

The Red Bank  
Chamber Music Society

*presents*

## The Claremont Piano Trio

Beethoven • Shostakovich • Mendelssohn

Emily Bruskin, violin

Julia Bruskin, cello

Andrea Lam, piano

Sunday Afternoon  
October 26, 2014 • 4:30 PM  
Trinity Church Auditorium  
Red Bank, NJ

# PROGRAM NOTES

# PROGRAM

Piano Trio No.5 in D Major, Op.70, No.1 ("Ghost")

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Allegro vivace e con brio
- II. Largo assai ed espressivo
- III. Presto

Piano Trio No.2 in E Minor, Op.67

Dmitri Shostakovich

- I. Andante. Moderato. Poco più mosso
- II. Allegro con brio
- III. Largo
- IV. Allegretto

# INTERMISSION

Piano Trio No.2 in C Minor, Op. 66

Felix Mendelssohn

- I. Allegro energico e con fuoco
- II. Andante espressivo
- III. Scherzo: Molto allegro quasi presto
- IV. Finale: Allegro appassionato

# Notes on the Program

## **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)**

### **Piano Trio No.5 in D Major, Op.70, No.1 (“Ghost”) (1808)**

(~30 minutes)

In his twenties Beethoven was the outstanding piano virtuoso of his time. In those days there was little call for “pianists” as such outside of the royal and clerical courts; rather, keyboard artists (on harpsichord, clavichord, foretepidiano, virginal, organ, and any other instrument meant to be played with the ten fingers of two hands) performing in public were usually composers playing their own works for audiences largely comprising the growing urban middle class. This tradition of composer-pianist was to continue throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, gradually giving way to the rising tide of pianists as performing artists who only played other composers’ music.

Before he turned 40 Beethoven had written many of the most important and lasting works in the piano repertoire: 23 sonatas for solo piano; five piano concertos and the “Choral Fantasy” for piano with orchestra and chorus; a “triple” concerto for piano, violin, and cello; four piano trios; and three piano quartets. He had played them all in public and would continue to do so for another two years, but by 1811 his profound deafness forced him to abandon public performance completely.

More than any other composer before him, and any until Brahms, Beethoven painted with a symphonic brush, no matter the size of the canvas. His 32 sonatas for solo piano are all, to greater or lesser degrees, attempts to capture the full range of an orchestral symphony – its dynamics, its drama, its textures, its vertical harmonies and linear themes, and especially its silences – by a single instrument with a lone performer. Similarly his string quartets are masterpieces of distillation, reducing the 50-piece symphony orchestra of his day down to its essence in just four instrumental voices.

The work we hear today is the fifth of Beethoven’s seven piano trios in the violin/cello/piano grouping, written at the age of 38 just after he completed his towering fifth and sixth symphonies. Its title “Ghost” was not given by Beethoven but by his student Carl Czerny, who said the second movement reminded him of a scene in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In fact, Beethoven’s notes and sketches from 1808 show that he was working on an idea for an opera based on *Macbeth*, and entries for this abandoned opera project are found along with his musical ideas for the slow movement of the Ghost trio.

The overall architecture of this three-movement trio is “classical” in one sense: two outer movements fast and exciting in the sonata’s key (D major), and a middle movement in contrasting mood and tonality (slow and sombre in D minor). Yet, at this point in his artistic life Beethoven was not about to imitate the classical models of Haydn and Mozart, and each of the three movements

bears the unique stamp of Beethoven's innovations.

The first movement, marked *Allegro vivace e con brio* (quick and lively, with spirit), presents two contrasting themes in rapid succession. An excited first theme lasts only six measures, with all three instruments playing the same ascending D-major scale figure *fortissimo* in rapid staccato eighth-notes. Without warning, this brief theme ends at its peak on an unexpected note, and the quiet octave in the left hand reinforces a harmonic ambiguity typical of Beethoven's mature works. The much longer second theme sets a quietly lyrical mood. Both themes are extensively developed, with considerable use of counterpoint and frequent modulations to distant harmonies. Rather than recapitulate the opening section, Beethoven simply repeats the middle development section before ending the movement with a brief coda that quotes both themes and finishes in a *fortissimo* burst.

The second movement, marked *Largo assai ed espressivo* (very slowly and expressively), creates the ghostly mood that gives the trio its name. It is characterized by extreme variations in dynamics, building and falling in volume sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly, and by alternating passages of calm and stress, of light and dark. It contrasts with the first movement in key as well, being in D minor rather than D major. The single theme of the movement is just a brief two-measure motif announced at the outset as a continuous line begun by the strings and completed by the piano. It is the brevity of this minor-key theme, and its insistent recurrence throughout the movement with only slight variations and embellishments at its deathly pace, that gives the *Largo* its eerily unsettled atmosphere.

