

History of the Russian Piano Trio • 2

TCHAIKOVSKY • PABST

The Brahms Trio



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Pyotr Il'yich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)
Piano Trio in A minor, Op. 50 (1881)
Paul PABST (1854–1897)
Piano Trio in A major (1895)

These two piano trios, so different in many ways, are linked by their connection to the Rubinstein brothers, Nikolay and Anton, whose influence on Russian music of the 19th century as pianists, composers, conductors and teachers, was vast. Tchaikovsky's massive *Piano Trio* is dedicated to the memory of Nikolay Rubinstein – it is inscribed 'to the memory of a great artist'. He learned of the death of his friend while in Nice in March 1881, and the work was finished in Rome, after a year of extreme artistic and emotional difficulty, between December of the same year and February of the following. He sent the score to Moscow, with the intention of it being checked over and performed by the pianist Sergey Taneyev, the renowned Czech violinist Jan Hřimalý and the German cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, who was the dedicatee of the *Variations on a Rococo Theme* from five years earlier. The score was published in September 1882 by Jurgenson.

Difficult though their relationship had been, it had also proved enormously productive, and Rubinstein's death affected Tchaikovsky very greatly. He attended the funeral, as did Jules Massenet, Pauline Viardot-Garcia, Édouard Lalo and Ivan Turgenev, at the Russian church in the Rue Daru in Paris, and described his deep emotions in a letter to his sponsor Nadezhda von Meck. Though he had been ostensibly preoccupied until that point with the idea of a new opera, the idea of a memorial to Rubinstein inevitably required something that featured an important piano part. It proved a great success during the composer's lifetime, and was played at a memorial concert for him in 1893.

One of the most remarkable things about the *Trio*, one of the most monumental in the repertoire, is its structure: it is only two movements, but of vast proportions. The first is an adapted sonata form, characterised by a veritable forest of thematic cells generated over the course of three subjects and whose harmony, after an excursion to E major

in the exposition and a modulatory development, spends most of its time alternating between A major and A minor.

An elegiac ternary theme is the basis for the huge set of variations that makes up the second movement, itself divided into two sections. Over the course of these, the composer stretches the tonality and the shape of the original theme in the most extraordinary way, so that it becomes barely recognisable. Each variation is a kind of genre piece: number three is a *scherzo*, for example, number four a two-part invention, number five a delightful evocation of a music box, followed by a waltz, number eight a fugue and number ten a twinkling mazurka. With the eleventh variation, Tchaikovsky brings the theme back, now in the strings, but there is still the second section of the movement to come. This is described as a 'final variation and coda', but the variation is in fact a complete sonata-form structure built on a variant of the theme. To complete the structure of the work as a whole, in the *coda* (*Andante con moto*), he returns to the opening theme of the first movement, with the thunderous piano part, and the *Trio* finishes with a brief funeral march with the indication '*lugubre*', a fitting tribute to the 'great artist' whose memory inspired the work.

Pavel Pabst (1854–1897) was not, by modern standards, Russian. He was, however, part of the complicated geopolitics of the late 19th century, which meant that countries and regions became constituent parts of different empires often in rapid succession. Pabst was born in what was then East Prussia, in the city of Königsberg, now known as Kaliningrad, and his name was originally Christian Georg Paul Pabst. After studying with Anton Door in Vienna and Liszt in Weimar, he moved to Riga (Latvia was also then a part of the Russian Empire), and then to Moscow in 1878, to teach at the Conservatoire at the invitation of Nikolay Rubinstein. After Rubinstein's

death he was appointed professor of piano, and stayed in Moscow until his own death in 1897.

Pabst was a great transcriber of the music of others (notably Tchaikovsky: there are paraphrases of *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, for example), but he was not a prolific composer. However, the works he did leave show precisely his formidable knowledge of the piano in technical and expressive terms. His *Piano Concerto* (1885), long thought lost, has been rediscovered in recent years and since been recorded. It is a work of extravagant virtuosity and flowing lyricism, observations that might also be made of his *Piano Trio*, which was written in memory of Nikolay Rubinstein's brother, Anton, who as a composer was much more prolific, and who died in 1894.

