

History of the Russian Piano Trio • 4 ARENISKY • TANNEYEV The Brahms Trio



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Anton Stepanovich ARENSKY (1861–1906)
Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32 (1894)
Sergey Ivanovich TANEYEV (1856–1915)
Piano Trio in D major, Op. 22 (1907)

Anton Stepanovich Arensky was born in Novgorod to a music-loving family. His father was a doctor and an amateur cellist, while his mother was a fine pianist, and taught her son until he was nine years of age. The family having moved to St Petersburg, he began studying at the Conservatoire there in 1879, his composition teacher being Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov. On graduating, he was appointed to the position of professor of counterpoint at the Moscow Conservatoire, where his pupils included Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Glière and Grechaninov. His fame as a composer began with his opera *A Dream on the Volga* (Moscow, 1891), though he had been writing music from an early age. In 1895 he succeeded Balakirev as director of the Imperial Chapel Choir in St Petersburg, a post he occupied until 1901. He died in 1906 in a sanatorium in Kirillovskoye (Perkjärvi) in the then Russian-administered Grand Duchy of Finland.

Arensky's output includes three operas (unfortunately the later two did not meet with the success of the first), a ballet entitled *Egyptian Nights* (1908), two symphonies, concertos for violin and for piano, some choral music both sacred and secular, a substantial number of songs and piano music, and some impressive works for chamber ensembles, including two string quartets, two piano trios and a piano quintet.

It may be said with complete justice that the guiding spirit of Arensky's life was Tchaikovsky, and the *Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor* (1894) demonstrates perfectly the way in which he filtered the older composer's style through his own. The work is dedicated to the memory of the cellist, composer and teacher Karl Davydov (1838–1889), who had taught at the St Petersburg Conservatoire since 1863, and is a very substantial achievement. Cast in four movements, the first, a dramatic *Allegro moderato*, is in sonata form, but with three themes. While they are of contrasting character, on their reappearance in the recapitulation they are brought

unexpectedly together, before the coda returns us once more to the opening theme. This is followed by an *Allegro molto*, structured in three parts. The first is characterised by the extensive use of pizzicato in the strings, while the piano is given an elegant melodic line. This changes in the second section, the strings being accompanied by the piano, and the third returns us to the atmosphere of the first, though the melodic material is developed further.

The third movement, entitled *Elegia*, is similarly tripartite, though very different in character: it is a funeral lament for Davydov, two outer sections in G minor surrounding a brighter and faster central episode in G major. The *Trio* ends with a glittering rondo, *Allegro non troppo*, which revisits both the theme of the third movement and the first theme of the opening movement.

Like Arensky, Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev (born in Vladimir in 1856) began his musical education at a very early age, also as part of a family deeply interested in the arts. He later studied with Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatoire, and also piano with Nikolay Rubinstein, giving the first Moscow performance of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1* in 1875, following its disastrous world premiere in St Petersburg. His playing so impressed Tchaikovsky that he was chosen to be the soloist in the latter's *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Taneyev himself began teaching at the Moscow Conservatoire on Tchaikovsky's resignation in 1878, and he had an impressive roster of pupils. A friend of Gounod, Saint-Saëns, d'Indy, Fauré and Duparc, he also had an extensive knowledge of Baroque and Renaissance contrapuntal technique, and published a massive treatise on the subject in two volumes entitled *Convertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style*. He died in Dyudkovo of a heart attack in 1915, a consequence of his attendance at the funeral of Scriabin, one of his former pupils.

Taneyev's output includes an opera, *Oresteia*, four symphonies, a piano concerto, two highly impressive cantatas, a huge number of songs, and a very substantial amount of chamber music, including no fewer than nine string quartets as well as two more left unfinished, four string trios, two string quintets, a piano quintet, piano quartet and the *Piano Trio, Op. 22*. This work, written in 1907, is as Tchaikovskian as Arensky's, though, as might be expected, it also demonstrates very clearly its composer's love of counterpoint. It is dedicated to Grechaninov. The opening *Allegro*, in sonata form, begins with a striking theme which leads into an intense dialogue between piano and strings. In the recapitulation, this first theme is only revisited after the second, giving the movement a pleasing symmetry. Fragments of it also form the basis for the second movement, a playful *Allegro molto*

constructed as a sparkling and virtuosic series of eleven variations exploring a huge range of compositional and performing techniques and which may be seen as an homage to Tchaikovsky's own *Trio*.

The final two movements are to be performed with no break between them, and thus the third, a highly lyrical *Andante espressivo*, functions as a kind of prelude to the *Allegro con brio*. It modulates from its opening F major to very remote tonal areas before a very brief solo passage for the violin announces the imminent beginning of the *Finale*, based upon the principal theme of the third movement, which is almost symphonic in its scope. Indeed, the entire *Trio* has about it the breadth of a symphony, and is certainly one of Taneyev's grandest creations.

Ivan Moody

The Brahms Trio

The Brahms Trio is one of the leading Russian chamber ensembles, comprising violinist Nikolai Sachenko and cellist Kirill Rodin, both winners of the Gold Medal at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, and pianist Natalia Rubinstein, First Prize winner of the Joseph Joachim Chamber Music Competition in Weimar and founder of the ensemble. Since its foundation in 1990, the trio has regularly appeared at prestigious international concert venues, such as the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the Brucknerhaus Linz and Seoul Arts Center, as well as at festivals in Melbourne, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Paris and London. Legendary musicians such as Tatiana Gaidamovich, Alexander Bonduriansky (Moscow Trio), Valentin Berlinsky (Borodin Quartet) and Rudolf Barshai have had a significant influence on the formation of the performing style and career of the trio. The Brahms Trio has made an invaluable contribution to enlarging the chamber repertoire by rediscovering unknown piano trios of Russian composers of the late 19th and early 20th century. The musicians of The Brahms Trio are professors at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, and are the recipients of the honorary title Honoured Artist of Russia. www.brahms-trio.ru



Photo by Emil Matveev

Both Anton Arensky and Sergey Taneyev belong to the generation of Russian composers who came to prominence at the end of the 19th century, midway between Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov. With its expansive themes and wonderfully elegiac mood, Arensky's *Piano Trio No. 1* is dedicated to the memory of cellist Karl Davydov. The subtle use of counterpoint in Taneyev's *Piano Trio in D major* reveals his expertise in combining earlier techniques with the emphatically Romantic style that both composers inherited from Tchaikovsky. These two masterpieces summarise the development of the piano trio genre in Russian music of the 19th century, and subsequently laid the foundations for its further evolution.

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ARENKY • TANEYEV

Anton Stepanovich ARENSKY (1861–1906)

Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32 (1894) 28:37

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Allegro moderato | 9:56 |
| 2 | II. Scherzo | 5:38 |
| 3 | III. Elegia | 6:25 |
| 4 | IV. Finale | 6:34 |

Sergey Ivanovich TANEYEV (1856–1915)

Piano Trio in D major, Op. 22 (1907) 40:13

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Allegro | 10:20 |
| 6 | II. Allegro molto | 12:17 |
| 7 | III. Andante espressivo | 6:20 |
| 8 | IV. Finale: Allegro con brio | 11:15 |

The Brahms Trio

**Nikolai Sachenko, Violin • Kirill Rodin, Cello
Natalia Rubinstein, Piano**

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Playing Time
68:55



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