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# TRIO SOLISTI

## RAVEL & CHAUSSON



  **BRIDGE**®  
BRIDGE 9440



**Ernest Chausson**



**Maurice Ravel**

Produced, Engineered, Mixed and Mastered by Adam Abeshouse  
Recorded Dates: December 16-18, 2013 at The Performing Arts Center at  
SUNY Purchase, The Recital Hall, Purchase, NY

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2013, the trio gave the premiere of Lowell Liebermann's Piano Trio No. 3, and earlier that same season, Chamber Music Monterrey Bay commissioned and presented the premiere of *Living Frescoes*, a work by Pulitzer Prize winner Kevin Puts for trio and clarinet, inspired by visual artist Bill Viola.

Above and beyond performing together and individually at many music festivals across the country, Trio Solisti has founded Telluride MusicFest, an annual chamber music festival in the mountains of Colorado in which the ensemble presents two weeks of performances with celebrity guest artists. Trio Solisti is Ensemble-in-Residence at Adelphi University in Garden City, NY, an honor that includes the presentation of concerts and master classes, and in-depth work with student composers.

[www.triosolisti.com](http://www.triosolisti.com)

## **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**

### **Trio in A Minor (1914) (26:29)**

- 1) I. Modéré (9:13)
- 2) II. Pantoum: Assez vif (4:06)
- 3) III. Passacaille: Très large (7:53)
- 4) IV. Final: Animé (5:05)

## **Ernest Chausson (1855-1899)**

### **Trio in G Minor, op. 3 (1881) (30:04)**

- 5) I. Pas trop lent – Animé (9:35)
- 6) II. Vite (3:59)
- 7) III. Assez lent (8:28)
- 8) IV. Animé (7:45)

### **Trio Solisti**

Maria Bachmann - violin  
Alexis Pia Gerlach - cello  
Adam Neiman - piano

## **Trio for Piano, Violin, and Cello**

**MAURICE RAVEL**

**Born March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France;  
died December 28, 1937, in Paris**

Even after Maurice Ravel became a quintessentially refined Parisian, he never relinquished his attachment to the Basque country of southwestern France in which he was born, about five miles from the Spanish border. He typically spent his summer vacations there in the village of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, which sits directly across the River Nivelle from the even smaller Ciboure, where Ravel was born. That's where he spent the spring and summer of 1914, principally occupied with three compositions: his piano suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, his "Basque-flavored" piano concerto *Zaspiak-bat*, and his Piano Trio. He would abandon *Zaspiak-bat*, although he presumably resurrected some of its material in his later Piano Concerto in G, and some say that this vanished score also furnished the opening theme of the Piano Trio.

These were his principal *musical* concerns during that vacation. He also watched nervously as German armies mobilized and World War I prepared to erupt. On June 28 the assassination in Sarajevo

Meany Hall and La Jolla's Revelle Series, to name a few. The ensemble has been described by *The New York Times* as "consistently brilliant" and praised by *The Washington Post* for its "unrelenting passion and zealous abandon in a transcendent performance."

Trio Solisti's rapidly growing discography includes the recently released Dvořák Trios (BRIDGE 9393), featuring Dvořák's "Dumky" Trio and the Trio in F minor, Op. 65 received high praise: "brilliantly performed" (*International Record Review*); "I cannot praise this recording highly enough" (*Fanfare Magazine*).

*Café Music*, (BRIDGE 9296), is an assortment of music that can inhabit either the concert hall or the less formal setting of a café. The centerpiece, Paul Schoenfield's jazzy *Café Music*, is surrounded by works by Piazzolla (*The Four Seasons* and *Le Grand Tango*), Turina (Trio No. 2 in B minor) and Gershwin songs.

