

July 29, 2025

PRE-CONCERT RECITAL

Violin Sonata in G Major **GUILLAUME LEKEU**

Born: 1870

Died: 1894

Composed: 1892

- I. Très modéré — Vif et passioné
- II. Très lent
- III. Très animé

In October 1893 a group of young friends in Angers, a small city in western France, sat down together to enjoy a bowl of sherbet. The results were catastrophic. The sherbet had been made with contaminated ingredients, and everyone at that gathering became deathly ill. Most recovered, but one did not. The young French composer Guillaume Lekeu grew weaker, developed typhoid fever, and died the following January 21st, the day after his twenty-fourth birthday. His brief life is one of the most poignant stories of what-might-have-been in the history of music.

The son of a Belgian wool merchant, Lekeu grew up in a cultivated household, and his talent was evident very early. He was composing at 15, and in 1888 his parents took him to Paris, where César Franck accepted the boy as his final private student. Lekeu was a prolific composer (he left behind about forty works, even from so short a life), and he was intense: Lekeu is reported to have fainted after hearing the Prelude to Tristan und Isolde at Bayreuth. In 1891 Lekeu's cantata *Andromède* received second prize in the Prix de Rome competition, and it came to the attention of the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. Noting that the young man had written no chamber music, Ysaÿe promptly commissioned two pieces from him: a violin sonata and a piano quartet. Lekeu composed the sonata in 1892, and Ysaÿe premiered it in Brussels in March 1893, then took it on tour throughout Europe. In gratitude, the young composer dedicated the sonata to Ysaÿe.

Lekeu's Violin Sonata has had some superb champions—there have been notable recordings by Yehudi Menuhin, Artur Grumiaux, Elmar Oliveira, and many others. But despite their efforts, the sonata

should be more well known than it is—it remains on the fringe of the repertory, almost unknown to general audiences.

Throughout Lekeu's sonata runs the strong influence of César Franck, who had died only two years before its composition. The sonata is in the cyclic form much favored by Franck (and by Liszt and Schubert before him): a seminal theme, introduced in the first movement, will reappear throughout the work, evolving into new forms as it proceeds and unifies the entire composition. The gentle opening theme of Lekeu's Violin Sonata, sung by the violin at the start of the slow introduction, feels like a flow of continuous melody, but that fundamental shape—with its octave drop, recurring triplets, and chromatic writing—will become the backbone of the entire sonata.

CONCERT

Suite for Two Violins and Piano in G minor, **Op. 71** **MORITZ MOSZKOWSKI**

Born: 1854

Died: 1925

Composed: 1903

- I. Allegro energico
- II. Allegro moderato
- III. Lento assai
- IV. Molto vivace

Polish-German composer Moritz Moszkowski had every intention of being a "serious" composer, and to that end he composed opera, symphony, ballet, two concertos, and several orchestral suites, but this music has virtually vanished (his compositions rate barely an inch of space in the current record catalog). Moszkowski would have been horrified to learn that his only music to survive is the wealth of brief pieces he wrote for non-professionals. He made his reputation (and a fortune) with salon music: light and pleasant pieces—usually for piano—intended for performance at home in the days when people actually made music at home (and when they actually had salons). His two books of lively Spanish Dances for piano duet were immensely

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popular a century ago, and the titles of other pieces suggest the colorful character of this music: Caprice Espagnol, Etincelles ("Sparks"), Malaguena.

The Suite in G minor for Two Violins and Piano is one of Moszkowski's "serious" compositions, though it is by no means a heavy piece of music. This is one of those rare things—a superb piece of music by an almost forgotten composer. Published in the first years of the twentieth century, the Suite is a collection of four contrasted movements, beautifully written for all three instruments and full of polished and attractive music. While the term "suite" suggests the absence of sonata-form rigor, the Suite for Two Violins features some accomplished and ingenious music.

The declamatory Allegro energico is the most dramatic of the movements, with the two violins soaring easily and trading phrases above rippling piano accompaniment. The Allegro moderato is amiably lyric—now the melodic line moves smoothly between the two violins, and the music proceeds gracefully to the concluding pizzicato chords. The dark slow movement is the finest in the suite. This music is by no means tragic, but it is marked throughout by a somber and restrained beauty that contrasts with the bustle of the other movements; much of this movement is written with the violins in strict canon, a rigorous choice from a composer not known for this sort of discipline. The finale, Molto vivace, hurtles along on the cheerful swing of its dotted rhythms; a lyric center section leads to a return of the opening material and then a dazzling coda.

Moszkowski's Suite for Two Violins and Piano may not be great music, but it is certainly very good music. Little known to the general concert-going public, it invariably brings the tangible pleasure of discovery.

Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 11 FANNY MENDELSSOHN

Born: 1805

Died: 1847

Composed: 1846

- I. Allegro molto vivace
- II. Andante espressivo
- III. Lied. Allegretto
- IV. Finale. Allegretto moderato

There is general agreement that the two most prodigiously talented young composers in history were Mozart and Mendelssohn, with many parallels between them. Both were born into families that nurtured their talents, showed phenomenal ability as children, began composing early, and had their music performed professionally from a young age. Both were virtuoso keyboard performers, played violin and viola, participated in chamber music, composed in many genres, drove themselves hard, and died in their thirties.

A further parallel: both had older sisters whose musical talents rivaled their own. Mozart's sister Maria Anna, five years his senior, performed with him as a child but had no surviving compositions, and a serious career was impossible for women then; she married in 1784 and grew estranged from Mozart later.

Fanny Mendelssohn, four years older than Felix, had a much closer relationship with her brother. Like him, she began composing early, though some of her songs were published under Felix's name. Discouraged from a career in music, she married painter Wilhelm Hensel at 24 and had a son, but music remained a passion. She composed orchestral overtures, chamber music, piano works, and vocal pieces, several published before her death. Her sudden stroke at 41 devastated Felix, who collapsed and never fully recovered; he died six months later. The exact date of composition for Fanny's Piano Trio in D minor is unknown; it was published posthumously by her family in 1850 and assigned Opus 11. The Trio features an active piano part that introduces many themes and often dominates textures, requiring a virtuoso player. The strings have a more melodic role, sometimes introducing themes

but often echoing the piano. Its structure is unusual: two fast outer movements frame two slow central movements.

The trio opens dramatically with *Allegro molto vivace*, a marking often used by Felix. The strings two octaves apart sing the main theme while the piano's racing accompaniment creates tension even at quiet dynamics. The cello's cantabile second subject emerges over *tremolandi piano*. This long movement drives energetically to a grand close.

The piano leads the ternary-form *Andante espressivo*, stating the theme before the strings join. An active staccato episode follows, then a return to the opening, flowing directly into the third movement. The *Lied* is lyrical, again piano-led with its opening theme shaping the movement. The finale begins with a long piano solo marked *ad libitum*, giving the pianist freedom in shaping tempo. Strings enter as the tempo accelerates, then unexpectedly slows and alternates pace throughout. Listeners will hear occasional recalls of earlier material. The music climaxes as the strings, two octaves apart, soar above the *tremolandi piano*, and the trio powers to a resounding close in D Major.

String Trio in E-flat Major, Op. 3

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: 1770

Died: 1827

Composed: 1792–1796

- I. *Allegro con brio*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Menuetto. Allegretto — Trio*
- IV. *Adagio*
- V. *Menuetto. Moderato — Minore*
- VI. *Finale. Allegro*

In his early years in Vienna, Beethoven wrote five trios for strings (violin, viola, cello), and the Trio in E-flat Major was the first. Written in 1793–94, when Beethoven was in his early twenties, it predates his Opus 1 and 2 piano trios and sonatas. Though considered a minor work today, it was the first Beethoven piece to be performed in England, which helped spread his name abroad.

The story is intriguing: a manuscript copy of the trio reached the court in Bonn, which had sent Beethoven to Vienna to study with Haydn. The Abbé

Dobler, court chaplain and amateur violinist, took it to England in 1794, three years before the trio's Vienna publication. There he performed it with violist and writer William Gardiner, who was astonished and later recalled how the composition awakened a new intellectual pleasure in sound, unlike anything he had heard before.

Beethoven's model was almost certainly Mozart's *Divertimento* in E-flat Major, published in 1792, the year Beethoven arrived in Vienna. Both works are for string trio, in six movements with two minuets, and both are substantial in length (Beethoven's lasting about 40 minutes).

The *Allegro con brio* opens sharply with syncopated chords, bursting with thematic ideas, some gentle, others driven by energy. The *Andante* in 3/8 proceeds with staccato writing embellished with trills and runs, developing into an animated section. The first *Menuetto*, marked *Allegretto*, features fragmented melodic lines passed between instruments; its trio is violin-led. Beethoven concludes with a brief coda recalling the minuet. The *Adagio* centers on a lyrical violin melody, marked *dolce*, piano and later *con espressione*. The fifth movement, a cheerful *Menuetto*, surprises with a dark C minor trio featuring an animated violin solo over viola and cello drone. The concluding *Allegro rondo* in 2/4 delivers expected energy and youthful playfulness.

Though often overlooked, Beethoven felt affection for this trio. Soon after completing it, he began arranging it as a piano trio, finishing the first movement but abandoning the second halfway. In 1807, publisher Artaria released a cello sonata arrangement in E-flat Major as Opus 64, apparently arranged by someone else with Beethoven's approval.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger