

**CHANDOS**

# LA MER

French Piano Trios  
SAINT-SAËNS · MEL BONIS · DEBUSSY/BEAMISH



NEAVE TRIO



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Camille Saint-Saëns, c. 1890

## La Mer – French Works for Piano Trio

**Camille Saint-Saëns** (1835 – 1921)

**Trio No. 2, Op. 92** (1892) 32:51

in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur

for Piano, Violin, and Cello

À Madame la Vicomtesse de Guitaut (née Anna Hoskier)

- |              |  |       |
|--------------|--|-------|
| <div>1</div> | I Allegro non troppo   | 11:10 |
| <div>2</div> | II Allegretto – Allegro – Allegretto – Allegro –<br>Allegretto (poco meno) – A tempo ma tranquillo | 5:44  |
| <div>3</div> | III Andante con moto   | 4:11  |
| <div>4</div> | IV Grazioso, poco allegro  | 4:13  |
| <div>5</div> | V Allegro – Allegro moderato   | 7:32  |

**Mel [Mélanie Hélène Domange, née] Bonis** (1858 – 1937)

**Soir-Matin, Op. 76** (1907) 8:16

for Piano Trio

- |              |  |      |
|--------------|--|------|
| <div>6</div> | Soir. Andante cantabile – Cédez un peu | 4:19 |
| <div>7</div> | Matin. Andantino – Più vivo            | 3:56 |

**Achille-Claude Debussy** (1862 – 1918)  
Arranged by Sally Beamish (b. 1956)

**La Mer** (1903 – 05) 23:58  
(The Sea)  
*Trois Esquisses symphoniques*  
(Three Symphonic Sketches)  
for Orchestra  
À Jacques Durand – 1905  
Arranged 2013 (revised 2015) for Piano Trio

- |     |    |   |      |
|-----|----|---|------|
| [8] | 1  | De l'aube à midi sur la mer   | 8:00 |
|     |    | Très lent – Animez peu à peu jusqu'à l'entrée du 6 / 8 –<br>Modéré [6 / 8], sans lenteur (dans un rythme très souple) –<br>Un peu plus mouvementé – Très rythmé – En animant –<br>Au Mouvement (un peu plus mouvementé) – En retenant peu à peu –<br>Encore plus retenu – Presque lent – Très modéré – Très lent                        |      |
| [9] | II | Jeux de vagues  | 7:51 |
|     |    | Allegro (dans un rythme très souple) – Animé – Assez animé –<br>Cédez un peu – Au Mouvement peu à peu – Cédez –<br>[Tempo quasi Allegro] – Animez – Au Mouvement – En serrant –<br>Au Mouvement – En animant beaucoup –<br>Au Mouvement – Peu à peu animé – Animé –<br>En animant beaucoup – Très animé – En retenant –<br>Au Mouvement |      |

<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">10</span>	III Dialogue du vent et de la mer	8:05
	Animé et tumultueux – Cédez très légèrement[...] et retrouvez peu à peu le mouvement initial – Tempo I – Plus calme et très expressif – Reprenez peu à peu le Mouvement – Retenu – Reprenez peu à peu le Mouvement – En animant – A tempo – Serrez – Au mouvement – Retenu – Au Mouvement (en serrant peu à peu) – Au Mouvement initial, en laissant aller jusqu'au Très animé – Très animé	
		<b>TT 65:05</b>

#### **Neave Trio**

**Anna Williams** violin

**Mikhail Veselov** cello

**Eri Nakamura** piano

Neave Trio



## La Mer – French Works for Piano Trio

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### Saint-Saëns: Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op. 92

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921) began his Piano Trio No. 2 in March 1892 while staying at one of his favourite winter haunts: an old Moorish villa at Pointe Pescade, just outside Algiers. He completed it a few months later, on a visit to Geneva in July 1892, undertaking some revisions in the weeks after that. It was a work which he had been promising his publisher, Durand, for a long time: six years earlier, in February 1886, he had written to Durand that ‘the trio I have been promising you for so long will follow immediately after the [Third] Symphony’.<sup>1</sup> Another five years passed before, in April 1891, he wrote from Cairo that he was about to get down to work on the ‘fameux Trio’, and that he would return to Paris once it was finished. Nine months later, on 26 December 1891, writing from Algiers, Saint-Saëns explained to Durand that after some rest he was ready to turn to the trio

