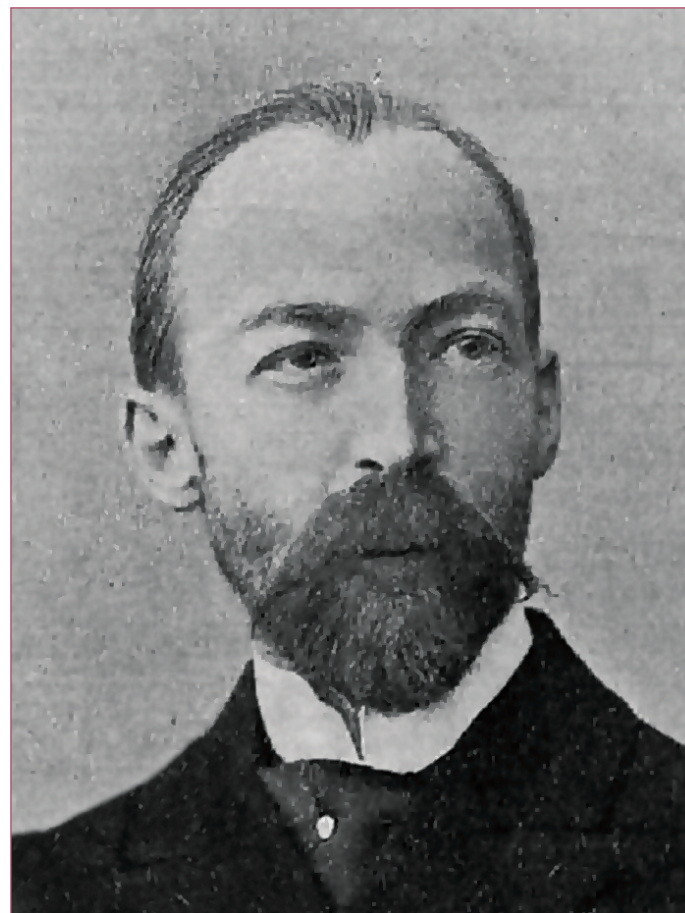


History of the  
Russian Piano Trio • 7  
*Lost in Russia*  
**ALOIZ • WINKLER**  
The Brahms Trio



## History of the Russian Piano Trio • 7

### Lost in Russia

This new volume in the History of the Russian Piano Trio series focuses on the ‘European page’ found in the annals of Russian music.

By the end of the 19th century, Russian music was entering its heyday and becoming an important part of international musical culture. A trend for Russian music was established in Europe and America: Anton Rubinstein’s ‘Historical Concerts’ in major European cities; Tchaikovsky conducting at the opening of Carnegie Hall; Rimsky-Korsakov’s European tour and the opera debut of the New Russian School (the premiere of Cui’s opera *Le Flibustier* in Liège) laid the foundations for the enormous popularity of the ‘Mighty Handful’ in Europe. The musical ideas and discoveries of the composers of the ‘Mighty Handful’ would be followed in the 20th century by the modernists – Janáček, Debussy and Ravel – not to mention the French ‘Les Six’, who took inspiration for the name of their collective from the ‘Russian Five’. Russian musicians were invited to teach at European conservatories; Berlioz, Wagner and Strauss appeared in Russia; European musical theatre companies, string quartets, soloists and conductors toured Russia; Auer and Wieniawski, Leschetizky and Busoni taught at the St Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories; Joachim and Sarasate played in the ensembles of the Russian Musical Society; the Mariinsky Theatre was directed by Nápravník for almost 50 years; and at the beginning of the 20th century Suk was invited to become chief conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre. Borders were blurred: music from different countries was incorporated into the common cultural space faster than ever before, and became a global treasure.

**Vladislav Aloiz** (1860–1918)

**Piano Trio in F major, Op. 40** (1894)

During Tchaikovsky’s triumphant visit to Odessa in January 1893 the *Rococo Variations* were performed by Vladislav Aloiz, the famous Czech cellist of the time, alongside an orchestra conducted by the composer himself. Aloiz was one of a select group of brilliant foreign musicians who came to teach at Russian conservatories at the invitation of Anton Rubinstein or the Russian Musical Society.

Aloiz was born in Prague in 1860 and graduated from the Prague Conservatoire in 1879 as a cellist under Franz Hegenbart. From 1880 to 1897 he taught cello and piano in Kyiv, Warsaw and Odessa, toured as a soloist and conductor, played in ensembles with Ysaÿe, Ševčík and Auer, and was a member of the Kyiv String Quartet. In 1897, Aloiz moved to St Petersburg, where he was appointed a professor at the St Petersburg Conservatoire and principal cellist of the Imperial Orchestra.

