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The Westchester Chamber Music Society



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The Westchester Chamber Music Society (WCMS)
is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Sunday, December 8, 2024
Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester
2125 Westchester Avenue
Rye, New York

The Westchester Chamber Music Society
presents

THE LYSANDER PIANO TRIO

Itamar Zorman, *violin*

Liza Stepanova, *piano*

Michael Katz, *cello*



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 -1827)
Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1 "Ghost"
Allegro vivace e con brio
Largo assai ed espressivo
Presto

Rebecca Clarke (1886 -1979)
Piano Trio (1921)
Moderato ma appassionato
Andante molto semplice
Allegro vigoroso

Intermission

Robert Schumann (1810 -1856)
Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 63
Mit Energie und Leidenschaft
Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch
Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung
Mit Feuer

*Following the concert, there will be a
Question & Answer session with the musicians.*

About this Performance

The Lysander Piano Trio, whose name is inspired by the character in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was formed at The Juilliard School. The Trio studied with Ronald Copes of the Juilliard String Quartet, the late Joseph Kalichstein, and Seymour Lipkin, and had a memorable masterclass with Alfred Brendel. Early in their career, Lysander became a standout at competitions, with top honors at the 2010 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, the 2011 Coleman Chamber Ensemble Competition (Grand Prize), the 2011 J. C. Arriaga Chamber Music Competition (First Prize), and the 2012 Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition.

The Lysander Piano Trio has been praised by *The Strad* for its "incredible ensemble, passionate playing, articulate and imaginative ideas, and wide palette of colors" and by *The Washington Post* for "an uncommon degree of heart-on-the-sleeve emotional frankness" and "vivid engagement carried by soaring, ripely Romantic playing." The group has developed a reputation for exciting programming, finding creative ways to connect well-known masterworks with pieces by lesser-known and underrepresented composers, discovering common threads across cultures and times.

Itamar Zorman, *violin*, is one of the most soulful, evocative artists of his generation, distinguished by his emotionally gripping performances and gift for musical storytelling. Since his emergence with the top prize at the 2011 International Tchaikovsky Competition, Zorman has wowed audiences all over the world with breathtaking style, causing one critic to declare him a "young badass who's not afraid of anything." His "youthful intensity" and "achingly beautiful" sound shine through in every performance, earning him the title of the "virtuoso of emotions."

Liza Stepanova, *piano*, was praised by *The New York Times* for her "thoughtful musicality" and "fleet-fingered panache." Liza Stepanova has performed at the Berlin Philharmonie, the Weill and Zankel recital halls at Carnegie Hall; Alice Tully, Merkin, David Geffen, and Steinway halls in New York City and at the Kennedy Center. She has appeared as a soloist with the conductors James DePreist

and Nicholas McGegan and live on WQXR New York, WFMT Chicago, and WETA Washington. Among her most recent projects is *E Pluribus Unum* (Navona Records, 2020) which features piano music by contemporary immigrant composers, including three world-premiere recordings. Stepanova holds degrees from the “Hanns Eisler” Academy in Berlin, Germany and The Juilliard School, where she studied with Joseph Kalichstein, Seymour Lipkin, Jerome Lowenthal, and George Sava.

Michael Katz, *cello*, has been hailed for his “bold, rich sound” (Strad Magazine) and “nuanced musicianship” (New York Times). The Grammy-nominated cellist Michael Katz has appeared as a soloist and chamber-musician across North and Central America, Europe, Asia, and Israel, in venues such as Carnegie Hall, David Geffen Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Kimmel Center, the Van Wezel Performing Arts Center, the Kravis Center, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Oji Hall (Tokyo, Japan), Philips Hall (Eindhoven, Netherlands), Teatro Cervantes (Malaga, Spain), Lucerne KKL (Lucerne, Switzerland), and Henry Crown Auditorium (Jerusalem, Israel). Deeply committed to community outreach and education, from 2014-2016 Katz was a Fellow in Carnegie Hall’s Ensemble Connect. He is a core member of Decoda, an affiliate ensemble of Carnegie Hall since 2019. He was previously selected to be part of a special string quartet led by Midori to present formal and outreach concerts in Myanmar and Japan.



Program Notes

by Joshua Berrett, Ph.D.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1 "Ghost"

Beethoven's "Ghost" Trio dates from 1808, perhaps the peak year of his very fertile Middle Period. As proof we have the remarkable four-hour Beethoven benefit concert held that year on the cold winter night of December 22. With Beethoven conducting and playing piano, four monumental works were premiered: the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Fourth Piano Concerto, and the Choral Fantasy, a *sui generis* work for solo piano, orchestra, and chorus that anticipates the "Joy theme" of the Ninth Symphony.

The demonic core of this work is its middle movement. Its dark D-minor tone prompted Beethoven's pupil, Carl Czerny, to some years later coin the colloquial subtitle "Ghost." For him, the music conjured up the scene in *Hamlet* when the Ghost first appears. But we now know better. The study of Beethoven's sketches has revealed that he was considering writing a *Macbeth* opera and originally planned to use some of this material for an opening Witches' Chorus. In any event, there is no escaping the dramatic suspense conveyed by the piano's pulsating chords, stark sighing motifs introduced by unison strings, not to mention cascading chromatic scales, shifts in register, stabbing diminished chords, and extensive use of tremolo on the part of the piano. Extreme dynamic contrasts as well as abrupt stops and silences only add to the tension.