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<sup>1</sup> Aussitôt après la [3ème] symphonie viendra le trio que je vous promets depuis longtemps.

which has been expected for such a long time. It will be no small thing because it will have *five* movements.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, he was already giving quite detailed thought to the piece – including its unusual five-movement structure – but serious work still did not begin. Two months later, on 20 February 1892, Saint-Saëns confided to a friend that on his return to Paris

I will bring back a Piano Trio that has been lingering in my head for an impossibly long time and which I must get done.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, on 16 March, he announced to Durand that ‘The Trio has begun. Ask Apollo when it will be finished’.<sup>4</sup>

For a composer who usually wrote quickly and with natural fluency, Saint-Saëns

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<sup>2</sup> qui est en expectation depuis si longtemps. Ce ne sera une petite affaire, il aura *cinq* morceaux...

<sup>3</sup> Je me rapporterai un Trio avec piano qui traîne dans ma tête depuis un temps impossible à déterminer et dont il faut que je me débarrasse.

<sup>4</sup> Le Trio est commencé. Demandez à Apollon quand il sera fini.

experienced an inordinate amount of trouble over the writing of this Trio. At last, in July 1892, he wrote to Durand from Geneva to announce its completion, only to follow this a few weeks later with a letter to say that he had started to make revisions and that he was not yet satisfied with the finale as it stood. His last batch of revisions (including more changes in the finale) were made after Saint-Saëns played through the Trio privately, in October 1892, with Martin-Pierre Marsick (violin) and Jules Delsart (cello). It is uncertain when Saint-Saëns first drafted this work, but one surviving sketch shows how an idea originally intended for the opening of the Trio was later moved to the finale, while another has Saint-Saëns working out a detailed harmonic scheme for part of the finale, which he gave to his friend Charles Malherbe. These detailed notes and revisions are all indications that this was a significant piece for Saint-Saëns.

After years of procrastination and delay on the part of Saint-Saëns, Durand was eventually able to publish the work, in November 1892. The score carries a dedication to Madame la Vicomtesse de Guitaut, one of Saint-Saëns's former pupils, an excellent pianist and the daughter of his friend Émile Hoskier. The public première was given at the Salle Érard on 7 December

1892 by Isidore Philipp (piano), Henri Berthelier (violin), and Jules Loëb (cello). It was regularly performed at chamber music concerts in Paris, and in 1896 Saint-Saëns himself was the pianist in a performance by the Società del quartetto di Milano. The earliest known performance in London took place on 4 January 1902 when the pianist was Raoul Pugno, appearing with Jacques Thibaud and Joseph Hollmann.

Émile Baumann, writing in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* (1929) wrote that the Second Trio was

a work of importance. Saint-Saëns worked long at it, and even rewrote the last movement. All his accumulated experience is compressed within its pages. It was conceived on so vast a scale that five movements hardly suffice to contain it.

The first movement, headed *Allegro non troppo*, opens with a magical effect: repeated piano chords rising and falling, marked to be played 'very lightly', above which the violin and cello introduce the serious melody which dominates the musical argument at crucial points in the movement, notably in the climactic passage at the end of the development. If this opening movement shows him at his most intense and dramatic, the *Allegretto* second movement



finds Saint-Saëns at his most elegant and inventive, the beguiling E major melody in 5 / 8 time shared between violin and piano, then taken up by all three instruments. A contrasting section (in B major and in 5 / 4 time) alternates with varied returns of the 5 / 8 melody which brings the movement to a close. Parallels are sometimes made with the 5 / 4 movement in Tchaikovsky's *Symphonie pathétique* – composed a year after Saint-Saëns's Trio. But although Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky knew and admired each other, it is unlikely that Tchaikovsky was familiar with Saint-Saëns's Trio.

