

*** Interval ***

Brahms: Piano Quartet No.1 in G minor Op.25

1. Allegro 2. Intermezzo 3. Andante 4. Rondo (Presto)

The Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25, was composed by Johannes Brahms between 1856 and 1861. It was premiered in 1861 in Hamburg, with Clara Schumann at the piano. It was also played in Vienna on 16 November 1862, with Brahms himself at the piano supported by members of the Hellmesberger Quartet.

The Quartet was conceived in 1856, drafted in 1859 while Brahms was employed at the small ducal court of Detmold, and polished up in Hamburg in 1861. The abandoned C sharp minor Quartet had been an out-and-out product of his years of youthful Romantic turmoil, of Sturm und Drang. The genesis of the G minor, by contrast, spans from the turbulent years of the mid-1850s to the more considered classical stance of Brahms's late twenties. It combines a troubled Romantic vocabulary with a poised, almost symphonic mastery of musical architecture. Yet the finale, with its unbridled gypsy music, displays all the young Brahms's taste for vigorous horseplay. The whole quartet seems continually to strive beyond its chosen medium, towards an orchestral sense of colour, scope of expression and range of development.

Our Next Concert will be on Saturday 29th October
when the international pianist Cordelia Williams will play works
by Mozart, Liszt, and Robert Schumann.

This concert is sponsored by

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Programme Notes
Saturday 24th September 2022

The Vanbrugh (String Trio) with Michael McHale (Piano)

The Vanbrugh (String Trio)

Keith Pascoe (Violin) | Simon Aspell (Viola) | Christopher Marwood (Cello)

Formerly the Vanbrugh Quartet, since the retirement of violinist Gregory Ellis, Keith, Simon and Christopher have continued as The Vanbrugh. Previous performances include concerts, radio and television appearances in Europe, the Americas and the Far East. Based in Cork as Resident Quartet to the national broadcasting service, Radio Telefis Éireann, the members of the former quartet were also Artists in Residence at University College, Cork. In recognition of their services to music in Ireland they were presented with the 1995 National Entertainment Award for classical music.

Michael McHale (Piano)

Belfast-born Michael McHale has established himself as one of Ireland's leading pianists and has developed a busy international career as a solo recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician.

He has performed and recorded as a soloist with the Minnesota and Hallé Orchestras, the Moscow, Bournemouth, Jacksonville, Fort Smith, BBC and London Symphony Orchestras, City of London Sinfonia, London Mozart Players and all five of the major Irish orchestras, and performed at the Tanglewood, BBC Proms and Tokyo Spring Festivals, Wigmore Hall, London, Berlin Konzerthaus, Lincoln Centre, New York, Symphony Hall, Boston and Pesti Vigadó in Budapest.



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Linda Buckley: “Solas na Gealaí” for solo piano

Linda Buckley (born 4 April 1979) is an Irish composer and musician. Her work has been performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Crash Ensemble, Icebreaker and Larla Ó Lionaird. She has received a Fulbright Scholarship and the Frankfurt Visual Music Award.

This short piece was commissioned by Moving on Music and composed for Michael McHale, to precede Beethoven's 'Moonlight' and 'Appassionata' Sonatas respectively. Both reflect a deep engagement with these two masterpieces and the inspiration and influence Beethoven continues to exert. Buckley describes this piece as 'reimagining material from Beethoven's iconic Moonlight Sonata in a new and contemporary context.' The title means 'moonlight' in Irish and anyone familiar with Beethoven's work will recognise the inspiration. The opening is clear and gentle, from which fragments of Beethoven begin to emerge, and while the overall sense of the piece remains 'Beethovenian,' Buckley's own creativity also shines through.

Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor (Moonlight)

i. Adagio sostenuto ii. Allegretto iii. Presto agitato

Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2 (The Moonlight) is admired particularly for its mysterious, gently arpeggiated, and seemingly improvised first movement. The piece was completed in 1801, published the following year, and premiered by the composer himself, whose hearing was still adequate but already deteriorating at the time. The nickname Moonlight Sonata can be traced to the 1830s, when the German Romantic poet Ludwig Rellstab published a review in which he likened the first movement of the piece to a boat floating in the moonlight on Switzerland's Lake Lucerne. Beethoven dedicated the work to Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, a 16-year-old aristocrat who was his student for a short time.

The Moonlight Sonata was structurally and stylistically remarkable in its day. Most sonatas of the late 17th and early 18th centuries consisted of a reasonably animated, thematically well-defined first movement, a more-subdued second movement, and a vibrant final movement. The Moonlight, by contrast, offered a dreamy first movement, a more lively second movement, and a final movement that was outright tempestuous. Such was the furore of the Moonlight's finale that several of the piano strings snapped and became entangled in the hammers during the work's premiere. Indeed, in the declining years of his hearing, Beethoven was known to play with a heavy hand, likely so that he could better hear the music.

Jean Francaix: String Trio

Francaix's natural gifts were encouraged from an early age by his family. His father, Director of the Conservatoire of Le Mans, was a musicologist, composer, and pianist, and his mother was a teacher of singing. Jean Francaix studied at the Conservatoire of Le Mans and then at the Paris Conservatory, and was only six when he took up composing, with a style heavily influenced by Ravel.

Composed in 1933 for the Pasquier Trio, a leading family ensemble in France, the trio is a concise work – four movements totalling twelve minutes – but still with demanding technical skills. It reflects the neoclassical movement in vogue at the time, that is, it is a deliberate effort to echo the charm and clarity of French Baroque music.

The opening movement (Allegretto vivo) is an animated yet intimate conversation among the three instruments, all played with mutes. The viola presents a motif spelling the name “Bach” in reverse - the notes B, C, A, B-flat corresponding to HCAB in German notation.

The second movement, while captioned “Scherzo,” is a whirling waltz. It is played without mutes, and is seasoned with syncopations and spiccato bowing.

The mutes return for the song-like slow movement in a minor mode. It features a tender modal theme with a rocking lullaby-like accompaniment.

The mutes again disappear for the finale, a rondo, with a returning refrain and two contrasting episodes. The refrain has an effervescent drive – it has been described as a chamber-music cancan. The episodes, while slower in tempo, are still tongue-in-cheek. After the refrain's final return, Francaix surprises us with a brief rollicking march, and the trio ends softly with a pizzicato.

Clara and Robert Schumann: Three Songs arranged for piano quartet by Michael McHale

Clara Schumann 1. *Die Gute Nacht*

This was the fourth song that Clara wrote in June 1841 as a present for her husband's 31st birthday. The other three were included in their shared *Liebesfrühling* cycle, his Opus 37, her Opus 12.

The mood is simple and the piano writing is hushed and peaceful. Clara forgets her pianistic virtuosity, or rather suppresses it, as if in the interests of not disturbing the neighbours at a late hour. The mutual adoration of the couple is palpable in this music. This is a feeling that goes beyond erotic passion: one senses a longing that has been stilled in its superficially passionate sense, only to enter deeper into the soul.

2. *Der Mond Kommt Still Gegangen*

Clara Schumann published six songs in an independent collection (Op. 13). *Der Mond Kommt Still Gegangen* (Quietly comes the Moon), was probably composed specifically for publication in this collection. Clara Schumann dedicated the songs to the Danish Queen Caroline Amalie, whose hospitality she had enjoyed in spring 1842 during a concert tour.

Robert Schumann 3. *Mondnacht*

“Mondnacht” roughly translated as “Moonlit Night” has been described as Eichendorff's most beautiful poem, “one of the few perfect lyrical marvels in the German language.” Robert Schumann's setting, in turn, matches the art of the poet in richness, nuance and form, creating a context in which verbal and musical elements embrace and reinforce one another.