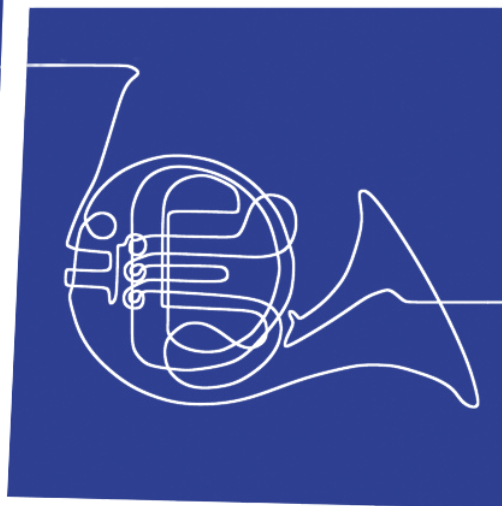
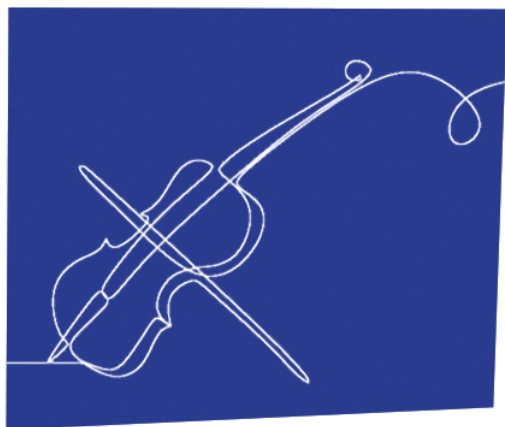


NAXOS

BERKELEY BRAHMS LESHNOFF

Horn Trios



David Cooper, Horn

Alexander Kerr, Violin • Orion Weiss, Piano

HORN TRIOS

Lennox Berkeley (1903–1989)

Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano, Op. 44 (1952) 24:52

- ① I. Allegro 5:12
- ② II. Lento 5:47
- ③ III. Tema con variazioni 13:47

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

**Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano in E flat major,
Op. 40 (1865) 28:04**

- ④ I. Andante – Poco più animato 7:34
- ⑤ II. Scherzo: Allegro 7:20
- ⑥ III. Adagio mesto 6:51
- ⑦ IV. Finale: Allegro con brio 6:03

Jonathan Leshnoff (b. 1973)

Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano (2016) 11:18

- ⑧ I. Pensive 5:41
- ⑨ II. Fast 5:35

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Horn Trios

The combination of horn, violin and piano was relatively unconventional in the 19th century, but it has early antecedents as far back as the trio sonata. By Haydn's time, composers were relishing the chance to write trios for an instrument from each 'family'. Successful examples included Haydn's own trios for flute, cello and piano, Mozart's *Kegelstatt* trio for clarinet, viola and piano, and Beethoven's good-natured *Trio* substituting cello for viola.

Only a very few works brought the horn forward as a candidate for inclusion, most notably Mozart's *Horn Quintet* of 1782. The combination of horn, violin and piano was used just once each by Czerny and Dussek, and it was not until 1865 that the horn trio was introduced with any certainty by Johannes Brahms. As a child, Brahms had learned the natural horn, along with cello and piano, with his father, Johann Jakob Brahms, playing the instrument to professional level. Johannes first wrote prominently for the instrument in 1858, enjoying its rustic overtones in his *Serenade No. 1 in D major, Op. 11*. As the 1860s progressed, Brahms gained greater fluency in chamber music, writing for the instruments he learned. The *Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38*, started in 1862 and completed in 1865, was followed by the publication in 1866 of the substantial four-movement *Horn Trio* included on this album. Brahms' loyalty to the natural instrument rather than a horn with valves is interpreted as an affectionate acknowledgement of his musical upbringing.