Trio Solisti actively collaborates with many of today's leading composers. Paul Moravec has written a number of works for the group, notably *Tempest Fantasy*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize in 2004. A recording of *Tempest Fantasy* and *Mood Swings* as well as other Moravec works was released on NAXOS American Classics. In

**Trio Solisti**, a “trio of soloists,” has forged its reputation as “the most exciting piano trio in America” (*The New Yorker*) with a performance style that combines exceptional virtuosity with penetrating musical insight. Possessing a repertoire that encompasses most of the standard trio repertoire as well as many new works by contemporary composers, rave reviews follow the ensemble throughout its concert tours.

*Strad Magazine* wrote of the trio's interpretation of Brahms Trios, “Trio Solisti plays this glorious music with rare commitment and insight - the free-flowing adrenaline has one on the edge of one’s seat,” and *Fanfare Magazine* acclaimed their recording of music by Paul Moravec, saying, “These performances are really almost beyond belief.” *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.”

Founded in 2001, Trio Solisti (comprised of violinist Maria Bachmann, cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach, and pianist Adam Neiman) has performed at many of America’s important concert venues and cultural institutions: The Great Performers Series at Lincoln Center, Washington Performing Arts Society at Kennedy Center, The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, People’s Symphony Concerts at Town Hall, Seattle’s

of Archduke Franz Ferdinand provided a spark for the European tinderbox, and within weeks nations were declaring war on one another. Ravel told his friends that he was pushing as hard as he could to finish his Piano Trio before he got involved in the action. This he managed to do; it occupied him from March or April through August 7, 1914, and the following January he began military service as an ambulance driver.

In 1928 the Aeolian Company asked Ravel to prepare a brief autobiography to accompany their release of piano rolls of his music. His disciple Roland-Manuel’s unedited manuscript of the autobiography yields no more than this about the work played here: “The Trio, whose first theme has a Basque flavor, was composed entirely in 1914, at Saint-Jean-de-Luz.” Roland-Manuel later maintained that Ravel was deceiving himself about the “Basque flavor,” arguing that “when in all good faith he thinks he is expressing himself in the Basque idiom, then pure Castillian appears.” Nonetheless, the musicologist Mark DeVoto has identified the opening movement’s rhythm as being derived from the *zortzico*, a Basque dance with a characteristic alternation of meters complicated by the addition of extra beats.

The second movement, which serves as a scherzo, carries the unusual designation *Pantoum*. That's a variant of the literary term *pantun*, which refers to a Malayan poetic structure, popular among 19<sup>th</sup>-century French poets, wherein diverse trains of thought are expressed in parallel. Ravel does not try to duplicate a *pantun* structure strictly, but this movement does involve subtle interlacing of material, constantly mixing binary and ternary rhythms. The sober third movement (Passacaille) provides respite from the bustling *Pantoum*, flowing peacefully in the classic French form of the passacaille, a melody repeating over and over as the composer weaves elaborations around it. Here the slowly paced, eight-measure melody is transformed in the course of the movement, but it is nearly always present in one voice or another.

The rhythm of the sumptuous *Finale*, flitting constantly between 5/4 and 7/4 time, may also have some connection to Basque folklore; indeed, its opening theme can be viewed as a rough inversion of the principal theme of the first movement. The instrumental writing throughout the Trio is virtuosic. Ravel was an accomplished pianist himself, although it became clear during his years at the Paris Conservatoire that he lacked the panache required of a top-flight concert artist around the turn of the century. But he did not even pretend that the piano writing

the first-movement introduction, now played much slower and spun out gloriously by all the instruments to convey precisely the sort of haunted melancholy, the Baudelairian *spleen*, that marks the best of Chausson's work.

The finale (*Animé*) again suggests something of Brahms in the lilting waltz-rhythms at its opening. But before long the motif from the first-movement introduction works its way into the texture, again adapted to its new context; and at the very end, rather like a coda, the motif resurfaces one last time, now poured out as a despairing lament. What seemed like an incidental theme at the work's outset, and indeed behaved like one in the first movement, has turned out to be the overriding matter for this entire Piano Trio. As such it reveals Chausson as a firm Franckian who has mastered his mentor's principle of cyclic thematic transformation through the span of a multi-movement composition.

