



**SMETANA
ROSE &
RACHMANINOV**

Piano Trios

Aquinas Piano Trio



Aquinas Piano Trio



SMETANA
ROSE &
RACHMANINOV
Piano Trios

Aquinas Piano Trio

SMETANA, ROSE & RACHMANINOV

Piano Trios

BEDŘICH SMETANA (1824–84)

Piano Trio Op. 15

- | | | | |
|---|-----|------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | i | Moderato assai - Più animato | 11'35 |
| 2 | ii | Allegro, ma non agitato | 7'38 |
| 3 | iii | Finale. Presto | 9'41 |

LAWRENCE ROSE (b. 1943)

Piano Trio Op. 26

- | | | | |
|----|-----|------------------------------|------|
| 4 | i | Allegro moderato | 2'36 |
| 5 | ii | Larghetto - Allegro moderato | 6'09 |
| 6 | iii | Allegro - Adagietto | 3'44 |
| 7 | iv | Adagietto | 4'21 |
| 8 | v | Vivace - Adagietto | 2'58 |
| 9 | vi | Allegro moderato - Adagio | 4'16 |
| 10 | vii | Largo - Poco meno mosso | 8'40 |

SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943)

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----------------------------|-------|
| 11 | | Trio Élégiaque No. 1 | 14'28 |
|----|--|-----------------------------|-------|

76'05

AQUINAS PIANO TRIO:

RUTH ROGERS *violin*

KATHERINE JENKINSON *cello*

MARTIN COUSIN *piano*



Bedřich Smetana

ELEGIAC INSPIRATIONS

All three piano trios on this disc have elements in common. They were either first or only forays for their respective composers into the medium and each work is elegiac in character either in whole or in part. Smetana had lost one of his daughters when she was only four and his trio was written as a memorial; Rose's trio includes three particularly poignant and elegiac movements composed under the cloud of mass shootings in USA and war crimes in Syria, all occurring in 2019 and Rachmaninov's student piece was inspired by the first elegiac movement of an earlier trio by his mentor, Tchaikovsky.

Bedřich Smetana (1824–84) was born in what was then Bohemia, a part of the sprawling Hapsburg “Empire”, where German was the rigidly enforced official language. Although from an early age he showed great musical promise especially on the piano, his parents were unwilling to encourage it by way of facilitating a formal education in music. Instead Smetana eventually went to Prague supposedly to study in a “normal” way but via a boyhood friendship he was introduced to a respected teacher there who helped him financially and gained him employment as resident music and piano tutor to the family of Count Leopold Thun who allowed him to continue his own studies and undertake concert performances.

In succeeding years Smetana drifted away from the idea of performance towards a career in composition but he maintained his love of teaching and was able to found his own music school in Prague. He had left the Thun family in 1848 to take part in the revolution against absolutist Hapsburg rule even though he could hardly converse in Czech with his co-revolutionaries. Although the revolution achieved nothing, the idea of Czech nationalism did take a firm hold on his sensibilities and this ultimately became a formative part of his inspiration and compositional processes.

In 1849 Smetana married his boyhood sweetheart by whom he had four daughters between 1851–5. In 1854 his second daughter died and the next year his eldest,

Bedřicha, died of scarlet fever. In that same year Smetana wrote his elegiac piano trio as a tribute to her memory but it was initially so poorly received that he felt compelled to make revisions. He also now felt the need to leave Prague and in 1856 he first took up teaching and then a conducting post in Sweden but while travelling with his family in Germany in 1859 his wife died of consumption. Smetana remarried a year later and returned to Prague in 1863.

Smetana then embarked on a series of operas dedicated to the Czech language, culture and people and from 1874–9 he completed his best-known music, a series of symphonic poems entitled “*Má Vlast*.” During this period he realised he was going deaf and he was also showing signs of hereditary syphilis. Smetana’s final years were plagued by illness and incapacity and this lauded champion through music of Czech nationalism died in an asylum.

At the time of composing his **Piano Trio in G Minor Op. 15**, Smetana had not shown any nationalistic tendencies either politically or musically and indeed he had a totally different motivation for the work following his daughter Bedřicha's death.

