in Beethoven's typical spirited style. But the middle section is once again a different approach, made of two interwoven components with nothing in common. The first element is shadowy, tense, syncopated, deeply influenced by chromatics in fugal style. The second is a raucous pulsating waltz!

The slow movement is a set of exquisitely ornamented variations on a psalm-like theme expressed initially by the piano. The first three variations restate the theme in sequentially reduced note values: triplet 8ths, 16ths, and triplet 16ths. The fourth variation is at a gentler pace, but in a syncopated rhythm and against agitated 32nd notes in the piano. The piano then almost appears to return to a straightforward repeat of the theme, but the cello usurps the second phrase. A lengthy fantasia follows, which conveys the theme through a series of remote keys back to the proper key and, with a single chord and without a break, into the finale.

The finale is a typical Beethoven rondo: spirited, witty, folklike, jocular although with specific changes. First, the violin and cello exchange registers with the violin avoiding the instrument's upper, brighter range, while the cello has a surprising number of passages in its higher register. Second, the main theme occurs five times, but in the last two occurrences in modified form and in an accelerated  $\frac{6}{8}$  rhythm instead of the earlier  $\frac{2}{4}$ . The ensuing increase in energy takes the masterpiece to a joyous ending.

— notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth George's mystery *A Traitor to Memory*, Haruki Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore*, the Coen Brothers' film *The Man Who Wasn't There*, and Colm Toibin's *Nora Webster*

# 66<sup>TH</sup> SEASON 2022-2023

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## Adaskin Trio

2:30 PM Sunday, September 18, 2022  
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2:30 PM Sunday, October 23, 2022  
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## Trio Zimbalist

2:30 PM Sunday, November 13, 2022  
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## Dover Quartet

2:30 PM Sunday, February 5, 2023  
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