The sombre mood of the slow movement is immediately dispelled by the lighthearted final movement, marked *Presto* (very fast) and written in the sunny key of D major. There is really just one theme, and it is somewhat varied and developed like a sonata, but it recurs over and over as in a rondo. The trio ends with a dazzling chromatic run up the piano and a sustained burst of energy by all.



## **Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)**

### **Piano Trio No.2 in E Minor, Op.67 (1944)**

(~28 minutes)

The life and works of Shostakovich are inextricably tied to civil unrest, revolution, world war, and political turmoil. He spent his entire adult life in the Soviet Union, sometimes in and often out of favor with Stalin and the Central Committee regime. More than once he was officially censured, denounced for "formalist perversions", and forced to rework or withdraw a composition. One of his closest friends and staunchest supporters through his many conflicts with the Soviet state was Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky, acclaimed musicologist, linguist, critic, artistic director of the Leningrad Philharmonic, and himself often a target of political scheming.

Sollertinsky died in February 1944, the final year of the Second World War, as the Allies were closing in on the Axis powers from all sides. Shostakovich was devastated. In a letter of condolence to his widow he wrote

I cannot express in words all the grief I felt when I received the news of the death of Ivan Ivanovich, my closest and dearest friend. I owe all my education to him. It will be unbelievably hard for me to live without him.

Shostakovich had been outlining a piano trio at the time, but he began work on it in earnest when the news reached him.

Besides this private grief, other recent news was heart-wrenching on a massively public scale: Soviet military advances into Poland were revealing the horrors of the Nazi death camps on the Eastern front. Eyewitness accounts of prisoners being ordered to dance on the graves of their comrades shocked the world and compelled Shostakovich to express in this trio his outrage at the barbarism and his sympathy with its victims.

For the next six months Shostakovich poured his heart into the piano trio. The result is an expression of the widest range of human emotions: an elegy to his closest friend, an outpouring of grief for the suffering of millions, defiance in the face of death, and the eternal hope for redemption.

The first of the four movements, marked *Andante* (slowly), opens in an other-worldly mood with the cello playing a mournful theme in the upper register. This is picked up by the violin and piano in turn. The mood grows more intense and angry, the texture becomes more angular, and the tempo increases in stages (*Moderato*, then a little faster *Poco più mosso*). The melodic and rhythmic material is relatively unchanged throughout the movement, while the extreme mood changes are effected mainly through the shifting use of counterpoint, dissonance, tempo, articulation, and dynamics.

The second movement *Allegro con brio* (quick and spirited) is a scherzo that epitomizes Shostakovich's sardonic wit and love of the macabre. It can be a wild ride for all the players, a kind of circus high-wire act with no safety net.

The *Largo* (very slowly and broadly) opens with the piano alone, playing a progression of eight chords, one per measure, that will be repeated for the remainder of the movement. The violin then enters with an elegiac melody over those same eight one-bar chords, and then the cello picks up that dirge-like melody on the third repeat. The movement derives its emotional strength from the unyielding solidity of the piano's long chords supporting the melodic lamentation of the two strings.

The trio continues without pause into the final-movement *Allegretto* (lively and moderately fast). It opens deceptively as a happy peasant dance, but it quickly turns menacing and macabre, a dance of death suggesting prison-camp horrors. Throughout the movement Shostakovich juxtaposes joy and sorrow, hope and despair, defiance and resignation. Themes and motifs from earlier movements reappear in new contexts, and the work ends softly with the chords of the *Largo* movement mingled with the *pianissimo* echo of the finale's dance theme.



## **Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)**

### **Piano Trio No.2 in C Minor, Op.66 (1845)**

(~30 minutes)

In his short life Felix Mendelssohn composed 750 works and created some of the most enduringly popular music of the nineteenth century. He was born into a life of privilege and grew up in the company of the brightest intellectuals of his time. Displaying prodigious musical talent at the piano from an early age, he composed some of his most famous works by age 16. He was a renowned conductor who at the age of 26 became music director of the prestigious Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, a position he retained until his death. He was a skilled artist in pencil and watercolor, and he could speak English and Italian as well as translate the classics from Latin. A compendium of Mendelssohn's complete compositions, artwork, and correspondence is expected to comprise more than 150 volumes.

His compositional style was strongly influenced by the music of the Baroque and Classical periods, and he was an ardent admirer of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). In 1829 in Berlin he organized and conducted the first performance of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion* since Bach's death nearly eighty years prior, thereby single-handedly reviving worldwide interest in Bach's music.

He wrote two piano trios; the first (1839), filled with youthful exuberance and graceful melody, was praised by Robert Schumann as "the trio masterpiece of the present time ... which grand- and great-grandchildren will enjoy in years to come." His second, written six years later as he was completing his magnificent violin concerto, is an altogether more mature and serious work, more passionate than exuberant, and more complex in its musical concept and expression. While the first trio was more classically Mozartean, filled with long singable melodies and symmetrically balanced phrases, the second trio is more in the Romantic style of Beethoven and Schubert, weaving a stunning tapestry from short harmonic and rhythmic threads.

