

The Leopold String Trio

Highly regarded worldwide, the Leopold String Trio performs regularly at the world's leading concert halls including Carnegie Hall New York, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Musikverein Vienna, Wigmore Hall London and Symphony Hall Melbourne and at the major festivals such as Edinburgh, Aldeburgh, Vancouver and Stavanger. They were selected for the ECHO Rising Stars series, the BBC New Generation artist scheme and winners of a 2004 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award.

"What defines the string trio is that the three voices are equal. The Mozart Divertimento and the Beethoven trios were ground-breaking in that they were evenly written for the three instruments."

Lawrence Power viola

The string trio repertoire is relatively unknown and the Leopolds' success as an established string trio is a rare achievement. The medium boasts the sonority of a string quartet with the intensity of three more soloistic voices. The Leopolds are passionate about the strength and depth of the repertoire. They have premiered works by Kurtag, Henze, David Matthews and Judith Bingham. Recordings for Hyperion include the complete Beethoven String Trios and Mozart's Divertimento, and have all had outstanding reviews. A CD of Dohnanyi, Martinu and Schoenberg is released in April 2005.

"We became established as a string trio, rather than what's often the case, which is three soloists or chamber musicians coming together for a one-off concert."

Kate Gould cello

In autumn 2005, the Leopold String Trio embarks on **The Series**, a three year event with 12 concert programmes expressing the scope and versatility of the String Trio repertoire.

"We've worked a lot on our blend and sound, wanting to sound as one but at the same time keeping our own individuality"

Marianne Thorsen violin

All three members of the Trio enjoy a varied musical life away from the ensemble. Both Marianne Thorsen and Lawrence Power are also members of the Nash Ensemble of London. Marianne Thorsen won the 2003 Sion International Violin Competition and was chosen as the Norwegian Concert Institute's 'Young Musician of the Year' in 1998. She is also a professor of Violin at the Royal Academy of Music. Lawrence Power has also won many prizes and was the first British winner of The William Primrose International Viola Competition in Canada. He is much in demand both as a soloist, making his Prom concerto debut in 2003, and chamber musician, and has also appeared as guest solo violist with The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Kate Gould was a winner of the Tillett Trust Young Artists' Platform and the BBC Radio 3 Young Artists' Forum, leading to many recitals around the country with Viv McLean. She is a member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, both the Olivier and the London Bridge Ensembles, and frequently appears as a guest principal of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

SVAM's new season starts on Sunday 15 October 2006 at 4pm with a concert by Alison Balsom, Trumpet and David Goode, Organ; followed by the AGM.

Dates for you diary for SVAM's 2006-7 season are available today.

Stour Valley Arts & Music

Fifty-fifth
season
2005-6

4.00pm
Sunday
2. April
2006

St. Mary's Church
East Bergholt

Leopold String Trio

Marianne Thorsen Violin
Lawrence Power Viola
Kate Gould Cello

Alexander Borodin (1833 – 1887)
Variations in G minor over a Russian
theme

Alfred Schnittke (1934 - 1998)
String Trio (1985)

1. *Moderato*
2. *Adagio*

Sergei Taneyev (1856 - 1915)
String Trio in B minor

1. *Allegro*
2. Variations

INTERVAL

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 -1827)
String Trio in G Op 9 No 1

Adagio – Allegro con brio
Adagio ma non tanto e cantabile
Scherzo Presto



SVAM is a member of NFMS and a Registered Charity (No 276640)

Programme Notes

Alexander **Borodin** was the illegitimate son of a Georgian Prince, who had him registered instead as the son of one of his serfs. He received a good education, including piano lessons, but it was chemistry in which he specialised, and later earned his living. He received no formal lessons in composition until he was thirty years old, when he was taught by Mily Balakirev. He was a member of The Five, or 'The Mighty Handful', a group of Russian composers dedicated to producing a specifically Russian music. Among Borodin's early chamber works, the two string trios are notable in that they are among the earliest surviving works in this genre by a Russian composer. They are both scored not for the customary violin, viola and cello, but for two violins and cello, though nowadays they are almost always heard in editions for violin, viola and cello, in order to bring them to a wider audience. The first takes the form of a set of variations, seven in all, on a genuine Russian folk song, and was written in 1855.