—James M. Keller

*James M. Keller is Program Annotator of the New York Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony. His book Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide is published by Oxford University Press.*

There is no mistaking that this is the creation of a follower of Franck, who is greatly evoked in the work's general chromaticism, its brooding density, and, in the opening movement, an obsessive insistence on a single theme. A secondary motif (arguably a premonition of the principal melody) reigns over the introduction (*Pas trop lent*) and returns repeatedly to interrupt the main part of the movement (*Animé*). Its major/minor ambiguity suggests the modal exoticism one might expect from Grieg or maybe Tchaikovsky. The principal theme breaks forth fully when the violin plays it at the onset of the *Animé* section over a nervous piano accompaniment. Chausson builds up considerable drama, especially during the torrential development section, and the recapitulation ends with memories of the opening motif, now bludgeoned into submission—eradication, actually—by violent *fortissimo* blows.

The second movement is a rollicking intermezzo or scherzo—far from characteristic for Chausson—in which phrase lengths vary in quick succession among spans of two, three, or four measures, a great entertainment for the alert listener. Instead of Franckian influence, we encounter here suggestions of Brahms; perhaps Chausson had in his ears the finale of Brahms' Horn Trio of 1865. With the third movement (*Assez lent*) an old friend comes to visit: the “Grieg-style” motif from

in his Trio was within his grasp. Responding to a request from an English presenter, he declared himself “absolutely incapable of playing the piano part.”

Ravel's Piano Trio is the most celebrated work of its genre to emanate from France, but it didn't appear out of nowhere. The long and distinguished list of French composers who produced piano trios encompasses such figures as Alkan, Chaminade, Debussy (a journeyman work, from 1880), Louise Farrenc, Fauré, Franck, d'Indy, Lalo, Lekeu, Magnard, Massenet, Roussel, Saint-Saëns, Thomas, and Widor. An especially distinguished entry in their midst is the Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 3, composed in 1881 by Ernest Chausson.



### **Trio in G minor for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 3**

**ERNEST CHAUSSON**

**Born January 20, 1855, in Paris; died June 10, 1899 in Limay,  
near Mantes, Yvelines (just northwest of Paris)**

Though his music tends toward melancholy, Chausson had little personal reason to be sad. He never worked a day in his life to pay his bills, thanks to his father's success as a public-works contractor just when Baron Haussmann was overseeing the reconstruction of Paris. Not until 1879, when he was 24 years old and had already graduated from law school, did Chausson commit himself to studying music seriously. He enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire as a composition student of Jules Massenet, who judged him to be "an exceptional person and a true artist." He then attached himself to the circle surrounding César Franck, whose instruction and encouragement enabled him to make a mark in the musical world despite his late start.

Generous as well as wealthy, Chausson was known to quietly funnel much-needed funds to his less fortunate composer colleagues. He and his wife lived in the affluent Parc Monceau neighborhood of Paris and also kept vacation homes at a succession of getaway destinations in the French provinces. It was during a retreat to the country in June

1899 that the composer, then 44 years old, headed out to exercise on that newly popular contraption, the bicycle. No one witnessed him lose control and crash into a brick wall, but the skull fracture he sustained was so severe that he must have died instantly. Debussy, Fauré, Duparc, Magnard, and Dukas were among the composers who attended his funeral, their ranks filled out by such friends as the artists Auguste Rodin and Edgar Degas.

The Trio was his first major stab at instrumental music. One would have expected musical Paris to jump to attention when this piece was premiered, on April 8, 1882, at a concert of the Société Nationale de Musique; but the concert was not covered by a single critic, and the Trio seems to have simply slipped away, forgotten, until it was published posthumously in 1919. Chausson's expressiveness, though intense at times, seems not quite so deeply personal as it would become later in his career. Still, for an Opus 3 it is a remarkable piece. The composer Vincent d'Indy, writing about it in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* (1929), observed, "In this work, amidst its beauties and its weaknesses, one already feels the aspirations, as yet unrealized, of an artist-soul, whose loftiness of thought foreshadows works in which he will come to his own."