

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society

presents

Trio Solisti

Schubert • Liebermann • Piazzola
Rachmaninoff • de Falla

Maria Bachmann, violin

Alexis Pia Gerlach, cello

Adam Neiman, piano

Sunday Afternoon

May 17, 2015 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

PROGRAM NOTES

PROGRAM

Piano Trio in Bb Major, D.28 ("Sonatensatz")

Franz Schubert

Allegro

Piano Trio No.3, Op.122 (2012)

Lowell Liebermann

Senza tempo – Lento – Moderato (They're Coming....)

Spring & Fall of Buenos Aires

Ástor Piazzolla (arr. Bragato/Bachmann)

INTERMISSION

Trio Élégiáque in D Minor, Op.9

Sergei Rachmaninoff

I. Moderato – Allegro vivace

II. Quasi variazione: Andante

III. Allegro risoluto – Moderato

Ritual Fire Dance (from "El Amor Brujo")

Manuel de Falla (arr. Bachmann)

Notes on the Program

Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

Piano Trio in Bb Major, D.28 (“Sonatensatz”) (1812)

(~11 minutes)

In 1827-28, the last year of his brief life, Franz Schubert composed three of the greatest piano trios in the chamber music repertoire: two four-movement trios, and one single-movement serenade that he titled *Notturmo*. Those mature works reflect the lifelong influence of his idol Beethoven, who had died in March 1827.

Sixteen years earlier at the age of 15, in his last year as a choirboy at Vienna’s famed Imperial Seminary, he wrote his only other work for piano trio. Whether he intended it as a full-scale piano trio we will never know, but he left it as a one-movement work that he titled simply “Sonata”. We know it now by the name *Sonatensatz* (“sonata movement”).

At the time of its composition, July 1812, Mozart had been dead for more than twenty years and Haydn for three, and Beethoven was Vienna’s reigning composer and performer. Beethoven had already written all of his own piano trios and performed them in Vienna by 1808, and the young Schubert must have been familiar with them.

Yet Schubert’s early *Sonatensatz* is more in the classical manner of Haydn or Mozart: lighthearted and tuneful, with only occasional flashes of Beethoven’s romantic fire that would infuse his later works. Perhaps Schubert felt more confident writing in the style of Vienna’s deceased musical patriarchs than under the formidable shadow of a contemporary composer at the height of his powers. Then again, we must remember that Schubert was still a young schoolboy, yet to find his mature voice in this, only his 28th composition of the more than 1,500 works – songs, solo and chamber music, orchestral, and choral masterpieces – that he would produce in the remaining sixteen years of his life.



Lowell Liebermann (b. 1961)

Piano Trio No.3, Op.122 (2012)

(~16 minutes)

American composer, pianist, and conductor Lowell Liebermann was described by the *New York Times* as “as much of a traditionalist as an innovator.” Born in New York and trained at Juilliard, he is a prolific composer whose catalog currently embodies well over one hundred works.

One of his most recent works is his third piano trio, commissioned by the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music, completed in 2012, and premiered at their Tucson concert in January 2013 by Trio Solisti. Here are the composer’s comments from the premiere:

Like my first two pianos trios this work is in one movement. The Third Trio unfolds in three clearly discernable sections. Its opening introduction features two cadenzas, one for violin followed by one for cello, which are heard over repeated pianissimo chords in the piano and which serve to introduce the work's motivic material. The broadly lyric section that follows features long lines in the strings over a glittering ostinato in the piano. The final section of the Trio is a menacing and somewhat jazzy processional which bears the subtitle (*They're coming.....*) in the printed score.

The entire Trio was written during a year notable for events which revealed some of the most disturbing aspects of American culture: events ranging from multiple public shootings to the hate-filled rhetoric leading up to the 2012 election.

