

Trio Archai II

Ayla Sahin violin
Finn Mannion cello
Mar Valor piano

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975)
Piano Trio No.1 in C minor, Op.8 (1923)
Andante – Moderato

14'

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Piano Trio No.1 in B, Op.8 (revised version, 1889)
i. Allegro con brio — Tranquillo — In tempo ma
sempre sostenuto
ii. Scherzo: Allegro molto — Meno allegro —
Tempo primo
iii. Adagio
iv. Finale: Allegro

36'

Trio Archai is a Britten Pears Young Artist for 2025/26, here for a two-week residency on the Chamber Music in Residence course.

Founded in Basel in 2023, Trio Archai gained international recognition after winning first prize and the Beethoven Prize at the Schoenfeld International String Competition 2025 in China, and first prize at the 72nd Royal Over-Seas League Competition 2024 in London.

In the 2024/25 season, the Trio premiered *Triangulum* by Dominic Röthlisberger at the Swiss Chamber Music Festival and *Nocturnes* by Jeremy Sams at the Whittington Festival.

The members of the Trio met at the Musik Akademie Basel, where they study with Claudio Martínez Mehner, Rainer Schmidt, Anna Geber and Anton Kernjak. They are members of the European Chamber Music Academy and ChamberStudio London, and scholarship holders of Jeunesse Musicales Deutschland. In 2025 the Trio was selected to join Thomas Adès's class at IMS Prussia Cove.

Archai (pronounced 'Ark-ai'), is from the ancient Greek for 'origins' or 'first principles', reflecting the ensemble's shared musical values and commitment to grow together.

Shostakovich: Piano Trio No.1

According to Shostakovich's sister, this single-movement work – originally called 'Poème' – was first performed to accompany a silent film. He wrote it in 1923. Life had been hard for the family since the revolution and to supplement their meagre income, the teenage Shostakovich had taken a job as a cinema pianist. The auditorium provided an excellent practice venue and despite regular protestations from film-goers, he and his friends often used the space to rehearse his new compositions, regardless of what else was going on around them. Listening to this early work, it is easy to imagine a film playing in the background, the sudden contrasts of mood reflecting the action unfolding on screen.

Shostakovich was studying in Leningrad at the time but the following year he applied to the Moscow Conservatory and took along the trio as an audition piece. He was disappointed with his companions who apparently played very badly: nonetheless, the examiners were impressed with the composition itself. One of them – the leading composer Nikolai Myaskovsky – even wondered why Shostakovich should need classes at all when 'he is already a complete master of form.' He was immediately offered a scholarship, although in the end his mother refused to let him go on account of his fragile health.

This is very much the young Shostakovich, aware of the mighty tradition of the Russian Romantics but taking it in a radical new direction. There are moments of great intensity – particularly as the trio comes to a close – undoubtedly inspired by the circumstances in which it was written. Shostakovich was 16 at the time and recovering from tuberculosis at a sanatorium in Crimea: he dedicated it to Tatyana Glivenko, a girl he fell in love with while he was there.

Brahms: Piano Trio No.1

No composer felt the weight of the past as acutely as the young Brahms, for whom the shadow of Beethoven loomed large. 'You can't imagine,' he said, 'what it's like to hear such a giant marching behind you!' As a result, he became extremely self-critical and consigned several early chamber works to the bin. This trio fared better and at least achieved publication, but Brahms soon regretted handing it over and told a friend that had he been able to keep it, he would certainly have made changes.

Brahms was just 20 when he embarked on the original piece and it was more than three decades before he decided to look at it again. At the age of 56, he felt he had a clear view of what he called the 'youthful excesses' of his early trio and felt moved to do something about them. He told Clara Schumann he hoped to make it 'not as dreary as before' but he had no plans for a complete rewrite, later claiming merely to have 'combed and arranged its hair a little' rather than providing it with a 'new wig'.

The main difference between the two versions of the trio is the overall length, which he reduced by almost a third. This was achieved mainly by cuts to the opening Allegro: he was clearly content with the lyrical first theme but replaced the rest of the movement and also reworked much of the Adagio. Only the second movement Scherzo remained untouched and there were relatively few changes to the finale which – unusually for a major-key work – ends in the minor. Brahms was living with the Schumanns when he first conceived the work: it has been suggested that witnessing the older composer's deteriorating mental state might have triggered this almost bleak conclusion.

Thus Brahms's first piano trio might also be called his fourth: a work in which the revisions were so seamlessly achieved that it is almost impossible to identify where the young Brahms pauses and the older composer takes over.

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