The central slow movement, marked *Andante con moto*, is based almost entirely on the falling melody heard at the start on the piano, then taken up in turn by the cello and violin, each time marked *appassionato*. This is heartfelt, eloquent music, which has almost the feeling of a lament before finally reaching a tender conclusion. The fourth movement (*Grazioso*) is elegant and waltz-like, and it is followed by a finale conceived on a grand scale. As in the case of the first movement, the material is quite serious in character and the composer's treatment of the opening theme is often contrapuntal, though when Saint-Saëns launches into a fugue, it is with a completely new theme. There are imaginative shifts in

texture and colour throughout, some very ingenious combinations of ideas, and at least one moment when it feels as if the movement is heading towards a conclusion in E major. But a resolute and gritty coda brings this remarkable work to an indomitable close.

#### **Mel Bonis: Soir-Matin, Op. 76**

Mélanie Hélène Bonis (1858 – 1937) – who preferred to style herself Mel Bonis – was encouraged by César Franck in her teens, and was a fellow student with Debussy at the Paris Conservatoire. Her passionate involvement with the singer Amédée-Louis Hettich was frowned upon by her parents and they pressured her to marry a widowed industrialist. He had no interest in music, or in the career of his wife, and for several years she devoted herself to life as a step-mother, then mother. It was a reunion with Hettich, in 1898, which reignited her interest in composing. Her output included a few works for orchestra, many for solo piano, and a significant number of chamber music pieces: sonatas for flute, violin, and cello, two piano quartets, and shorter pieces such as *Soir-Matin* (Evening-Morning) for piano trio, composed in 1907. At the opening of 'Soir' a gently swaying melody, shared by violin and cello, has a hint of the free-wheeling themes of Franck,

but also an individual harmonic language which is captivating. 'Matin' is more overtly impressionistic in style, and while familiarity with their music might lead us to hear echoes of Debussy or Fauré, Bonis finds her own stylistic path. The results in both of these pieces (as in her larger works) are utterly alluring.

**Debussy: *La Mer*, arranged by Sally Beamish**

The central importance of the sea to Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918) is well documented in his letters. In September 1903 he wrote to André Messager about *La Mer*, noting the amusing irony of composing the piece in the resolutely landlocked department of the Yonne, in north-west Burgundy, and describing his approach to the work with an analogy to landscape painting:

I'm working on three symphonic sketches... the whole to be called *La Mer*. You're unaware, maybe, that I was intended for the noble career of a sailor and have only deviated from that path thanks to the quirks of fate. Even so, I've retained a sincere devotion to her [the sea]. To which you'll reply that the Atlantic doesn't exactly wash the foothills of Burgundy! And that the result could be one of those hack

landscapes done in the studio! But I have innumerable memories, and those, in my view, are worth more than a reality the charm of which tends to weigh too heavily on the imagination.<sup>5</sup>

In July 1904, Debussy left Lilly Texier and eloped to Jersey with Emma Bardac. In an undated letter from the Grand Hotel in St Helier, he wrote to his publisher, Durand, that 'The sea has behaved beautifully towards me and shown me all her guises'.<sup>6</sup> He returned to the subject while staying at the Grand Hotel in Eastbourne, where he was correcting the proofs of *La Mer*: 'It's a charming, peaceful spot. The sea unfurls itself with an utterly British correctness.'<sup>7</sup> Edward

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<sup>5</sup> Je travaille à trois esquisses symphoniques... sous le titre de *La Mer*. Vous ne savez peut-être pas que j'étais promis à la belle carrière de marin, et que seuls les hazards de l'existence m'ont fait bifurquer. Néanmoins, j'ai conservé une passion sincère pour Elle. Vous me direz à cela que l'Océan ne baigne pas précisément les côtes aux bourguignons! Et que cela pourrait bien ressembler aux paysages d'atelier! Mais j'ai d'innombrables souvenirs; cela vaut mieux, à mon sens, qu'une réalité dont le charme pèse généralement trop lourd sur votre pensée.