For me, the viewing of almost any news media these days seems to inspire an encroaching sense of paranoia and despair. I think some of this feeling crept into the work's final section, which has an undercurrent of pessimistic sarcasm running throughout. The Trio culminates in a climax which seems to be a musical embodiment of the triumph of banality, before it all comes crashing down in an abrupt ending. Individual audience members are invited to imagine a bogeyman of their own choosing to serve as the object of paranoia represented in this closing section.



Ástor Piazzolla (1921 – 1992)

Spring & Fall of Buenos Aires(1969-70)

Arranged by Jose Bragato and Maria Bachmann

(~10 minutes)

Ástor Piazzolla is considered the father of the modern tango, known as *nuevo tango*, incorporating elements of jazz and classical music into the traditional Argentine dance form. Before Piazzolla the tango idiom was oriented towards songs of love and loss, with rich and unforgettable melodies and lyrics by the likes of Carlos Gardel and Alfredo Le Pera, celebrated as national heroes in Argentina from the 1930s until today. Piazzolla revolutionized the tango by changing its emphasis from melodies and words to pure music and dance, broadening its harmonic palette, adding classical counterpoint, heightening dissonances, and extending compositional forms beyond simple verse-and-chorus structure.

One of his most successful instrumental groupings became the quintet consisting of *bandoneón* (a form of accordion), violin, piano, electric guitar and double bass; and that is the original scoring of the four works he titled “The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires”. Unlike Vivaldi’s unified *Four Seasons*, they were conceived and composed separately over a seven-year period, though Piazzolla himself occasionally performed them together as a suite. His collaborator, famed Argentine cellist José Bragato, arranged them for piano trio.

The greatest challenge facing an arranger is how to capture the mood and atmosphere of a musical work when it will be played by a different group of instruments than originally intended. For the

Four Seasons of Buenos Aires, here is the comparison of the Piazzolla's original Argentine tango quintet with the Bragato's piano trio:

Tango Quintet	Trio
bandonéon	
violin	violin
piano	piano
electric guitar	cello
double bass	

Only the violin and piano appear in both the original quintet and in Bragato's piano trio adaptation. While the double bass and electric guitar are not too distant in range and texture from the combined forces of the violin, cello, and piano, Bragato's real challenge was to find a way to express the reedy, often punchy accordion-like sound of the bandonéon with only the classical piano trio resources at his command. Maria Bachmann added musical material, innovative string techniques, and percussive sound effects – *glissandi* (slides) on the strings, “crickets” produced by playing on the wrong side of the violin bridge, and knocking sounds on the violin and cello bodies – to suggest the sonic textures of the original tango band.

Today we hear two selections from the four-movement work: *Spring* and *Fall*.

Buenos Aires Spring dates from 1970 and opens with a violin solo, with the cello providing percussive as well as harmonic and melodic elements as the movement proceeds. The musical texture is thickened by extensive use of counterpoint among all three voices. Copious *glissandi* on the violin add an extra element of excitement to this movement's passion as it draws to a close.

Buenos Aires Fall was written in 1969. In characteristic Piazzolla style it begins quietly as a sedate tango in A minor, building on a descending chromatic scale in the violin, and gradually builds in intensity and speed to a rousing finish. Solo cadenzas introduce more quietly introspective ballad sections that further develop the tango themes and harmonies, while providing periods of respite before the bravura tango passages resume.



Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Trio Élégiaque in D Minor, Op.9 (1893-1917)

(~45 minutes)

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff was the last of the long line of towering composer-pianists who ruled the concert stage from the earliest days of the keyboard until his death in 1943. For the first three hundred years of the piano's existence – roughly 1600-1900 – there were many virtuoso performers on keyboard instruments (organ, harpsichord, and piano), but only a handful can be counted among the greatest composers of the complete range of serious symphonic, choral, and solo musical repertoire as well as the most memorable performers of their own music on the organ (J. S.

Bach), the harpsichord (Mozart), the early fortepiano (Beethoven), and the modern concert grand piano (Liszt). The nineteenth century saw the gradual decline of the composer-performer of “serious” music and the rise of the virtuoso pianist who didn’t compose but just played (or transcribed) the works of other composers. No 18th-century pianist would have dreamed of publicly performing a competitor’s piano composition in concert except at his funeral, but 20th-century virtuoso pianists were routinely playing only the works of other composers who themselves wrote but didn’t perform in paid public concerts.