The *Trio* begins in assured, serious mood, taking time both to bring the horn in and to establish E flat major as the home key. The introduction has darker colours but soon lightens, with animated interplay between the three instruments. A bold *Scherzo* is placed second and finds Brahms working in triplets for the main theme, the horn often leading but also duetting at the distance of a sixth with the violin. There is a marked change of mood for the *Adagio*, as solemn low register chords in the piano suggest a religious contemplation. In this music Brahms was expressing his grief for the loss of his mother Christina, who died earlier that year. As the piano's distant thoughts recur, they gain stature, and the horn and violin offer sweeter-toned solace from a respectful distance. As the movement progresses its meditative qualities become more dominant, until a powerful climax towards the end looks to have won the day, only for the music to end obdurately in the minor key.

The finale sweeps away any downcast thoughts with immediate effect, its carefree theme exploring the horn's hunting legacy. The main theme trips along, dominating the trio's exchanges, though there is still time for a bittersweet counterpart.

Due, perhaps, to Brahms's mastery of the horn trio, it was not until the 20th century that the next works for the combination emerged. One of the form's most notable contributions came from the pen of Lennox Berkeley. Born near Oxford and studying with Nadia Boulanger, Berkeley found his keenest inspiration in smaller scale works, in spite of a prodigious output including four symphonies, four operas and pieces across many of the established classical forms. His chamber works reveal an enjoyment in less conventional combinations of wind and stringed instruments.

The *Horn Trio* was commissioned by pianist Colin Horsley, who had enjoyed playing the Brahms *Trio* with celebrated horn player Dennis Brain. Berkeley wrote the work in the autumn of 1952, and the pair, along with violinist Manoug Parikian, performed it for the first time at the Victoria and Albert Museum the following spring.

Berkeley begins his *Trio* with an angular statement in fourths from the horn, a distinctive motif soon taken up by the violin, then the piano. The three enjoy a lively and characterful debate, with several more distinctive themes, before the movement subsides to a lightly playful finish, with sleepy horn fanfares punctuated by soft chords from the violin. The second movement starts with a thoughtful statement from the piano, its stepwise theme slowly drawing in the violin then the horn. The intensity builds gradually, Berkeley's spare textures assenting to a deeply felt climax before reaching a hushed conclusion.

The third movement, a theme and set of eight variations, is longer than the first two movements combined. The clean, Mozartian lines of the theme are ripe for development, and Berkeley relishes his source material in a broad range of ideas that bring out more obviously the influences of Hindemith and the 'Les Six' composers, particularly Poulenc who he met in the 1920s. The horn leads a punchy first variation, with sparkling piano figuration, to which the violin responds with a *cantabile* line for the second variation. The tempo slows for the third variation, with long notes from the horn and a mournful *portamento* between pitches at the end. Berkeley snaps out of this mood for a brisk fourth variation exchange between violin and piano, before the childlike simplicity of the fifth brings horn and violin together in soft dialogue, drawing stern disapproval from the piano. The sixth variation assumes a triple-time waltz before the heart of the work, a long-breathed seventh variation, brings music of deep emotion, the three instruments in rhythmic stasis. The music emerges for one final variation, offering hope and ultimately strength as the trio quicksteps its way to the finish. A brief pause for thought is swept away by an assertive full stop.

Baltimore-based Jonathan Leshnoff is among the most-performed of recent American composers, his prolific output gaining a reputation for its concentrated expression and lyricism. These qualities have already been in evidence through a series of albums on Naxos, culminating in a GRAMMY nomination in the Best Classical Compendium category for his *Symphony No. 4 'Heichalos'*, featuring the Violins of Hope (8.559809). Working within tonal confines, Leshnoff has also explored the expressive potential of chamber music through works for mixed instruments and four published string quartets.

Leshnoff has held the music of Beethoven in the highest regard, ever since a captivating experience listening to the *Fifth Symphony* on his father's turntable at the age of three. He studied the violin from an early age, with a keen emphasis on improvisation around the performance of classical works, and this blossomed into fully fledged composition when he joined the Tanglewood youth programme. An Orthodox Jew, Leshnoff has brought his religious convictions to music such as *Symphony No. 2 'Innerspace'* and *Zohar*, for chorus and orchestra. He has worked closely with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra concertmaster Alexander Kerr, who premiered his *Violin Concerto No. 2*, and who commissioned the *Horn Trio* for performance with then Dallas principal horn David Cooper and pianist Orion Weiss. Leshnoff completed the work in 2016, with a first performance at Farmington Mills the following year.