Its first and final movements are in C minor, a key characterized by musicologist Nicholas Slonimsky as "The key of concentration in solemnity".

The first movement *Allegro energico e con fuoco* (energetically quick and fiery) offers two motivic themes. The first theme is darkly tense and anxious, moving forward with a sense of foreboding that intensifies as the piano part becomes thicker and more excited. The second theme appears with no advance warning; it begins *fortissimo* in the guise of an heroic anthem breaking out of the stormy clouds of the opening theme, but it is quickly transformed into a more sweetly meditative mood. Both themes are fully developed before the movement returns to a recapitulation and closes with a coda.

In the second movement *Andante espressivo* (slow and expressive) Mendelssohn reminds us that he was one of the finest composers of melodious song; it moves with a gently rocking 9/8 beat in the mood of a *barcarolle* or Venetian gondolier's tune. The third movement is a scherzo marked *Molto allegro quasi presto* (very quickly, almost headlong); its predominantly minor key tinges its exuberance with gravitas.

The finale is marked *Allegro appassionato* (quickly and passionately) and returns to the serious key of C minor. It has two strongly contrasting motivic elements: the opening motif introduced by the cello is impulsively forward-moving with restless energy; the second, introduced by the piano, is a more settled and joyous motif in a major key. As the conversation between these two opposing motifs in the development section grows increasingly intense, it is interrupted by the surprising appearance of a solemn chorale in the solo piano, which gradually reconciles the two parties as the strings soon join in the prayer. The movement continues with further development of the two themes, and the chorale reappears in a thunderous *fortissimo* to announce the sudden change of key from C minor to C major, and there it stays all the way to a rousing finish.

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## ARTISTS

Lauded as “one of America’s finest young chamber groups” (*The Strad*), the Claremont Trio is sought after for its thrillingly virtuosic and richly communicative performances. First winners of the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson International Trio Award and the only piano trio ever to win the Young Concert Artists International Auditions, the Claremonts are consistently praised for their “aesthetic maturity, interpretive depth, and exuberance” (*Palm Beach Daily News*).

During the 2014-15 season the Claremont Trio will perform at the Library of Congress, the San Miguel International Festival, the Sanibel Music Festival, Concerts at the Point, Music Mondays, Dayton Vanguard Concerts, and the Rockport Chamber Music Festival. In addition, they return to Boston’s Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, where they will present a four-concert series featuring Brahms’s Piano Trios alongside new works by Judd Greenstein, Nico Muhly, Lembit Beecher and Donald Crockett.

Bridge Records released the Claremont Trio’s newest recording of the Beethoven “Triple” Concerto with the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra and Beethoven’s Piano Trio Op. 1 No. 1 last year to critical acclaim. Of their most recent Beethoven and Ravel CD *Audiophile Audition* raved “These are some of the most impassioned, moving, and notable readings of these favorites that I have ever heard, bar none.” Their discography also includes Mendelssohn Trios, Shostakovich and Arensky Trios, and American Trios with works by Leon Kirchner, Ellen Zwilich, Paul Schoenfield, and Mason Bates. A collaborative disc with clarinetist Jonathan Cohler garnered a glowing review in *Fanfare* and received a Critic’s Choice award from *BBC Magazine*.

The Claremont Trio's recent seasons included engagements at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Boston's Celebrity Series, Chicago's Dame Myra Hess Series, Pasadena's Coleman Chamber Music Association, Johns Hopkins University, the Austin Chamber Music Festival, St. Paul's Music in the Park, Stanford Lively Arts, and Kansas City Friends of Chamber Music, along with the Chamber Music Societies of Phoenix, Dallas, Sedona, San Antonio, Buffalo, and the Universities of Washington, Wisconsin, and Missouri. They have performed the Beethoven Triple Concerto with the Nashville Symphony, Virginia Symphony, Pacific Symphony, and Utah Symphony. They also appear regularly at festivals including Ravinia, Saratoga, Mostly Mozart, Caramoor, Rockport, Bard, and Norfolk.

The Claremont Trio has commissioned new trios by Nico Muhly, Gabriela Lena Frank, Mason Bates, Sean Shepherd, Helen Grime, Donald Crockett, Robert Paterson, Paul Chihara, Sharon Farber, Howard Frazin, Daniel Kellogg, and Hillary Zipper. They have conducted master classes at the Eastman School of Music, Columbia University, Duke University, Peabody Conservatory's Preparatory Division, and the Boston Conservatory.

The Claremont Trio was formed in 1999 at the Juilliard School. Twin sisters **EMILY BRUSKIN** (violin) and **JULIA BRUSKIN** (cello) grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and they both play old French instruments: Emily's violin is a Lupot from 1795; Julia's cello is a J.B. Vuillaume from 1849. Pianist **ANDREA LAM** grew up in Sydney, Australia. The Claremonts are all now based in New York City near their namesake: Claremont Avenue.