The work's outer movements, however, are all energy and sunshine, giving the whole composition a kind of arch shape. The opening *Allegro vivace e con brio*, a sonata form, is truly about brio. A hurtling, vigorous five-measure *tutti* (unison) passage signals that Beethoven means business. It has a duple rhythmic feel within a triple meter; it then melts into a more lyrical waltz-like melody. Beethoven works his magic on these two primary elements. And the exuberant *Presto* rondo finale comes with a principal theme where Beethoven works wonders with a rising and falling D-major scale.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)
Piano Trio (1921)

Day after day, Rebecca Clarke's diaries contain some variant of the phrase, "Another good day composing!" And in her memoir, *I Had A Father Too, or The Mustard Spoon*, she writes of being "flooded with a wonderful feeling of potential power . . . that made anything seem possible. Every composer, or writer, or painter too for that matter, however obscure, is surely familiar with this sensation. It is a glorious one. I know of almost nothing to equal it."

A trailblazer as both composer and violist, she is regarded as one of the most significant female musical figures of the early 20th century. Born in England, Clarke studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music and later at the Royal College of Music under Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. She became one of the first women to join a professional orchestra as a violist and enjoyed a successful career as a performer in Europe and the United States. Yet, despite her professional accomplishments, Clarke faced the systemic sexist biases of her time, which often overshadowed her achievements as a composer.

Her works, characterized by bold harmonies, rich textures, and emotional depth, even now remain largely underappreciated. Yet Rebecca Clarke has her champions. The Rebecca Clarke website claims "we are currently involved in 46 projects—publications, new editions, concerts, recitals, recordings, broadcasts, competitions, concert- and author-tours, educational institutes and workshops, books, dissertations, papers—in 13 countries, on 5 continents, in 10 languages"

At the very least, this afternoon's performance of her 1921 *Piano Trio* should win her more admirers.

This work was composed during a period of intense creativity, coinciding with her *Viola Sonata*. The *Trio* was submitted anonymously to a composition competition sponsored by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, where it tied for first place. It is a work of passionate intensity, color, and evocative timbre. In its own special way, it can be heard as a vivid expression of an English Impressionist aesthetic—a movement within music and art that reflects

the broader Impressionist movement originating in France, but with distinct characteristics shaped by English culture and sensibilities. For this reason, one can hear echoes of Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel in Clarke's music. It is a music of fluidity, rather than any formal rigidity, drawing upon folk elements, and modes going as far back as Gregorian Chant, and Palestrina—whose music she performed during her student days.

The opening *Moderato ma appassionato* showcases her mastery of atmosphere and drama. One is immediately caught up in the sweeping rhapsodic gestures, the strings often heard in octaves, and the piano providing a shimmering texture. The more introspective *Andante molto semplice*, introduces a folk-like theme played by the strings, while the piano provides a harp-like accompaniment. A certain poignant restraint prevails. The *Allegro vigoroso* finale bursts with energy. There are vigorous exchanges among the instruments, accentuated by bold harmonic shifts, as well as juxtapositions of the playful and the serious. We experience the culmination of a journey through what has been an exciting soundscape.

Robeert Schumann (1810-1856)
Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 63

Written in a burst of creative energy in the summer of 1847, this, the first of his three piano trios, is in an intensely romantic style, and is the most celebrated of Schumann's trios. At the same time, it is a kind of work that brings to mind the ironic importance of the piano in his creative output and the trajectory of his whole life. A reminder that in his late teens he still entertained the fantasy of becoming a virtuoso pianist. To make up for lost time, he devised a bizarre contraption to strengthen the middle finger of his right hand. But it only made things worse. In fact, both the index and middle fingers of his right hand caused him grief. Electrophysical therapy, homeopathy, and other remedies of the time were tried to no avail.

Yet, Schumann demonstrated an astounding gift as a composer for the piano. Virtually all his greatest music involves the instrument. One thinks of masterpieces like the *Piano Concerto*, piano suites like *Papillons*, *Carnaval*,

or *Kreisleriana*—and all their literary allusions—song cycles like *Dichterliebe* and the chamber works featuring the piano quintet, the piano quartet, and the three piano trios. And in all of this, his muse was his wife, Clara Wieck. At age nineteen, he first laid eyes on her, an eleven-year old prodigy and daughter of his prospective piano teacher, Friedrich Wieck—a possessive father-in-law-to-be, to say the least. The courts had to intervene before Robert was able to marry Clara.

The opening movement of *Piano Trio No. 1* has a tempo marking of *Mit Energie und Leidenschaft (With energy and passion)*. There is a special intensity to the main theme of this sonata-form movement, which is introduced by the violin over a turbulent piano accompaniment. There is much to listen for as the movement unfolds: contrapuntal interplay, an introspective second theme, intricate interweaving of motifs, contrasting martial rhythms, and a bell-like episode within the development section, where the piano is heard in its shimmering high register.

The second movement, *Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch (Lively, but not too quick)*, serves as a kind of scherzo. In the relative major key of F, it features a playful dactylic rhythm—an ascending scale hinting at a gallop.

With his slow movement, *Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung (Slowly, with heartfelt emotion)*, Schumann shifts to A minor to present what is essentially a somewhat melancholic song without words, with intermittent passages of light to relieve some of the gloom. The movement eventually wends its way to way to a dominant cadence, leaving us poised to launch directly into the finale.

Marked *Mit Feuer (With fire)*, this movement is a rondo form sounding overall like a hymn of thanks. The turn to D major, coupled with a sense of restless energy and forward momentum that infuses the contrapuntal writing, makes for an exciting finish.

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Coming Up



Tesla Quartet

March 16, 2025

Ross Snyder, *violin*

Michelle Lie, *violin*

Edwin Kaplan, *viola*

Austin Fisher, *cello*

Mozart:

String Quartet No. 14 in G Major, K. 387 "Spring"

Bacewicz:

String Quartet No. 3

Dvořák:

*String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major,
Op. 51, B. 92 "Slavonic"*



The Callisto Quartet

May 4, 2025

Program includes

Haydn, Esmail, and Dvořák