In the same year, Edition Jurgenson published the *Piano Trio in F major, Op. 40*, written by Aloiz in 1894. Unlike the deeply rooted tradition of the Russian piano trio, this work is free of commemorative connotations. It is dedicated to Aloiz’s friend and colleague, the virtuoso pianist and director of the Kyiv Conservatory, Vladimir Pukhalsky.

The inspirational beauty of the main theme, which, in my opinion, sits among the most beautiful and heartfelt melodies in Russian music, the breadth and flexibility of the vocal breath, the freedom and passion of expression and the richness of texture and harmony of this work are comparable to Arensky’s famous *Trio in D minor, Op. 32*, which was written in the same year. However, unlike that work, Aloiz’s trio did not have a happy fate, nor did Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Trio in C minor*, written three years later, which is close to these two works in terms of the nature of its melody and Romantic mood. Unlike Rimsky-Korsakov’s trio, the premiere performance of Aloiz’s trio did occur – in Odessa in January 1895 – and was a success with the audience. There was one more performance of the trio, in March 1900 in St Petersburg, but

further traces of this work are lost. Throughout the 20th century Aloiz's trio, like its composer, was forgotten. Rimsky-Korsakov's trio was a little luckier and began its return to the Russian and world stage in the 1950s, while Aloiz's trio has had to wait until the present day.

Stylistically, this three-movement work is a fascinatingly cosmopolitan mix of everything that modernism in all its various versions – Impressionism, Symbolism, Futurism, Constructivism, Dadaism, Expressionism, among many other movements – would eschew in most of its musical, aesthetic, and political manifestos over the following decades. On the threshold of a new time, when eschatological ideas and the aesthetics of symbolism already dominated Russian art, when the foundations of European music – major and minor – had cracked, the gravitation of sounds was disappearing and the very idea of tonality was changing its appearance, Aloiz's piano trio proves to be infinitely far from revolutionary ideas and prophecies. This magnificently Romantic, passionate and virtuosic work looks to Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, in much the same way that throughout the 19th century the traditions of German Romanticism fuelled the inspiration of Russian composers who took up writing piano trios.

The first movement, *Allegro con spirito*, is in sonata rondo form with a mirrored recapitulation and a bravura coda based on the material of the first theme. As a homage to the established tradition of the Russian piano trio (with origins that can be traced back to Felix Mendelssohn's famous *Trio in D minor, Op. 49*), Aloiz has the cello state the first theme accompanied by the piano, as Tchaikovsky and Pabst, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov began their trios, and as their successors continued to do in the 20th century. The timbral, harmonic and tonal development of the main theme is crowned by its climax in the piano. An extended, elegiac transitional theme, not lacking polyphonic development, leads to the second subject, *poco tranquillo*. Built on an organ point, with pulsating syncopations in the accompaniment, the trembling and ghostly theme, remotely reminiscent of the second subject of Schubert's *Symphony No. 8 in B minor* in the exposition, colliding cascades of piano passages in the development evokes associations with Liszt's *First Piano Concerto*, while the octave unison of the main theme against the background of the powerful sound of the ostinato *ff* is close to the character of the statement of Smetana's *Trio in G minor, Op. 15*, and Franck-like climaxes. The contrasting second movement, *Andante con passione*, is written in arch form. The brief, quasi dance-like A major middle section, *un pochissimo vivo*, with its triplet breath of string texture and high-pitched piano chord theme that recalls the middle section of the *Elegies* from Arensky's trio, is countered by the dusky fresco of the mournful images of the outer sections. This movement made a particular impression on the audience at the premiere. A reviewer in *Artist* magazine, 1895 remarked that 'especially the second movement, the effect of the muted violin with the accompaniment of the cello and the melody at the piano is very beautiful'. The work is concluded with a sparkling, virtuosic and buffoonish finale, *Allegro giocoso*, which anticipates Prokofiev's future grotesque marches and whimsical, ironic miniatures, and quotes Brahms and Tchaikovsky, using the whole arsenal of instrumental virtuosity and compositional skill, not even sparing a fugue, and demonstrating the composer's brilliant artistry and easy-going nature, and his joy and humour – not often found in the Russian piano trio.

An outstanding cellist, who, according to contemporaries, also excelled on the piano, a composer of more than 50 works, including two cello concertos and a cello sonata, orchestral, piano and vocal pieces, Vladislav Aloiz played a prominent role in Russian musical life at the beginning of the 20th century. On the occasion of his 50th birthday, which was widely celebrated in St Petersburg in 1910, the Russian Emperor Nicholas II presented him with a cello by Domenico Montagnana. Half a century later this cello turned up in the hands of Natalia Gutman. But that is another story...

In 1918, Aloiz left his apartment in St Petersburg and disappeared forever. Nothing more is known of him. To this day it has not been possible to find out what really happened at that time, whether he fled Russia or perished on the streets of revolutionary Petrograd.

