

presents...

NICOLA BENEDETTI/ LEONARD ELSCHENBROICH/ ALEXEI GRNYUK TRIO

Nicola Benedetti | Violin
Alexei Grynyuk | Piano

Leonard Elschenbroich | Cello

Wednesday, March 22, 2023 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

SCHUBERT

Piano Trio in E-flat Major, D.929

Allegro
Andante con moto
Scherzo: Allegro moderato
Allegro moderato

INTERMISSION

TCHAIKOVSKY

Piano Trio in A Minor, Opus 50

Pezzo elegiaco
Tema con variazioni
Variazione finale e coda: Allegro risoluto e con fuoco

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Joan Kahr

Tonight's performance honors members of the Cadenza Legacy Society.

The Benedetti/Elschenbroich/Grynyuk Trio is represented by Primo Artists
244 Fifth Ave Suite B222, New York, NY 10001 primoartists.com

ARTISTS PROFILES

San Francisco Performances presents the San Francisco debut of Nicola Benedetti/Leonard Elschenbroich/Alexei Grynyuk Trio.



Nicola Benedetti is one of the most sought-after violinists of her generation. Her ability to captivate audiences and her wide appeal as an advocate for classical music has made her one of the most influential artists of today.

Nicola began her 2022–23 season with a performance of the Marsalis *Violin Concerto* with the RSNO at the BBC Proms and Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto* with Kazuki Yamada and the CBSO. Further engagements include the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Violin Concerto No. 2* with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, a tour to Japan with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and performances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Hallé, DSO Berlin, St. Louis Symphony, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony and Orchestre de Paris amongst others.

Winner of the Grammy® Award for Best Classical Instrumental Solo in 2020, as well as Best Female Artist at both 2012 and 2013 Classical BRIT Awards, Nicola records exclusively for Decca (Universal Music). Her latest recordings of Vivaldi *Concerti* and Elgar's *Violin Concerto* entered at number one in the UK's Official Classical Album Chart. Other recent recordings include her Grammy® award-winning album written especially for her by jazz musician Wynton Marsalis: *Violin Concerto in D* and *Fiddle Dance Suite for Solo Violin*. In 2021, *BBC Music Magazine* named her "Personality of the Year" for her online support of many young musicians during the pandemic.

Nicola was appointed a CBE in 2019, awarded the Queen's Medal for Music

(2017), and an MBE in 2013. In addition, Nicola holds the positions of Vice President (National Children's Orchestras), Big Sister (Sistema Scotland), Patron (National Youth Orchestras of Scotland's Junior Orchestra, Music in Secondary Schools Trust, and Junior Conservatoire at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland). In 2019, Nicola formalised her commitment to music in education when she established The Benedetti Foundation. Since its launch, the Foundation has worked with over 29,000 participants, age 2–92, from 103 countries through its transformative in-person workshops and online sessions for young people, students, teachers, and adults.

In March 2022, Nicola became the Director Designate of the Edinburgh International Festival, becoming Festival Director on 1 October 2022. In taking the role she is both the first Scottish and the first female Festival Director since the Festival began in 1947.



Leonard Elschenbroich has established himself as one of the most charismatic cellists of his generation renowned for his passionate and compelling performances and winner of multiple awards including the Leonard Bernstein Award, Förderpreis Deutschlandfunk, Eugene Istomin Prize, and a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award. He was a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist (2012–14), Artist-in-Residence at Deutschlandfunk (2014–15) and Artist-in-Residence at the Philharmonic Society Bremen (2013–16).

He made his European debut on tour with the Staatskapelle Dresden, his US debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, his Asian debut at Suntory Hall in Tokyo and has appeared five times in the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall. He has also performed with orchestras including

the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, WDR Symphony Orchestra, Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin, Bergen Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Swedish Radio Symphony, Netherlands Philharmonic and the Residentie Orchestra. He gave the world premiere of Mark Simpson's *Cello Concerto* (2018), which was written specially for him on a commission from the BBC.

As a chamber musician, Leonard performs regularly in duo recitals with Alexei Grynyuk and as a member of the Benedetti-Elschenbroich-Grynyuk Trio which has toured through Europe, the US, South America and Australia. He has appeared at the Wigmore Hall, Auditorium du Louvre, Concertgebouw, Frick Collection, Ravinia Festival and the Lucerne, Gstaad, Rheingau, Mecklenburg Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein Music festivals.

