

# LSO St Luke's

# CHAMBER MUSIC



Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

## SAINT-SAËNS' CIRCLE: GOULD PIANO TRIO

Friday 25 March 2022 6pm  
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

**Gabriel Fauré** Piano Trio in D minor  
**Camille Saint-Saëns** Piano Trio No 2 in E minor

**Gould Piano Trio**  
**Lucy Gould** violin  
**Richard Lester** cello  
**Benjamin Frith** piano

## Piano Trio in D minor Op 120

Gabriel Fauré

- 1 **Allegro ma non troppo**
- 2 **Andantino**
- 3 **Allegro vivo**

**B**orn in the Ariège region of southern France, Gabriel Fauré was dispatched to Paris at the age of nine to study at the newly-founded École Niedermeyer, essentially a training school for church musicians. His piano and composition professor there from 1861 was Camille Saint-Saëns, for whom he developed an 'almost filial' attachment, based on 'immense admiration and unending gratitude', until the elder man's death 60 years later. Fauré outlived his mentor by just under three years. He retired from the Paris Conservatoire in 1920, after spending the past 15 years as its Director – a particularly turbulent time during which he initiated reforms which earned him the sobriquet 'Robespierre'. At 75, he felt worn out, experiencing increasing deafness and fatigue. But like Saint-Saëns, he continued to compose to the end of his life: among his last works are a group of chamber compositions including a piano trio and a string quartet – remarkably enough, his first essays in both genres.

The D minor Piano Trio was begun on holiday in the south of France in 1922, and completed in Paris in the early spring of 1923. Three young Conservatoire graduates gave the first performance at a May concert of the Société Nationale de Musique in honour of Fauré's 78th birthday: the following month it was performed again by the famous Cortot-Thibaud-Casals Trio.

Fauré's mature style was elusive and understated, inflected by modal harmonies and infused with poignant melodies. The opening movement juxtaposes sonata and rondo forms: its pensive main theme, first introduced by the cello over a shimmering right-hand-only piano accompaniment, recurs throughout the movement, sometimes in conjunction with the yearning second theme. The lyrical slow movement opens with a violin cantilena (literally meaning 'lullaby' in Italian), subtly accompanied by the piano, while a second theme moves to the more extrovert key of F major. Both themes combine towards the end. The quirky, dance-like finale is full of surprises and uninhibited humorous touches.



# Piano Trio No 2 in E minor Op 92

Camille Saint-Saëns

- 1 **Allegro ma non troppo**
- 2 **Allegretto**
- 3 **Andante con moto**
- 4 **Grazioso, poco allegro**
- 5 **Allegro**

I am working quietly away at a Trio which I hope will drive to despair all those unlucky enough to hear it. I shall need all summer to perpetrate this atrocity; one must have a little fun somehow.' So Saint-Saëns wrote while on holiday in Algeria in the spring of 1892 to his friend and fellow-composer Charles Lecocq. As the acclaimed composer of a swathe of operas, tone poems (including the ever-popular *Danse macabre*), concertos, choral and chamber music and songs, Saint-Saëns was approaching 'grand old man' status in French music. He was nevertheless aware that he was out of tune with the times: his own musical style never ventured close to modernism, and he had little sympathy with younger, more adventurous colleagues such as Claude Debussy.

The Second Piano Trio, composed almost three decades after the First, epitomises his love of clarity and precision – traits he admired in the music of 18th-century French composers. It was first performed in Paris on 7 December 1892 by his former piano pupil, Isidor Philipp, with the violinist Henri Berthelier and cellist Jules Loeb.

The Trio is constructed as an elegant arch form. Two substantial outer movements – the first in classic sonata form, with surging, virtuosic piano figuration underpinning a wide-ranging melody passed between violin and cello; the finale a masterclass in counterpoint, dominated by a Bach-like fugue – frame a sequence of three shorter movements. The second and fourth are both dance-like. The playful and sunny Allegretto is in the oddly lopsided metre of 5/8 (a trick Tchaikovsky was to borrow a year later in his 'Pathétique' Symphony). The fourth movement is a delightful, intermezzo-like waltz which Charles Lecocq whimsically compared to a 'child of the house who pops his pink snub nose round the door. One would like to send him packing, but he is so charming that one ends up listening and patting him on the head.' At the core of the work lies an introspective and mellow Andante, constructed as an impassioned exchange between all three participants.

Notes by Wendy Thompson

# Gould Piano Trio

The Gould Piano Trio have been compared in the *Washington Post* to the great Beaux Arts Trio for their 'musical fire' and 'dedication to the genre'. They have been at the forefront of the international chamber music scene for a quarter of a century.

The Trio's career was launched when they won first prize at the Melbourne Chamber Music Competition. They went on to be ECHO Rising Stars, making a highly successful debut at New York's Weill Recital Hall, described by *The Strad* magazine as 'Pure Gould'. Their many appearances at London's Wigmore Hall have included the complete piano trios of Dvořák, Mendelssohn and Schubert as well as – in the 2017/18 season – a Beethoven cycle to celebrate 25 years since their debut at the venue.

The Trio's passionate belief in the importance of developing new repertoire has led them to commission works from many contemporary composers. Their commissions from Sir James MacMillan and Mark Simpson received their premieres at the Bath International Festival and the PRS New Music Biennale in Hull, City of Culture 2017. The Gould Trio also maintain a lively relationship with promising young chamber players by giving masterclasses worldwide, particularly in association with the Guildhall School in London and The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff.

Together with clarinettist Robert Plane, the trio are artistic directors of the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival in Northumberland, which celebrated its 21st anniversary with a much-acclaimed new commission from Huw Watkins for clarinet and piano trio entitled *Four Fables*.

The Gould Trio have toured extensively in North America, the Far East, Europe and New Zealand. Their adventurous recording projects include highly-praised discs of the standard works, along with recordings of long-neglected gems from the late-Romantic British repertoire. These include trios by Charles Villiers Stanford and John Ireland, and works by Arnold Bax, Robin Milford, York Bowen and Cyril Scott. Last year they released a recording of John Casken's piano trio, and a disc of works by Charles Ives, Rebecca Clarke and Amy Beach. Their next release will be a complete Schubert Piano Trio cycle, juxtaposing these masterpieces with arrangements of the composer's dances.