

**SITKOVETSKY TRIO**

**Alexander Sitkovetsky, violin**

**Isang Enders, cello**

**Wu Qian, piano**

**JULIA ADOLPHE (b. 1988)**

**Etched in Smoke and Light (2022)**

(approx. 19 minutes)

**CÉCILE CHAMINADE (1857-1944)**

**Piano Trio No. 2 in A minor Op. 34**

Allegro moderato

Lento

Allegro energico

(approx. 24 minutes)

**Intermission**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

**Allegretto for Piano Trio in B-flat major WoO 39**

(approx. 7 minutes)

**FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)**

**Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor Op. 66**

Allegro energico e con fuoco

Andante espressivo

Scherzo. Molto allegro, quasi presto

Finale. Allegro appassionato

(approx. 30 minutes)

## **Julia Adolphe**

### **Etched in Smoke and Light (2022)**

Julia Adolphe is a young American composer whose works have been performed by the leading orchestras and chamber ensembles of the United States, as well as in various concert venues in Europe. Her scores have found favour for their imaginative textures, sensitive attention to tonal colour and the directness of their emotional appeal.

She is clearly a “programmatic” composer. All of her works are labelled with descriptive titles such as *Dark Sand*, *Sifting Light* or *Veil of Leaves* that invite the listener to imagine a scene or hear an unfolding narrative. Many of them, in fact, sound like the titles of paintings, and this visual symbolism is especially relevant to her piano trio entitled *Etched in Smoke and Light*, of which she writes:

*Etched in Smoke and Light* is written in honor of my father, Jonathan Adolphe, a painter who loved working with translucent materials. I composed the work in the four months following his passing, reflecting on the immensely painful, visceral experience of losing him as well as the powerfully vibrant memories of love, joy, and play that he created with me and gave to me throughout our lives together.

My father's paintings contain traces of smoke, and they are transparent so that light can play across the work's surface. Both his artwork and this piece strive to capture the ephemeral nature of our reality, to reveal how creative expression enables us to hold on to and immortalize what is at once powerfully present and ultimately transient.

The work is in two movements, written in a large-scale A-B-A form. It opens in a drifting atmospheric mist of tonal colours in the high register, their cleanly separated sonorities suggesting the transparency and bright sheen of glass. One can easily imagine the composer walking slowly through the art studio of her late father, gazing at his artworks and the light piercing through their translucent textures.

About three minutes in, a more lyrical tone emerges from the stringed instruments as short phrases of melody mix in with the tonal atmospherics, eventually bursting into a surge of lyrical sentiment that must surely relate to the composer's warm memories of her family life.

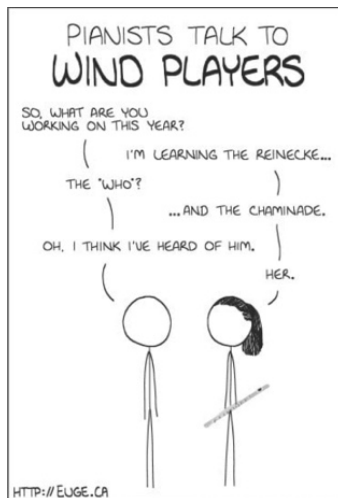
Once this lyrical plateau has been reached, the way is opened for darker thoughts of sadness and loss to drive the work to a heart-rending climax that plumbs the lower register of the keyboard while the stringed instruments wail far above. The movement ends quietly in a duet between violin and cello.

The second movement opens with a lonely violin solo lament, soon joined by tactful sympathetic accompaniment from the other instruments. The violin pursues its complaint doggedly, leading the ensemble to ever more intense outbursts of protest. But then the fever breaks and the lyrical passage of warm memories from the first movement returns to provide closure to the work's psychological drama and its narrative of feelings sifted and sorted, etched into the smoky light of memory.

## Cécile Chaminade

### Piano Trio No. 2 in A minor Op. 34

Cécile Chaminade was the world's first internationally celebrated female composer. Born into a wealthy French family, she received a first-rate musical education and began her career in the 1880s with a number of serious, large-scale works. But when her father died in 1887, she needed to establish an independent income for herself and began to write for the burgeoning market for music in the home, composing over 200 character pieces for piano and more than 125 *mélodies* for voice and piano. And here she struck gold — or its cash equivalent. For it is with these small pieces — sales of which she promoted on concert tours throughout Europe and the United States — that her reputation was built.



Chaminade Clubs sprang up throughout the Western world, with over 200 in the United States alone. She was invited by Queen Victoria for tea. Theodore Roosevelt welcomed her to the White House. She performed at Carnegie Hall. And in 1913 she became the first female composer inducted into the Légion d'Honneur. But it was not to last.

With the arrival of modernism in the twentieth century, her musical style, characterized by tuneful melodies with mildly chromatic harmonies and transparent textures, fell out of favour. Few of her 400 works were performed after the Great War until her *Concertino* for flute and orchestra was resurrected by flautist James Galway in the 1970s, beginning a reassessment that continues to this day.