Of course generalities have their exceptions. Some of the greatest concert works over the past hundred years have been composed by people who grew up making their living as pianists and playing their own works: George Gershwin comes to mind, as do the fabulously virtuosic Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, who had heralded a new 20th-century musical idiom informed by industrialization and war and revolution and state-imposed socialism.

But Rachmaninoff was the last of his line, a Romantic-era pianist of uncompromising integrity, incomparable pianistic technique, instantly recognizable musical language, commanding stage presence, and a life story of triumph over adversity.

Born in czarist Russia, he studied at the great musical conservatories of St. Petersburg and Moscow. His American tour in 1909 brought critical and popular acclaim, but it was the Russian Revolution in 1917 that spurred him to emigrate to the US with his family. Once in America he all but ceased composing, completing only six works between 1918 and his death in 1943.

The great majority of his compositions feature the piano, either in solo or orchestral settings, and nearly all of them demand the utmost virtuosity. Rachmaninoff’s hands were legendarily large, and many of his compositions feature densely rich chords covering wide spans in both hands. He composed only ten works for chamber ensembles, including one of the greatest cello-piano duo sonatas in the repertoire.

He wrote two piano trios, both titled “Elegiac Trio”. The first was a one-movement work that he composed in 1892 during his final year of studies at the Moscow Conservatory, and he played it at his first professional public concert. The manuscript was lost for sixty years, then eventually discovered after the close of the Second World War and published in 1947. Little is known about the inspiration for that first trio. While it is clearly funereal in tone, it bears no dedication to anyone in particular, though its principal theme is a variation of the opening orchestral motif of Tchaikovsky’s first piano concerto, reflecting the deep musical and emotional influence that Tchaikovsky (1840-93) exerted on the young Rachmaninoff.

One year later, in November 1893, Tchaikovsky died suddenly and unexpectedly. Rachmaninoff was grief-stricken. He immediately began work on a new piano trio, the one we hear today, and dedicated it “To the memory of a great artist.” These were the same words that Tchaikovsky himself had used a dozen years earlier in dedicating his own piano trio to the outstanding virtuoso pianist of his day, Nicolai Rubinstein.

In a letter Rachmaninoff said that he had worked “earnestly, intensely, painstakingly.... All my feelings and powers were devoted to it.... I trembled for every phrase, sometimes crossed out everything and began to think and think about it all over again.” He revised the trio twice over the next 25 years, in 1907 and 1917.

The trio is in three mournful movements. The first movement opens in tempo *Moderato*, but it goes through many changes in tempo and mood over its nearly 20-minute length, by turns sad, heroic, wistful, defiant. Stylistic echoes of Tchaikovsky are interspersed, including a bravura piano cadenza in the middle of the movement.

The second movement, a set of eight variations, is as long as the first. The theme is a simple melody recalling the one in Tchaikovsky’s own piano trio; it also resembles a theme in Rachmaninoff’s previous symphonic work, *The Rock*, which Tchaikovsky admired and planned to conduct the following month. Though it begins with an air of sweet nostalgia, successive variations introduce different moods, including a lighthearted scherzo.

The final movement is less than half as long as the others, marked at its opening as *Allegro risoluto* (quick and decisive). A fiery solo piano cadenza in the middle heralds a reprise of the themes and textures of the first movement, and the trio closes with a quietly solemn funeral procession that fades to *pianissimo*.