Leonard Elschenbroich records for Onyx and his latest release—an outstanding cycle of Beethoven *Cello Sonatas*—received wide acclaim was selected as Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* and Chamber Choice in *BBC Music Magazine*. His discography includes Kabalevsky's *Cello Concerto No. 2* with the Netherlands Philharmonic/Litton, concertos by Dutilleux and Saint-Saëns, and sonata discs with works by Rachmaninov, Shostakovich (Editor's Choice, *Gramophone*), and Schnittke. His recording of the Brahms *Cello Sonatas* in 2021 was released in February 2023.

He plays a cello made by Matteo Goffriller "Leonard Rose" (Venice, 1693), on private loan.



British-Ukrainian pianist **Alexei Grynyuk** performs throughout the world appearing in the most prestigious concert halls and music festivals. He has performed recitals at the Verbier Music Festi-

val in Switzerland, Newport Music Festival in USA, “Musical Kremlin” Festival in Moscow, Duszniki Chopin Festival in Poland, and International Keyboard Festival in New York among many others. The venues include Wigmore Hall and the South Bank Centre in London, Salle Cortot and Salle Gaveau in Paris, Great Hall of Moscow Conservatoire, and Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Alexei has displayed tremendous interest in music from early childhood and started performing at the age of six. At 13 he attracted wide attention by winning First prize at the Dyagilev All-Soviet-Union piano competition. He went on to win many prizes, notably first prizes at the Horowitz International Piano Competition in Kiev, Shanghai International Piano Competition in China.

His musical development was shaped by his studies at the Kiev Conservatoire under Natalia Gridneva and Valery Kozlov. He refined his studies with Hamish Milne at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Later he was awarded Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM) and served as a jury member at the Benjamin Britten International Violin Competition London and the prestigious “Vendome Prize” International Piano Competition.

Being a passionate chamber musician, Alexei Grynyuk is part of a piano trio with his regular partners violinist Nicola Benedetti and cellist Leonard Elschenbroich. Described by *The Telegraph* as “A trio of True Stars” together they have toured the world extensively in the past decade performing at the Royal Albert Hall London, Birmingham Symphony Hall, LSO St. Luke’s, Frankfurt Alte Oper, 92Y New York, Gardner Museum Boston as well as festival appearances at BBC Proms, Ravinia, Gergiev, Istanbul, Cheltenham. and Edinburgh International.

PROGRAM NOTES

Piano Trio in E-flat Major, D.929

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

The premiere of the *Trio in E-flat Major* was one of the few public triumphs in Schubert’s brief life. It took place at a concert of his music given in Vienna on March 26, 1828, one year to the day—coincidentally—after Beethoven had died in that

city. Schubert was lucky in his performers on that occasion: the violinist was Joseph Böhm, the cellist Joseph Linke, and the pianist Carl Maria von Bocklet—all three had been associated with Beethoven, who admired their playing. Schubert’s friends had been after him for some time to arrange such a concert, but the shy composer, reluctant to take on the financial risk, had always put it off. The audience, packed with Schubert’s friends, was wildly enthusiastic. The concert even turned a profit, and the composer found himself briefly wealthy—he used some of the money to go hear Paganini, who was appearing then in Vienna. Through the remainder of the year a stream of masterpieces seemed to leap from Schubert’s pen, including the final revision of the *Ninth Symphony* and the *Fantasy in F Minor*, as well as the composition of the last three piano sonatas, the *Schwanengesang* songs, and the *Cello Quintet*. But that stream would come to a sudden stop in November—eight months after his triumphant concert Schubert was dead at age 31.

The highlight of the March concert had been this trio, written the previous November. Lasting three-quarters of an hour, it is of gigantic proportions for a piano trio, and some critics have charged that—particularly in its outer movements—it is too long. Many other listeners—charmed by Schubert’s melodies, the wonderful harmonic freedom of his late music, and the trio’s high spirits—would not wish it one instant shorter.

The *Allegro* opens with its first theme, a powerful unison figure three octaves deep. This theme is only six measures long, but in that brief space Schubert has already modulated from E-flat major to C minor. Almost instantly, a countertheme spins off this main idea, and later in the movement still another theme grows out of this opening idea—it is as if that basic shape is so pregnant and Schubert’s melodic gift so fertile that themes are being born in front of us. The quiet second subject is first heard in the piano over steady strings. The long development moves easily over silvery piano triplets before the concluding cadence, which ingeniously combines both main themes.