Set in two movements, the trio makes a clear progression from darkness to light. Its *Pensive* first movement is initially led by fulsome phrases from the violin, supported by softer thoughts from horn and piano. The horn rises from its slumber, however, in striking high register phrases looking to raise the music's energy. The anticipated outpouring in *Fast* is emphatic, setting out with pointed syncopations and assertive motifs. A rhythmically vital section, it proves the composer's description of a 'joyous, rhythmic romp' for all three players, with excited whoops from the horn, excitable counterpoint from the violin and rhythmic jousting from the piano.

Ben Hogwood

David Cooper

David Cooper's passion for French horn comes from his uncle and grandmother, who both played horn professionally with the Lansing Symphony Orchestra. He started playing horn at the age of 11, and by 16 was playing with Michigan State University's top collegiate ensemble. Cooper studied at the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music, and throughout his career has held positions in the Victoria Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony and Dallas Symphony orchestras. He held the coveted solo horn position of the Berlin Philharmonic in 2017–18 and became principal horn of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2019. Among the world's top horn players, Cooper is recognised for his ability to flawlessly and expressively perform the most challenging repertoire. He has played as guest principal horn with many of the world's finest orchestras, such as the London Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic, plus numerous solo and chamber music appearances throughout the world. Cooper shares his love of music and horn with his students at Roosevelt University and lives in Chicago.

www.cooperhorn.com

Alexander Kerr

Alexander Kerr's expressive and charismatic style has made him one of the most accomplished and versatile violinists on the international music scene today. In 1996 at the age of 26, he was appointed to the prestigious position of concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam. After nine successful years at that post, he left in June 2006 to assume the endowed Linda and Jack Gill Chair in Music as professor of violin at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. In addition to his teaching responsibilities in Bloomington, he maintains a busy concert schedule appearing with orchestras and in recital and chamber music performances throughout the US, Asia and Europe. In 2008 he began his tenure as principal guest concertmaster of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and in September 2011 assumed his role as concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Orion Weiss

One of the most sought-after soloists and chamber music collaborators of his generation, acclaimed pianist Orion Weiss has performed with dozens of North American orchestras including the Chicago Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Boston Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic and New York Philharmonic, and at major venues and festivals worldwide. Known for his affinity for chamber music, Weiss regularly performs with violinists Augustin Hadelich and James Ehnes, tenor Nicholas Phan, and numerous other collaborators and string quartets. He has also recently performed with the Israel Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, Toronto Symphony, National Arts Centre Orchestra and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and can be heard on recordings released by the Naxos, Telos, Bridge, First Hand Records, Yarlung and Artek labels. Weiss has been awarded the Classical Recording Foundation's Young Artist of the Year, the Gilmore Young Artist Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant and the Mieczysław Munz Scholarship. A native of Ohio, he attended the Cleveland Institute of Music and The Juilliard School, studying with Emanuel Ax.

www.orionweiss.com



From left to right: Alexander Kerr, Orion Weiss, producer Judith Sherman, David Cooper

The viability of the horn trio was definitively established by Brahms in 1865. He had learned the natural horn as a child and infused his *Trio* with a range of moods, including a deeply felt slow movement in honour of his mother who had died earlier in the year and a carefree finale which explores the horn's hunting legacy. Inspired by this precedent, Lennox Berkeley's *Trio* is lively and characterful with a sequence of ingenious and playful variations. GRAMMY-nominated Jonathan Leshnoff is one of America's leading contemporary composers and his 2016 *Trio* moves from darkness to light, and is full of pointed syncopations, before arriving at a joyous conclusion.

HORN TRIOS

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|------------|---|--------------|
| 1–3 | Lennox Berkeley (1903–1989)
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***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

David Cooper, Horn

Alexander Kerr, Violin • Orion Weiss, Piano

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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