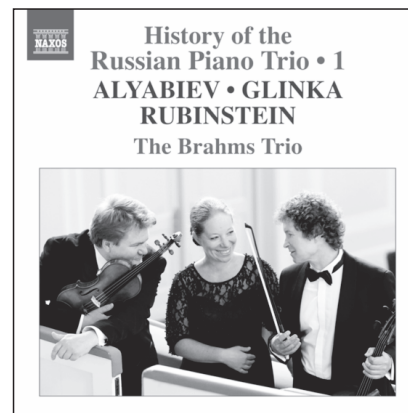
It begins with an *Allegro con brio* in sonata form, a movement of great emotional instability with frequent

changes of texture and unpredictably harmonies, and very full and virtuosic piano writing. The second movement is entitled *Intermezzo*, and is a delightful minuet briefly interrupted by a *molto cantabile* section.

Rêverie élégiaque is the title of the third movement, and its haunting melody suggests a personal evocation of Rubinstein. The piano plays continuously throughout, but here it clearly assumes the role of accompanist. The *Finale* is a tour de force, its galloping *Allegro moderato* followed by a calmer second section and then a brief *Maestoso* conclusion and a coda which, as with the final page of Tchaikovsky's *Trio*, is a funeral march, the piano part carrying the indication '*quasi campane*' – 'like bells'.

Ivan Moody

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The Brahms Trio

The Brahms Trio is one of the leading Russian chamber ensembles, comprising violinist Nikolai Sachenko and cellist Kirill Rodin, both winners of the Gold Medal at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, and pianist Natalia Rubinstein, First Prize winner of the Joseph Joachim Chamber Music Competition in Weimar and founder of the ensemble. Since its foundation in 1990, the trio has regularly appeared at prestigious international concert venues, such as the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the Brucknerhaus Linz and Seoul Arts Center, as well as at festivals in Melbourne, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Paris and London. Legendary musicians such as Tatiana Gaidamovich, Alexander Bonduriansky (Moscow Trio), Valentin Berlinsky (Borodin Quartet) and Rudolf Barshai have had a significant influence on the formation of the performing style and career of the trio. The Brahms Trio has made an invaluable contribution to enlarging the chamber repertoire by rediscovering unknown piano trios of Russian composers of the late 19th and early 20th century. The musicians of The Brahms Trio are professors at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, and are the recipients of the honorary title Honoured Artist of Russia. www.brahms-trio.ru



Photo by Emil Matveev

The Russian piano trio reached its apogee with Tchaikovsky's *Piano Trio in A minor*, dedicated to the memory of Nikolay Rubinstein. A monumental piece in the repertoire, it is cast in only two movements, and was played at Tchaikovsky's own memorial concert two years after its composition. Paul Pabst's *Piano Trio in A major* is less well known. Composed in memory of Nikolay Rubinstein's brother, Anton, it is a work of exceptional virtuosity and flowing lyricism, with unpredictable harmonies, a delightful *Intermezzo* and a tour de force of a *Finale*.

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Pyotr Il'yich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Piano Trio in A minor, Op. 50 (1881) 50:18

- | | | |
|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | I. Pezzo elegiaco | 19:43 |
| 2 | II. Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto. | |
| | Variazione finale e coda | 30:32 |

Paul PABST (1854–1897)

Piano Trio in A major (1895) 23:08

- | | | |
|----------|---|-------------|
| 3 | I. Allegro con brio | 6:42 |
| 4 | II. Intermezzo: Tempo di menuetto | 5:26 |
| 5 | III. Rêverie élégiaque: Andante molto cantabile | 3:34 |
| 6 | IV. Finale: Allegro moderato – Poco più tranquillo – | |
| | Maestoso – Quasi marcia funebre | 7:21 |

The Brahms Trio

Nikolai Sachenko, Violin • Kirill Rodin, Cello
Natalia Rubinstein, Piano

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Cover photo of The Brahms Trio by Emil Matveev



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Playing Time
73:27



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