<sup>6</sup> La mer a été très bien pour moi, elle m'a montré toutes ses robes.

<sup>7</sup> Cet endroit est paisible et charmant. La mer s'y déroule avec une correction toute britannique.

Lockspeiser was unhesitating in describing *La Mer* as 'the greatest example of an orchestral Impressionist work' and it does not seem unduly far-fetched to see a parallel in Claude Monet's great seascapes from the 1890s.

The three movements form a magnificent large-scale symphonic whole, and for her arrangement, Sally Beamish (b. 1956) was faced with the challenge of rendering this work for piano trio: as she herself put it, she wanted to

reinvent Debussy's orchestral score with the piano trio in mind... This meant exploring what strings and piano can do in terms of texture, and concentrating on idiomatic and natural techniques.

The result is an extremely satisfying reworking of *La Mer* for a quite new ensemble. Beamish resisted the temptation to transcribe every note of the orchestral score, instead choosing to explore the colours and textures of chamber music while always remaining faithful to Debussy's original – and she drew particular inspiration from works such as Ravel's Piano Trio. Beamish's version of *La Mer* was first performed, by Trio Apaches, at the Lincoln Festival in 2013, and it is a transcription which offers a dazzling new perspective on a familiar masterpiece – at times, it feels almost as if Beamish has

given us the mature Piano Trio that Debussy himself never composed.

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Hailed by the magazine *BBC Music* for its 'generous and warm-hearted, utterly beguiling playing', the GRAMMY-nominated **Neave Trio** has emerged as one of the finest young ensembles of its generation. It has been praised by WQXR Radio in New York City for its 'bright and radiant music making', described by *The Strad* as having 'elegant phrasing and deft control of textures', and praised by *The New York Times* for its 'excellent performances'. Its members originating from the US, Russia, and Japan, the Trio has performed on concert stages from Carnegie Hall, in New York, to venues in the UK, continental Europe, Japan, and Russia, bringing audiences to their feet and receiving the highest critical acclaim. Performances have been broadcast on radio stations across the United States and abroad, notably on American Public Media's *Performance Today*.

Previous recordings have been met with critical acclaim, listed among 'The Best New Recordings of 2018 (So Far)' on WQXR and among the best recordings of 2019 both by

*The New York Times* and BBC Radio 3. The Trio's 2022 album, *Musical Remembrances*, was nominated for a GRAMMY® in the Best Chamber Music / Small Ensemble category. The Trio has held artist residency positions at Brown University, the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, San Diego State University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Walnut Hill School for the Arts, and Concord Academy, and is the inaugural Ensemble-in-Residence at Virginia Commonwealth University. From 2017 to 2022, it was ensemble in residence at the Longy School of Music of Bard College, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As part of its mission to create new pathways for classical music and engage

a wider audience, the Neave Trio frequently works with artists of all mediums. Notable collaborations include the world première performance of *Klee Musings*, a work dedicated to the Trio by the American composer Augusta Read Thomas; the world première of Robert Paterson's triple concerto, *Summit*, conducted by JoAnn Falletta; and a new dance piece with Pigeonwing Dance, the composer Robert Sirota, and choreographer Gabrielle Lamb called *Rising*, an evening-length work which meditates not only on rising temperatures and sea levels, but also on the rising awareness of humanity of our connection to and dependence on the Earth's oceans.  
[www.NeaveTrio.com](http://www.NeaveTrio.com)

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Neave Trio

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Neave Trio

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Steinway Model D Concert Grand Piano (serial no. 592 087) courtesy of Potton Hall  
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for Piano, Violin, and Cello

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(1858–1937)

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for Piano Trio

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(The Sea)  
*Trois Esquisses symphoniques*  
(Three Symphonic Sketches)

TT 65:05

## Neave Trio

Anna Williams violin  
Mikhail Veselov cello  
Eri Nakamura piano

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