From the very outset of the **first movement (Moderato assai)** there can be no doubt that this was a composer in emotional turmoil as the violin alone urgently states the passion, anger and grief of the moment. This mood is continued by both string instruments in counterpoint while underpinned by the piano. There is but little relaxation until the second group of themes emerges, now wistful and sad (cello) and then almost ethereal (violin) until a *piu animato* section gradually crushes all previous wistfulness into violence and pianistic thunder. Formally, Smetana continues with the classical pattern of development and recapitulation maintaining or varying earlier textures and expanding emotions into desperate anger as well as false light-heartedness and majesty and culminating in an unrelenting conclusion.

Does the opening scherzo of the **second movement (Allegro, ma non agitato)** suggest light relief or is this forced gaiety as the brilliantly manipulated rhythmic gestures



Lawrence Rose

play with the very opening of the whole work? There is a veiled, ghostly quality in evidence here. The scherzo is interrupted by two episodes both marked "*alternativo*". The first, *andante*, is wistfully graceful and suggests nostalgia for happier times while the second, marked *maestoso*, assumes the character of a courtly dance which itself is interrupted by moments of climactic defiance. The concluding scherzo is very brief and acts as a coda of almost ghostly quietude.

For the **third movement (Finale. Presto)** emotions are running at fever pitch as dance interweaves with melancholy and nostalgia. Matters are impelled by a frenetic tarantella-like statement from the piano as cross-rhythms occupy both hands. This is replaced by a lament for cello and then violin and there follows a repeated interweaving of these contrasting ideas with the lament undergoing some transformations before its "ultimate fusion into a funeral march marked *grave, quasi marcia*. This catharsis allows for a further restatement now clothed in apparent glory but capped finally by a brief allusion to the opening dance and by firm closure.

Lawrence Rose was born in England in 1943. He studied violin there from an early age and very soon developed an enthusiasm for composition, leading to the creation of some juvenilia. Other factors intervened, however, and Rose pursued a career in law. This did not completely prevent music studies and composing and some seeds for later completed works were sown. Rose left the law in 2001 and took up composition apace. He has since completed twenty-nine pieces, most of them after emigrating to Chicago. Some are large-scale works including four symphonies, three violin concertos, a concerto for orchestra and a piece for double string orchestra. There is a body of chamber music including four string quartets, a piano quartet, a clarinet trio, a brass quintet, a piano fantasia, a string trio, a cello sonata and a violin sonata. (As an antidote to Covid isolation he also completed a short work for two solo cellos in 2020.) Performances of some of his chamber music have taken place in England. Rose has also completed "*The Glory and the Dream*" for soprano and orchestra, "*Whimsical Profundities*", a song cycle for bass-baritone and chamber ensemble and "*Missa pro Pace*" for double choir, organ and piano.

Rose fashioned the framework of his **Piano Trio Op. 26** as a continuous seven-movement design along the lines of Beethoven's string quartet Opus 131 but including linking passages between all movements except the first and second which directly meld into each other. The links vary in length and each refers to earlier material. The often extreme fluctuations in mood throughout the trio reflect some of the turbulent events of the year of composition.

The **first movement (Allegro moderato)** serves as an overture or introduction to the whole and is characterized overall by energetic skittishness. Moments of comparative calm are somewhat fleeting. Rhythmic and/or melodic patterns within it will feature in later movements. In its final bar the piano presages the start of the immediately following **second movement (Larghetto - Allegro moderato)**. The piano alone, forte and with gravitas and spare harmonies, intones the commencement of a passacaglia whose theme is to assume a greater significance as the work itself progresses. After the initial statement of the theme there follow eight variations of contrasting character and orchestration some being sombre in nature, others more lyrical or rhythmic and eventually more agitated and finally richly magisterial. This musically significant elegiac movement concludes with an allegro moderato link referring to some elements of the first movement before accelerating into the **third movement (Allegro - Adagietto)**. A perky introduction leads into a fugue albeit not entirely in typical Baroque form. The fugue subject is announced by the piano alone but undergoes constant variation or development as the movement progresses. Underpinning one later subject entry, the piano is assigned a variant of the passacaglia theme. An adagietto linking passage recapitulates that theme but in a quietly reflective manner.

The **fourth movement (Adagietto)** is an extended wistfully lyrical and at times passionately elegiac centrepiece to the whole work concluding with a very short link musing on rhythmic snatches common to the third movement and this movement itself.