Chaminade's Piano Trio No. 2 in A minor was written in 1887, one of the last ambitious concert works she composed before turning to write smaller pieces. As such, it stands pivotally as a hybrid between the earnestness of her early ambitions and the tuneful charm that graced her career-making salon pieces.

Coming in clearly on the side of “earnestness” is the muscular rough-cut opening theme, reminiscent of Brahms, that boldly opens the work with all instruments in unison:

**All.º moderato** ♩. = 96

**VIOLON**

*f marcatisissimo sostenuto*

**VIOLONCELLE**

*f marcatisissimo sostenuto*

**PIANO**

*f marcatisissimo*

There is a *willful* quality to this fanfare, with its shoulder-poking accent on the second beat of the bar, signalling that its composer is a woman not to be trifled with.

The gracious second theme, based on a rising scale figure, must doubtless be inscribed on the “tuneful charm” side of the ledger. Announced by the cello sitting on a warm sofa of rippling piano upholstery, it would surely pull gentle sighs of approval from the swelling bosom of any society matron of sensitivity and feeling:



Note the prominence given to the rising seconds that begin each bar, linking this theme to its more aggressive sibling, the first theme, a resemblance made clear when the composer — no slouch when it comes to counterpoint — combines the two in the friendly contest of ruffled feathers that counts as the development section:



This development section features many a scale figure going up and an equal number coming down plus a constant chatter of pulsing triplets. The recapitulation re-establishes the swagger of the opening and ends with an *accelerando* in a mad rush to get out the door.

The *Lento* second movement is the most widely praised of this trio, and it is not hard to see why. The tentative melodic line in the strings that opens the movement, rising up like an anthem of hope, the pathos of its many falling intervals in the love duet between violin and cello, the halting but comforting harmonies pulsing up from the keyboard — these features of the movement’s opening section transcend the sentiments expected from a mere “salon” composer.

Violon

Violoncelle

Piano

Lento  $\text{♩} = 92$

*p* *cresc.* *f*

*p* *cresc.* *f*

*p* *sostenuto* *cresc.*

The musical score for the first section is in 6/4 time, marked Lento with a tempo of 92 bpm. It features three staves: Violon (top), Violoncelle (middle), and Piano (bottom). The Violon and Violoncelle parts begin with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The Piano part begins with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The Violon and Violoncelle parts have dynamics of *p*, *cresc.*, and *f*. The Piano part has dynamics of *p*, *sostenuto*, and *cresc.*

The second section sees a more active role for the piano. It first introduces a slow dance-like tune with modal harmonies that brings a lighter tone to the proceedings, often covering the string instruments with great harp-like washes of tone colour when they take over the tune for themselves.

Poco più mosso

The musical score for the second section is in 6/4 time, marked Poco più mosso. It features two staves: Violon (top) and Violoncelle (bottom). The Violon part begins with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The Violoncelle part begins with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The Violon part has dynamics of *f* and *marcatissimo*. The Violoncelle part has dynamics of *f* and *marcatissimo*. The Violon part has a crescendo marking *cresc.* and a dynamic of *f*. The Violoncelle part has a crescendo marking *cresc.* and a dynamic of *f*.

The climax of the movement comes at the full-throated return of the opening anthem, a moment that almost rivals in emotional impact the tenor-baritone duet from Bizet's *Pearl Fishers*. It is reportedly at just this moment that, upon first hearing this movement, a person who bears a striking resemblance to the present writer was seen reaching for a Kleenex.

Chaminade's *Allegro energico* finale is nothing if not "energetic." It opens with a shocking dissonance and a swordfight of thrusting gestures.

Violon

Violoncelle

Piano

All° energico  $\text{♩} = 132$

*ff* *f* *marcatissimo* *mf*

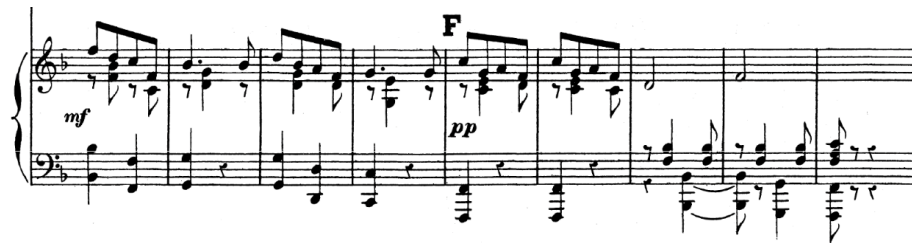
*ff* *f* *marcatissimo* *mf*

*ff* *marcatissimo* *cresc.*

The musical score for the third section is in 2/4 time, marked All° energico with a tempo of 132 bpm. It features three staves: Violon (top), Violoncelle (middle), and Piano (bottom). The Violon part begins with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The Violoncelle part begins with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The Piano part begins with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The Violon and Violoncelle parts have dynamics of *ff*, *f*, *marcatissimo*, and *mf*. The Piano part has dynamics of *ff*, *marcatissimo*, and *cresc.*

But despite this opening shriek of panic and alarm, Chaminade makes sure to prevent unhealthy prolonged spikes in blood pressure amongst the more delicate of her listeners with contrasting

episodes of restful long-limbed melody in the strings and tuneful idle noodling from the keyboard such as this:



It is obvious that Chaminade is out to impress with this piano trio, and its renewed popularity on concert programs after more than a century of neglect amply demonstrates that she has, at last, succeeded.