**Alexander Winkler** (1865–1935)

**Piano Trio in F sharp minor, Op. 17** (1910)

The life of Alexander Winkler – the composer of another piano trio, the world premiere recording of which is included on this album – was more prosperous than many of his contemporaries who lived and worked in Russia at the turn of the century, which was a time of revolutionary upheaval.

Born in Kharkiv in 1865 to an Austrian family, he graduated in 1886 as a pianist under Ilya Slatin from the Kharkiv branch of the Imperial Russian Musical Society, and in 1887 he completed his studies in law at the Imperial University of Kharkiv. He continued to study piano with Theodor Leschetizky, and composition with Karel Navrátil in Vienna and Victor-Alphonse Duvernoy in Paris. In 1890, Winkler returned to Kharkiv, taught music theory at the Institute for Noble Maidens, performed in concerts for the Imperial Russian Musical Society, and in 1896, on the recommendation of Leschetizky, was invited to teach piano at the St Petersburg Conservatoire and found himself at the centre of Russian music for the next three decades.

Deshevov, Swan, Myaskovsky, Prokofiev and many other pianists and composers who established the glory of 20th-century Russian music studied in Winkler's conservatoire class. He was a dedicatee of Glazunov's *Four Preludes and Fugues, Op. 101*, Kobylansky's *Piano Sonata, Op. 3* and Prokofiev's *Four Études, Op. 2*. In 1897, Winkler's *String Quartet No. 1, Op. 7* was awarded the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society prize. Winkler wrote reviews for the German-language newspaper *St. Petersburgische Zeitung*, he was a member of the Belyayev circle and vice-chairman of the Belyayev Board of Trustees for the Society of Encouragement of Russian Composers, and took part in Belyayev's collective works, composing two cycles of variations on Russian themes and orchestrating Schumann's *Carnaval*. Winkler's works were performed at the Russian Symphony Concerts and most of them were published by Mitrofan Belyayev (M.P. Belaieff).

According to the recollections of his contemporaries, Winkler was a very noble and benevolent man, 'extremely kind and sweet' as Elena Günther-Glazunov, Glazunov's adopted daughter, described him. Even Prokofiev, who in his diaries had very different opinions of his contemporaries and especially of his colleagues, wrote about Winkler mostly with gratitude.

Winkler's legacy as a composer includes symphonic music (the *Fantasy Overture 'En Bretagne'*, *Variations on a Russian Theme* dedicated to Anatoly Liadov, variations for violin and orchestra, variations for cello and orchestra, among others), and piano arrangements for four hands of a number of orchestral works by Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov (including the ballet *Raymonda* and the *Eighth Symphony*), Scriabin, Tcherepnin and Myaskovsky. Chamber music is also prominent: three string quartets and a string quintet, violin, viola and cello sonatas, a piano quartet, a piano quintet, and a piano trio, which is of particular interest.

The *Piano Trio in F sharp minor, Op. 17* is honourably dedicated to Princess Hélène de Saxe-Altenbourg, the last head of the Imperial Russian Musical Society, who took over its leadership in 1911 and held the chair until 1917. Masterfully written with a beauty and laconic themes reminiscent of late Brahms, this work, composed by Winkler during his happy St Petersburg years, at the top of his professional career and prosperity, carries a surprisingly intimate, nostalgic tone in contrast to Aloiz's bright and passionate trio. The confessional nature of the musical statement and the elegiac mood, combined with a tendency to use the minor key, have been characteristic traits of the Russian piano trio since the very first pieces by Russian composers. The F sharp minor tonality, rare for a Russian piano trio, and the beautiful piano solo that opens the classical four-movement cycle attract attention. The first movement, *Allegro*, is in sonata form with a coda in which the main theme reaches a tragic climax. The second movement, *Vivace*, is a dark and fantastic *scherzo* in the spirit of Liadov and Myaskovsky, written in a complex three-part form with elements of motivic