The **fifth movement (Vivace - Adagietto)** is a complete contrast providing a rhythmically complex but highly engaging foray into mind games for performers and listeners alike. A necessary short breathing space precedes the adagietto link which refers to some of the more passionate elements of the fourth movement, but which quiets and slows into the **sixth movement (Allegro moderato - Adagio)**. Variety is again provided by this movement which commences with a stirring march-like fragment leading into a much longer passage of contrasting elements. An interlude of developed material precedes an impassioned but varied restatement of the passacaglia theme. Further development of earlier material prefaces a return to the march-like fragment which terminates with a coda. A short pause precedes an adagio link for cello alone and then cello and piano. This link is derived from a seemingly unimportant cello passage appearing earlier in the movement. Being slowed down and isolated, it provides an appropriate sombre lead into the **seventh movement (Largo - Poco meno mosso)**. In light of the horrific events of 2019, it is perhaps not surprising that the work should end with a long-breathed elegy occasionally disturbed by impassioned outbursts or that the closing bars should subside into quiet resignation.

Born into an aristocratic family, **Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)** displayed an early musical talent and in spite of paternal intentions for the military he eventually ended up at the Moscow Conservatory where he graduated in 1892 as winner of the Great Gold Medal. He had met and become greatly impressed by Tchaikovsky and was to benefit from his mentorship. He was also to gain a strong reputation as a composer, pianist and conductor in Moscow. Indeed, Rachmaninov is now recognized as being one of the greatest of pianists doubtless aided by his exceptionally large hands, each capable of spanning some twelve inches and possibly by his likely affliction with Marfan Syndrome, a hereditary disorder of the connective tissue which may actually have contributed to his great flexibility. Another great pianist, Cyril Smith, described Rachmaninov as having hands "like octopus tentacles."

It is hardly surprising that the **Trio élégiac in G Minor**, one of Rachmaninov's student pieces and the first of his two elegiac trios, should have been inspired by Tchaikovsky, in particular by his piano trio in A minor composed in 1881/2 to commemorate his friend, Nicolai Rubinstein who died in 1881. (The first movement of the Tchaikovsky is marked "*Pezzo elegiaco*.") The Rachmaninov has no opus number and was composed at the age of nineteen during his graduate year over a period of three days. It was not published until 1947 but did receive performances before then in manuscript form. It only has one movement but is a substantial and assured foray into sonata form and cast amidst a wonderfully imaginative use of organic thematic material. The piano writing throughout is incredibly inventive, full and rich without any congestion while the violin and cello are accorded moments of intense lyricism.

The piece as a whole in fact abounds in that melancholic lyricism which was to characterize Rachmaninov's mature style. Indeed, in this trio, this Russian romantic seems to breathe the soul of Russia herself. For various musical reasons it is tempting to suggest that the piece could be an elegy for Tchaikovsky, one being that its short coda is marked "*Alla marcia funebre*". In 1892, however, Tchaikovsky was in good health and doubtless would have been delighted with his young protégé's first serious entry into the world of chamber music.

© 2021 Lawrence Rose



Sergei Rachmaninov

The **Aquinas Piano Trio** has established itself as one of Britain's most sought-after chamber groups. Recent highlights include a Schumann concert series at Kings Place, performances at the Menton International Festival in France and the Chipping Campden International Music Festival in the UK and concerts at the Kirker Chopin Festival in Mallorca. The group's growing list of recordings includes the Saint-Saëns Trios, released on Guild in 2015, and their Mendelssohn Trios which was *Strad Magazine's* Choice of the Month in May 2015. Their continuing support of contemporary music saw premieres of new works by Thomas Hyde and Rob Keeley, with a Naxos CD release of Rob Keeley's Piano Trio no.2. The trio is very excited to release recordings of works by Michael Stimpson, Lawrence Rose, Smetana, Rachmaninov and Haydn. The Aquinas Piano Trio performs regularly at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall.

Produced, engineered and edited by James Unwin.
Recorded on 20-22 December 2020 at The Menuhin Hall, U.K.
Steinway technicians: Julian Dendy and Nigel Polmear.

Publishers: Henle (1-3); lawrencerosemusic@gmail.com (4-10); Sikorski (11).

Booklet notes © 2021 Lawrence Rose.
Photograph of Aquinas Piano Trio © 2014 Alexa Kidd-May.
Photograph of Bedřich Smetana c. 1878.
Photograph of Lawrence Rose © 2021 Nicole Thomas Photography.
Photograph of Sergei Rachmaninov c. 1921.
Design: Colour Blind Design.

Printed in the E.U.

5 0 6 0 1 9 2 7 8 1 1 7 5

STONE
records