



BEETHOVEN HILLER SCHUBERT  
RAUTIO PIANO TRIO



# Beethoven, Hiller & Schubert

## Works for Piano Trio

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### Rautio Piano Trio

Jane Gordon *violin*  
Victoria Simonsen *'cello*  
Jan Rautio *piano*

About the Rautio Piano Trio:

*'[...] playing of great agility and intimacy [...]  
It's an impressive achievement, a disc to return to often'*  
The Observer

*'Rarely does a disc come along that unexpectedly brings so much  
pleasure as this one [...] fabulous recordings, magical performances'*  
Early Music Review

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

#### **Piano Trio No. 5 in D major, Op. 70, No. 1 'Ghost'**

- |                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Allegro vivace e con brio | [6:50] |
| 2. Largo assai ed espressivo | [8:09] |
| 3. Presto                    | [8:17] |

Ferdinand Hiller (1811–1885)

#### **Piano Trio No. 6 in C minor, Op. 186**

##### **Serenade No. 2 \***

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| 4. Vorspiel (Preludio), Allegro moderato        | [4:17] |
| 5. Marsch (Alla Marcia), Allegro vivace         | [5:57] |
| 6. Nachtgesang (Notturmo), Andante espressivo   | [4:47] |
| 7. Zwischenspeil (Intermezzo), Vivace           | [3:44] |
| 8. Schlussreigen (Finale), Vivace ma non troppo | [6:52] |

Franz Peter Schubert (1797–1828)

#### **9. Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. posth 148, D897 'Notturmo', Adagio**

[8:44]

Total playing time [57:44]

\* world premiere recording



Photography: Graham Brandon

### **Beethoven, Hiller & Schubert: Works for Piano Trio**

Placing the piano trios of Beethoven, Hiller and Schubert alongside one another has led to a fascinating exploration of their musical worlds and the historical contexts. Besides the intertwined connections of the three composers, these particular works for piano trio all contain a nocturne – a night scene. The nocturne is today perhaps most famously associated with the piano music of Chopin, typically characterised as a Romantic character piece, however it was in existence much earlier. Mozart, for instance, used the more common Italian term *notturmo* interchangeably with *divertimento*, *serenata* or *cassation*. On this disc, Hiller's third movement is entitled 'Nachtgesang (Notturmo)', Beethoven's 'ghostly' adagio movement has the character and atmosphere of a nocturne, and Schubert's single-movement trio is also entitled 'Notturmo'. All these movements evoke something of the quiet night-time and an atmosphere of poetic reflection.

\* \* \*

In March 1827 nearly 20,000 people attended Beethoven's funeral – it was, at the time, the largest funeral that had ever been held in Vienna. The procession included

approximately forty musicians nominated as torchbearers, one of whom was the thirty-year-old Schubert. After years of ill health, Beethoven had mostly withdrawn from public life. In his final weeks, when it was known he was seriously ill, many colleagues gathered to pay their respects. One of them was his friend, the celebrated composer and pianist Johann Hummel, who had travelled to Vienna to visit the dying composer, bringing with him his sixteen-year-old pupil Ferdinand Hiller. After Beethoven's death, Hiller took a lock of the famous composer's hair, which was then kept in his family for over 100 years. It was sold at Sotheby's in 1994.

Written in 1808, Beethoven's two Opus 70 trios are dedicated to Countess Anna Marie Von Erdödy and were composed during his stay on her estate. The works are from his 'middle' period, which was a time of great productivity and when Beethoven's popularity was at its height. Privately the composer was coming to grips with the extent of his hearing loss, a condition that made him feel humiliated and powerless. Symphonies 5 and 6, then 7 and 8, written before and after 1808 respectively, project a clear testament of defiance against cruel odds, and the same is true of his chamber music.

The Op. 70 No. 1 'Ghost' trio is one of the most popular works for piano trio and marks a distinct development in the writing for this ensemble. Beethoven's chamber music challenged the established composition practices and was often conceived on a symphonic scale. The string parts here are far more developed than those in his preceding trios, Opus 1, composed a decade earlier. The technical language is more engaging for the instrumentalists and the use of dramatic atmospheric shifts and a wide range of instrumental colour gives the work a highly charged emotional content.

Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny wrote in 1842 that the 'Largo assai' movement of the D major piano trio, Op. 70 No. 1, evoked for him the image of the ghost of Hamlet's father. The ghostly spectre proved irresistible and the trio is known by its now famous epithet. There is evidence that the composer was discussing an opera based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with the playwright Heinrich von Collin at the same time as working on the trio; moreover, words 'Macbett' and 'Ende' appear on the sketches for the 'Largo'. It is not clear which scene the middle movement of the trio is meant to depict, but we like to imagine that the chilling atmosphere and dramatic outbursts convey the disturbed

mental state of Lady Macbeth as she sleepwalks and laments the crimes she and her husband had committed.

To heighten dramatic contrast, Beethoven made the outer movements terse and muscular. The first movement begins with an intense outburst of drama followed by a shocking and sudden interruption from a sustained cello note (high F). Melodic writing follows and the energy returns to consume the movement. The virtuosic third movement has a triumphant character with an air of playfulness and concludes with a satisfying climatic coda. One might consider the 'Ghost' trio as a microcosm of the composer's life and psyche at that time.

Ferdinand Hiller was born in 1811 in Frankfurt am Main, a city with a vibrant musical scene, into a wealthy family where his parents encouraged his musical abilities. These fortuitous circumstances enabled Hiller to focus on his own interests and ambitions throughout his life. Hiller was a child prodigy and gave his concert debut at the age of ten. Later he worked as a pianist, conductor and composer; he was also a prolific writer, an impresario and he was renowned for his equally virtuosic social skills. Hiller spent a lot of his lifetime travelling throughout Europe. Due to the nature of his affable personality, he met, befriended and



Ferdinand Hiller

maintained an extensive correspondence with many of the greatest composers of the nineteenth-century music scene – including Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, Brahms and Liszt. However, despite Hiller's prominence during his lifetime, few of his works are performed today.

Hiller wrote six piano trios, the last of which he additionally entitled 'Serenade'. Piano Trio No. 6 in C minor (Second Serenade) was published in 1879 and despite being one of Hiller's later works it demonstrates a youthful, exuberant quality. As one might expect from a professional concert pianist, the piano part is suitably virtuosic and exciting. Throughout, there is a lively conversational writing style between the piano and string parts, and the music has a delightful effervescence and lightness. Each of the five movements is full of character, from the operatic overture-style 'Prelude' to the Mendelssohn-esque 'Intermezzo' and the quirky 'Finale', with its playful dance-like melody.

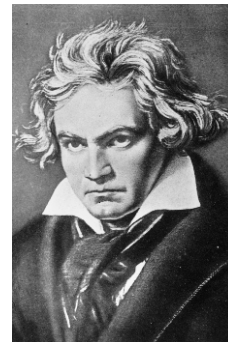
Making this first recording of Hiller's trio has been a rewarding and exciting experience. The musical energy is clearly visible in the score and helped us to bring the full array of characters to life. At the same time, from a player's perspective, there is little precedent for interpreting Hiller's

general compositional style. In places, the score contains discrepancies between the string and piano parts and therefore we had to make our own stylistic choices. Details of articulation and slurs frequently did not correspond. The term 'dolce' (sweet; sweetly) is used repeatedly, often in unexpected places where the texture is at its thickest, for instance in the climatic phrases in the second movement, 'Marsch (Alla Marcia)'. Here, Hiller has surprisingly written dolce alongside fortissimo (very loud). We viewed this as an encouragement to keep the music light at a moment where a far richer and possibly more 'Brahmsian' sound could have ensued. Interestingly, Hiller's deployment of dolce is quite different from that of Beethoven's, such as that found in the third movement of the 'Ghost' trio where it is written alongside a piano (soft) dynamic.

Whilst visiting Beethoven on his deathbed, Hiller also met Schubert. He wrote of a fascinating house concert he attended with his teacher Hummel in Vienna in 1827, at which baritone Johann Michael Vogl and Franz Schubert himself performed Schubert's *Winterrise*. Hiller recalled that Hummel was so moved by the performance that he 'said little, but large tears ran down his cheeks'. Whilst Hiller was fully immersed in the eminent musical circles of his time,



Franz Schubert



Ludwig van Beethoven

Schubert was a more reserved figure. Neither the public nor his close friends were aware of the extent of his work and very little was written about Schubert during his lifetime.

Schubert lived most of his short life in Vienna, during the height of Beethoven's popularity. He was exposed to Beethoven's music from an early age and held him in high esteem. There is no reliable evidence as to whether Schubert ever met Beethoven, despite extensive speculation. The two composers moved in different social circles in Vienna but it is likely that Beethoven would have known of some of Schubert's music. Schubert wrote to artist Leopold Kupelwieser (spring 1824): 'The latest in Vienna is that Beethoven is giving a concert in which he is having his new symphony [the Ninth], three movements from his new Mass and a new overture performed. God willing, I am also thinking of giving a similar concert in the coming year.' Schubert died at the age of thirty-one, only a year beyond Beethoven's death and, in accordance with his wishes, was buried next to him.

Schubert's Adagio in E-flat, composed in 1827, was possibly a discarded movement from his Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat major. It is written in a structure similar to that of a rondo: the quiet and intimate *notturmo*

section occurs three times, interjected with two episodes of dramatically contrasting material. It is almost as if the dream-like opening is suddenly shattered, transporting the listener into another dimension with a strong harmonic shift. These 'episodes' are characterised by a very determined, driven and somewhat militaristic style. When the music returns to the quieter section, with its serene, sustained string melody, the undulating piano writing adds variations and beautiful elaborations.

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The Rautio Piano Trio is an award-winning and critically acclaimed ensemble, known for their innovative and captivating performances. The Trio presents highly imaginative programmes incorporating rarely-performed works alongside the cornerstones of the repertoire. They regularly use historical instruments for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music: their debut disc for Resonus Classics (RES10168) featured a selection of Mozart's piano trios recorded on a fortepiano belonging to the late Christopher Hogwood. It was hailed by *The Observer* as 'an impressive achievement' and received multiple five-star reviews.

The Rautio Piano Trio has performed at the Wigmore Hall, South Bank, Bridgewater Hall, on BBC Radio 3, throughout the UK and in France, Austria, Germany and Israel. Highlights include performances at the Hambacher Musikfest in Germany, SOUND contemporary music festival in Scotland, English Haydn Festival, Pablo Casals Festival in France and at the Haydn-Saal in Vienna.

At Kings Place, London, they curated a Shostakovich concert, 'Approaching the Iron Curtain', which celebrated the composer's life and music on the fortieth anniversary of his death. The Trio regularly appears at St George's Bristol, where they have performed the complete cycle of Mozart Trios, Mendelssohn Trios and a special Shostakovich concert with Joan Rodgers featuring the Seven Romances for Trio and Soprano. The Trio continues to explore neglected works, including a focus on those by Johann Christian Bach (the 'London Bach'), which they first performed for the London Bach Society BachFest and subsequently at the Cobbe Collection of historical instruments and at St George's Bristol.

The Rautio Piano Trio was formed at the Royal Academy of Music, London, and at the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove. They later held a Leverhulme Chamber Music Fellowship at the Royal Academy of Music. They have been recipients of numerous awards, such as the Tillet Trust, Worshipful Company of Musicians, Park Lane Group, Musician's Benevolent Fund Ensemble Award and the English-Speaking Union.

[www.rautiopianotrio.co.uk](http://www.rautiopianotrio.co.uk)

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Instruments used in this recording:

Violin: Giovanni Paolo Maggini, Brescia, c. 1630

Cello: Giovanni Grancino, Milano, 1687

Piano: Steinway Model D



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The Observer

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