Manuel de Falla (1876 – 1946)

Ritual Fire Dance, from *El Amor Brujo* (1915)

Arranged by Maria Bachmann

(~5 minutes)

Spain was a powerful force in the Baroque era of Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti, but after 1750 Spain played only a minor role in the history of serious music until the late nineteenth century. Then, with the rise of nationalist composers throughout Europe, Spain reappeared on the world concert stage with works by Isaac Albeniz (1860-1909), Enrique Granados (1867–1916), and Manuel de Falla (1876–1946). Falla (pronounced “Fayya”) is best remembered today for two ballets – *The Three-Cornered Hat* (*El sombrero de tres picos*, 1919) and *Love, the Sorcerer* (*El amor brujo*, 1914-25).

His original version of *El amor brujo* was composed in 1915 for a vocal/instrumental chamber ensemble, commissioned by the famous flamenco dancer Pastora Imperio. He later revised it for symphonic orchestra with soprano soloist and, in 1927, as a one-act ballet. It is intensely Andalusian in its evocation of gypsy styles.

It is the eighth movement of the work, “Ritual Fire Dance” (*Danza ritual del fuego*), that is most remembered by today’s concert audience. In Falla’s work a young gypsy woman, haunted by her dead husband, joins her band around their campfire and dances with his ghost, drawing him into the fire and extinguishing his spirit to free herself from his grip.

Though Falla had transcribed the dance movement many times, it is probably the 1921 piano solo version that is most familiar to audiences today. Maria Bachmann has recently added her piano-trio arrangement of the dance to the rich variety of transcriptions of this iconic work.

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ARTISTS

Trio Solisti has forged a reputation as “the most exciting piano trio in America” (*The New Yorker*) with a passionate performance style that combines exceptional virtuosity and penetrating musical insight. Possessing a repertoire that encompasses the standard repertoire and works by contemporary composers, rave reviews follow the trio throughout its concert tours. Noted *Wall Street Journal* critic Terry Teachout proclaimed, “To my mind, Trio Solisti has now succeeded the Beaux Arts Trio as the outstanding chamber music ensemble of its kind.” Described by *The New York Times* as “consistently brilliant,” the group has been praised by *The Washington Post* for its “unrelenting passion and zealous abandon.”

Alongside its ongoing touring activities, Trio Solisti is embarking upon a number of exciting new ventures. In Fall 2015, the ensemble plans to unveil a three-concert series at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, presenting the complete piano chamber music of Brahms. Special guest performers include violinist Jesse Mills, violists Richard O’Neill and Hsin-Yun Huang, clarinetist Anthony McGill, and French hornist Julie Landsman. The trio will also dedicate itself to recording two magnum opuses: the complete Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff piano trios, and the complete Brahms piano trios, scheduled for release on Aeolian Classics in Fall 2015 and 2016, respectively. In addition, Trio Solisti is working with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon to commission a piano trio to be premiered in 2017.

Critical acclaim was recently accorded the ensemble for its 2014 recording of the Ravel and Chausson piano trios, on Bridge Records. *The New York Times* raved, “startlingly fresh and fascinating...plenty of fire and excitement in this standout recording.” *Gramophone* magazine described it as “a performance of kaleidoscopic hues, beauty of sound, and bountiful panache. Whether silken or sweeping, the music receives idiomatic and sophisticated treatment as shaped by these keenly perceptive artists.”

Founded in 2001, Trio Solisti – featuring violinist **Maria Bachmann**, cellist **Alexis Pia Gerlach**, and pianist **Adam Neiman** – has performed at prestigious concert venues such as the Great Performers at Lincoln Center, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, People’s Symphony Concerts at Town Hall, Washington Performing Arts Society at Kennedy Center, Seattle’s Meany

Hall and La Jolla's Revelle Series. The ensemble has a varied discography on a number of record labels, including Naxos, Bridge Records, Endeavour Classics, and Marquis Classics. It actively champions contemporary music, collaborating with leading composers such as Philip Glass, Lowell Liebermann, Paul Moravec, and Kevin Puts.

Trio Solisti proudly marks its 11th year as Ensemble-in-Residence at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York, and it is pleased to celebrate the 13th season of Telluride MusicFest, an annual chamber music festival founded by the ensemble.

You are invited to visit their website at www.triosolisti.com