

Trio Archai I

Ayla Sahin violin
Finn Mannion cello
Mar Valor piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Piano Trio in E flat, Op.1 No.1 (1795) 30'
i. Allegro
ii. Adagio cantabile
iii. Scherzo: Allegro assai – Trio
iv. Presto

Helen Grime (b.1981)
Three Whistler Miniatures (2011) 11'
i. The Little Note in Yellow and Gold (Tranquillo)
ii. Lapis Lazuli (Presto)
iii. The Violet Note (Lontano, molto flessibile)

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)
Piano Trio in D minor, Op.120 (1920–23) 23'
i. Allegro ma non troppo
ii. Andantino
iii. Allegro vivo

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.

Beethoven: Piano Trio in E flat, Op.1 No.1

Although some early works had already appeared in print, the 25-year-old Beethoven thought carefully about his first major publication. He was keen to create a stir among the Viennese musical elite and it was vital that his official Op.1 should send the right message. The decision to offer a set of three piano trios was a canny one: not only would it enable him to show off his keyboard skills, the lucrative market for such pieces among amateur players would also ensure a handsome profit.

The previous three decades had seen first Haydn and then Mozart gradually develop the piano trio as a distinct form, which was already moving away from its purely domestic origins. Beethoven, however, was intent on taking it even further, giving all three instruments equal prominence, expanding the number of movements and replacing the usual minuet with a Scherzo (literally, 'a joke'). The result was so far from what had started out as more of an accompanied sonata, that Beethoven apparently 'wondered at his folly' in cramming in so many new ideas.

The Op.1 trios were dedicated to his patron, Prince Lichnowsky, who hosted the premiere at his Viennese residence. The event was the musical highlight of the year, with the works reported to have 'at once commanded extraordinary attention'. The guest of honour at this elite gathering was Haydn: Beethoven, he said, gave him the impression 'of a man with more than one head, more than one heart and more than one soul!' And a subsequent performance in London inspired its pianist to call Beethoven 'the man who is to console us for the loss of Mozart'.

Helen Grime: Three Whistler Miniatures

Helen Grime was inspired to write her *Three Whistler Miniatures* after seeing three chalk-and-pastel miniatures on display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, where in 2012 her work received its first performance. It falls into three contrasting sections: The Little Note in Yellow and Gold, Lapis Lazuli and The Violet Note. Although the music does not relate directly to the pictures, Grime says she was taken by 'the subtly graduated palate and intimate atmosphere suggested by each of them'. Throughout the piece, the violin and cello form – as she puts it – 'a sort of unit' which is set against the contrasting nature of the piano.

Fauré: Piano Trio in D minor, Op.120

When Fauré retired as director of the Paris Conservatoire, he was 75 and in far from perfect health. He was also suffering from a hearing condition which distorted high and low notes, causing them to sound painfully out of tune. Nonetheless, the last three years of his life saw the completion of several substantial works including his only piano trio. Progress on the work was slow, partly due to an attack of pneumonia soon after he had begun, but also because – as he wrote to his wife – he was only able to work for short periods of time. 'My worst tribulation,' he told her, 'is a perpetual fatigue.'

When Fauré began the Trio, the top line was to be taken by the clarinet but he soon abandoned that option and settled for the classic trio combination instead. At the time, he was staying in a resort by Lake Annecy – sometimes referred to as the Venice of the Alps – and the opening cello theme with its rippling, watery accompaniment evokes the traditional gondoliers' barcarolle, or boat-song, which Fauré often used in his piano music. The second (and longest) movement is – by turns – gently lyrical and darkly introspective but it is the finale that offers the most surprises, with constant musical interruptions, an increasing sense of drama and an overall energy quite at odds with his 'perpetual fatigue'.

The premiere took place on the composer's 78th birthday. He himself was too ill to attend but he would have been pleased with the reaction, one critic praising 'the elegant clarity, the equilibrium of thought and the serenity' of the writing. It was, he said 'a beautiful work that enriches the chamber music repertory'.

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Please note that next week's Friday Lunchtime Concert will take place in the Britten Studio at Snape Maltings.