## Ludwig van Beethoven

### **Allegretto for Piano Trio in B-flat major WoO 39**

Beethoven's beguiling little *Allegretto* for piano trio was written in 1812 for Maximiliane Brentano, the ten-year-old daughter of the composer's friends Antonie and Franz Brentano. Never intended for publication during the composer's lifetime, it was discovered amongst his papers after his death and published in 1830.

Beethoven's inscription atop the manuscript reveals that its purpose was to encourage his "little friend" in her piano playing. The piano is thus the main attraction, introducing all the main themes, but the keyboard writing is simple, just a lively workout for a child's little fingers in an age before Hanon exercises became the bane of all pianists-in-training.

The work is in sonata form and opens with a naïve little "baby step" melody perched daintily over a pulsing underlay of chordal harmony:

**VIOLINO.**

**VIOLONCELLO.**

**PIANOFORTE.**

*Allegretto.*

The second theme introduces a tad more excitement (relatively speaking) with an Alberti-style accompaniment in 16ths:



The development section is normally where Beethovenian tension and explosive power of expression reach their apogee, but in this work, there is nothing of a developmental nature to furrow the brow of our young piano-bench Shirley Temple. There is just a long right-hand trill in the (of course obligatory) extended coda that marks this simple piece as a work of Beethoven's mature period.



## Felix Mendelssohn

### Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor Op. 66

The zeitgeist of the Romantic era was something that *coloured* but did not really *shape* the works of Felix Mendelssohn. That colouring, however, is especially dark in his Piano Trio No. 2 (1845-46) in the fateful key of C minor. This was a key with a troubled past, having hosted so many of the most turbulent works of Beethoven, from the Pathétique Sonata to the Fifth Symphony. And it was yet to inspire even more turmoil in the works of Brahms, who knew this trio so well that he actually quoted from it. So if Mendelssohn here sounds “Brahmsian”, it is likely because Brahms actually sounds “Mendelssohnian.”

As the work opens there is something troubling afoot. Against a low-pitched growl of stringed instruments holding pedal tones at the bottom of their register, the piano surges up and down like a vein of molten lava preparing to erupt onto a seaside Icelandic town.



It takes a full twenty-three bars for the implied melody lurking beneath the surface of these smouldering waves of dark sonority to crystallize and be stated outright by the violin.



Eventually a striding second theme in the major mode is forthrightly proclaimed by the strings.



These three thematic elements, all sharing the same rise-and-fall melodic shape, play out the drama of this sonata-form movement in a multitude of surging and subsiding sections throughout the development, recapitulation and a large — very Beethovenian — developmental coda.



After a movement fraught with so much tension and dramatic sweep, Mendelssohn calms our frayed nerves with an *Andante espressivo* slow movement inspired by the warmth of the fireside and the bliss of a happy home. Arranged like one of his Songs Without Words, with the piano and strings alternating in presenting successive verses, it presents us with a comforting lullaby tune in the gently rocking pulse of 9/8 time over a soothing drone tone in the bass.



The middle section adds an undulating pattern of piano filigree to the violin and cello's loving duet before rising to an impassioned climax of soulful deep breaths and contented sighs.

The composer gets our hearts racing once again with one of his famous playful and fleet-footed *scherzi*, a movement bristling with wit and flashes of contrapuntal wizardry.



The momentum of this movement is so compelling that not even its middle-section Trio in the major mode can stop the headlong thrust of its perpetual motion mindset.



And who, having given different melodic motives to his minor- and major-mode sections, could resist combining them in the final section of the movement? Not Mendelssohn.

The finale of this piano trio returns to the outsized proportions of its opening movement. Structured as a kind of sonata-rondo, it opens with a dance-like tune from the cello that begins with a big leap, which some have suggested sounds like a Baroque gig.



Its second theme, like that of the first movement, is a breast-swelling, hand-on-your-heart hymn to decency and virtue.



And speaking of hymns, what should show up, making a guest appearance in the development section, but a Lutheran chorale — or Mendelssohn's version of one anyway.



This hymn tune will return in a majestic orchestral scoring for all instruments, helping to lead this piano trio in C minor — like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in the same key — to its triumphant *C major* conclusion.