Alfred **Schnittke**'s musical education began privately in Vienna where his father was working as a journalist and translator. Contact with Austro-German style and forms was to have lasting influence on Schnittke's music. In 1948, the family moved to Moscow, where Schnittke studied piano and received a diploma in choral conducting. Later he studied at the Moscow Conservatory, completing the postgraduate course in composition there in 1961, and joining the Union of Composers. The following year he was appointed instructor in instrumentation at the Moscow Conservatory, a post which he held for ten years, after which he supported himself chiefly as a composer of film scores. By 1984 he had scored more than 60 films. Schnittke wrote in a wide range of genres, absorbing many influences. Beside the German manners of his youth are the vocabulary and rhetoric of the Russian tradition of the 19th century, as well as the language of Shostakovich, along with atonality and other more modern devices. Schnittke's wish continually to combine all these ingredients led to his characteristic 'polystylism'. Despite the inherent risk of appearing to be mere pastiche unless the disparate stylistic elements are adequately incorporated within the music's aesthetic and physical structure, this proved in general to be an efficient generator of that kind of irony which Schnittke inherited from Shostakovich, whose natural successor he has often been considered to be. His music came to be more widely known abroad in the 1980s, thanks in part to the work of emigré Soviet artists such as the violinists Gidon Kremer and Mark Lubotsky. Despite constant illness, he produced numerous works, amongst them symphonies, string quartets and trio; a Faust opera, a Peer Gynt ballet, viola and cello concertos. As his health further deteriorated in the 1990s, Schnittke's music started to abandon much of the extroversion of his polystylism and retreat into a more withdrawn, bleak style. The String Trio of 1985 is a homage to Berg, and refers to the older composer's style in a general way rather than by direct quotation. The whole piece is a complex set of variations or transformations of the opening material. Some passages seemingly invoke by turns rage and despair in the manner of Shostakovich: the overall effect is one of intensity.

Taneyev was the son of a government official, a cultured and intelligent man with aristocratic connections. A prodigious talent, he entered the Moscow Conservatory aged nine. He later joined Tchaikovsky's composition class. He made his piano debut at 19, playing Brahms's D minor

Concerto: later the same year he gave the first performance in Moscow of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. Taneyev was to play the solo part in the Russian premières of all Tchaikovsky's works for piano and orchestra – a firm friendship between them had begun while Taneyev was still a student, and continued until Tchaikovsky's death. Taneyev also became friendly with Tolstoy, often visiting his country estate. Tolstoy's wife became infatuated with Taneyev, though it appears that he himself was quite unaware of it - he was, by all accounts, an ascetic, being a teetotaler and fiercely opposed to tobacco. The Trio in B Minor, from near the end of his life, remained in incomplete score and sketches until 1948, when three Russian editors brought forth the performing version we now know. This valedictory work consists of a typically tightly constructed first movement in sonata form, and, following the familiar pattern of Tchaikovsky's famous memorial Trio, concludes with a melodic lamentation and several variations. The variations are both cheerful and mournful, with the last one (Finale, *Presto*) strangely combining both moods.

Beethoven wrote five string trios before he attempted a string quartet: after his first group of string quartets he wrote no more string trios. It is sometimes supposed that the trios were a preparatory step on the road towards the quartets, though as it is harder to achieve either richness of tone or variety of texture with three instruments than it is with four, this seems improbable. The trio texture had been popular in earlier decades, but by 1800 it was becoming unfashionable, and in the following century was not often explored. Beethoven's G major opens with measured arpeggio shapes answered by quicker, slightly fussy scale patterns. The latter are picked up for discussion before becoming adopted as the opening subject of the *Allegro con brio* - their development as a four-note motif occupies much of the remaining material. Not for the first time, Beethoven makes a lot out of a little. The pattern of three quick notes leading to a main accent reappears in the Scherzo movement – it was to become one of Beethoven's fingerprints: among obvious later examples are the fifth symphony, the fourth piano concerto, and the 'Harp' quartet. Beethoven aimed to surprise, even, at times, to shock, and the second theme appears in the minor key rather than the expected major. Haydn's penchant for humorous surprises has been taken over and transformed them into something more dramatic and significant. The slow second movement is in what was, for the time, a far from orthodox key, though it sounds natural enough when heard in the knowledge of Beethoven's later development – he has taught us to hear such things as natural in the same way that Constable has taught us to see the Suffolk sky in a particular way. The finale of the trio ensures that it will always be placed last in the programme of any concert in which it appears. One of Beethoven's sunniest inventions, the energy of its *perpetuum mobile* main theme underlies even the much more relaxed, one might say 'breezy' second theme. Here Beethoven achieves a miracle of texture, the two upper instruments soaring effortlessly above the cello accompaniment patterns – almost laughing at the idea that string trio is a difficult medium to manage effectively. As often with Beethoven, we must not let the towering achievements of later years cause us to overlook the very real merits – and delights - of his earlier works.