and tonal harmonic development in the outer sections and a polyphonic, harmonically unstable middle section, *meno mosso*, with predominantly dissonant harmonies. The theme of the middle section is based on a three-note descending motif – a katabasis, a Baroque rhetorical figure, that symbolises going to the grave, descending to the underworld. The third movement, *Andante*, is a light, lyrical intermezzo in sonata form without development. The crystal transparency of the barcarolle-like main theme, which is played by the piano with pizzicato strings in the recapitulation, features elements of dance, the juxtaposition of distant tonalities and the impressionistic richness of harmonic colours providing a desirable contrast to the gloomy sorrow of the first two parts of the trio. The enchanting and ghostly world of romantic reflections and Medtner-like fairy tales, which are told with inventive sophistication in a mixture of retro and modern language, Russian and European, is contrasted with outright kitsch – the catchy, literally circus-like finale, *Allegro deciso*. It is also written in sonata form, in which a quasi-heroic main theme is a gathering image of the revolutionary marches that were already sounding in full force in the rebellious streets and corridors of the Conservatoire. Markers of ironic distancing are abundantly scattered throughout the musical text. And whenever there is a hint of the usual Romantic conventions, it instantly becomes the object for technical or harmonic ‘pirouettes’ that completely disrupt any pathos. The second subject, which is supposed to be a lyrical contrast to the dramatic main theme, is provided in the exposition with *scherzoso* octave acciaccaturas in the violin line, and the Talbergian ‘three hand’ technique in the piano part, and even more elaborations in the recapitulation where it is accompanied by acrobatic figurations of the strings. The Classical, serious fugue declared at the beginning of the development, based on the main theme in C minor with an invertible counterpoint, once encountering a chromatic tonal juxtaposition of subjects instead of a proper dominant answer, quickly jumps up in intervals of a second and flies at full speed into the main tonality of F sharp minor, the simultaneous climax of the main theme and start of the recapitulation. The jubilant march-like final theme reaches a thunderous apotheosis in the coda and concludes the work with the triumphant assertion of the eponymous F sharp major.

In just a few years, such marches would be written in abundance by the Pokrass brothers and other graduates of the Petrograd Conservatoire, including Winkler’s own students. Songs of revolution would be heard everywhere, even in conservatoire halls, and Winkler, along with his family, would leave Russia for France in 1923, settling in Besançon, where he would teach piano, harmony and counterpoint at the École municipale de musique until his death in August 1935.

During the 20th century, both Alexander Winkler and Vladislav Aloiz would be forgotten, their names fading from the memory of generations for many decades, just like many other Europeans who had lived in Russia and had created its history of music at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, during its heyday.

**Natalia Rubinstein**

## The Brahms Trio

The Brahms Trio is one of the leading Russian chamber ensembles. Since its foundation in 1990, the trio has regularly appeared at prestigious international concert venues, such as the Large Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Elbphilharmonie Laeiszhalle Grand Hall, Brucknerhaus Linz and Seoul Arts Centre, as well as at festivals in Melbourne, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Paris and London. Legendary musicians such as Tatiana Gaidamovich, Rudolf Barshai, Alexander Bonduriansky (Moscow Trio) and Valentin Berlinsky (Borodin Quartet) have had a significant influence on the formation of the performing style and career of the trio. The musicians of The Brahms Trio are professors at the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory. The Brahms Trio has made an invaluable contribution to the expansion of chamber repertoire by rediscovering unknown piano trios of Russian composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 2020, Naxos began to release a series of 15 albums entitled *History of the Russian Piano Trio*. These releases have subsequently been nominated for an International Classical Music Award (ICMA), and were named as the best albums of 2021 by *Gramophone* and *American Record Guide*. In 2022, The Brahms Trio was nominated for Opus Klassik Awards in the categories of Best Chamber Music Recording, Ensemble of the Year and Outstanding Contribution to the Expansion of the Repertoire. [www.brahms-trio.ru](http://www.brahms-trio.ru)



Photo © Emil Matveev

The two composers featured on this album worked in Russia during a period when it had become part of international musical culture, with many European musicians choosing to make a living there. Famous Czech cellist, Vladislav Aloiz, whose cosmopolitan *Piano Trio in F major* is an inspirational mix of beauty, passionate virtuosity and wit, moved to St Petersburg where he was awarded a professorship at the Conservatoire. Born in Kharkiv to an Austrian family, Alexander Winkler also found himself at the centre of Russian music at the turn of the century. The laconic themes of his masterfully written *Piano Trio in F sharp minor* are reminiscent of late Brahms.

## History of the Russian Piano Trio • 7

### *The Silver Age and Art Nouveau Era*

#### ALOIZ • WINKLER

Vladislav ALOIZ  
(1860–1918)

*Piano Trio in F major, Op. 40*  
(1894)

- |                            |       |
|----------------------------|-------|
| 1 I. Allegro con spirito   | 10:17 |
| 2 II. Andante con passione | 5:39  |
| 3 III. Allegro giocoso     | 10:35 |

Alexander WINKLER  
(1865–1935)

*Piano Trio in F sharp minor,*  
*Op. 17 (1910)*

- |                             |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| 4 I. Allegro                | 11:51 |
| 5 II. Vivace                | 5:52  |
| 6 III. Andante con passione | 9:17  |
| 7 IV. Allegro deciso        | 7:10  |

#### WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

### The Brahms Trio

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

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Contact: Naxos Deutschland Musik & Video Vertriebs-GmbH, Gruber Str. 46b, DE-85586 Poing, Germany. info@naxos.de