The *Andante con moto* begins with an accompaniment that is brilliant in its understatement—rather than offering a steady rhythm, Schubert gives the piano an odd little hop, and that asymmetric hop is the difference between routine and inspired writing. Over it, the cello sings the soaring

and noble main melody. This opening appears to have had an unusual inspiration: in November 1827, just as he was beginning work on this trio, Schubert heard a recital by the Swedish tenor Isak Albert Berg, and among the Swedish songs sung on that occasion was one whose main theme-shape anticipates Schubert’s theme here. The movement rises to a huge climax, marked triple *forte*, before concluding quietly on the opening theme.

The third movement is marked *Scherzo: Allegro moderato*, though in a letter to his publisher Schubert referred to it as a “minuet.” While it retains some of the shape of the classical minuet, it is much too fiercely argued to be dance music, and its real identity lies somewhere in that area between scherzo and minuet. Schubert builds the outer sections on canons, while the trio is full of energy. The concluding *Allegro moderato* in particular has been criticized for its length, but in its original form it was even longer—Schubert in fact had made cuts even before he sent it to his publisher. The movement flows along agreeably, and in an unusual example of cyclic writing Schubert twice brings back the big cello tune—the so-called “Swedish” theme—from the slow movement. The reappearance of this theme, now varied rhythmically, is one of the most striking moments in this striking music.

Piano Trio in A Minor, Opus 50

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
(1840–1893)

Nikolai Rubinstein, brother of the pianist Anton Rubinstein, had hired Tchaikovsky to teach composition at the Moscow Conservatory and later encouraged him as a composer, conducting and championing his music. When Nikolai died on March 23, 1881, at the age of 46, Tchaikovsky resolved to write a work in his memory, but it was difficult for him to choose the form for such a piece. Nikolai had been a pianist, but a piano concerto did not seem a proper memorial piece. Tchaikovsky disliked the combination of piano and strings in chamber music but eventually overcame this aversion to write the *Trio in A Minor* as the memorial to Rubinstein; it was the only time Tchaikovsky used a piano in his chamber music. He began work on the trio in December 1881 while living in Rome and completed the score on February 9, 1882.

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The manuscript is inscribed: “In memory of a Great Artist.”

A particular memory came back to Tchaikovsky as he worked on this music: in 1873, after the premiere of Tchaikovsky’s *The Snow Maiden* (which had been conducted by Rubinstein), faculty members from the Moscow Conservatory had gone on a picnic in the sunny, blossom-covered countryside. Here they were surrounded by curious peasants, and the gregarious Rubinstein quickly made friends and had the peasants singing and dancing. As he set to work on the trio, Tchaikovsky remembered how much Rubinstein had liked one of these songs.

The trio as completed has a very unusual form: it is in two massive movements that last a total of almost 50 minutes. The first movement in particular has proven baffling to critics, who have been unable to decide whether it is in sonata or ron-

do form. It is built on two sharply contrasted themes: the cello’s somber opening melody—which Tchaikovsky marks *molto espressivo*—and a vigorous falling theme for solo piano, marked *Allegro giusto*. Tchaikovsky alternates these themes through this dramatic movement, which closes with a quiet restatement of the cello’s opening theme, now played in octaves by the piano.

The second movement is a huge set of variations. The theme of these variations is the peasant melody Rubinstein had liked so much on the picnic in 1873, and Tchaikovsky puts this simple tune through 11 quite different variations. Particularly striking are the fifth, in which the piano’s high notes seem to echo the sound of sleigh bells; the sixth, a waltz introduced by the cello; the eighth, a powerful fugue; and the tenth, a mazurka introduced by the piano. So individual and dramatic are these variations that several critics instantly assumed that each must

depict an incident from Rubinstein’s life and set about guessing what each variation was “about.” Tchaikovsky was dumbfounded when this was reported to him; to a friend he wrote: “How amusing! To compose music without the slightest desire to represent something and suddenly to discover that it represents this or that, it is what Moliere’s *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* must have felt when he learnt that he had been speaking in prose all his life.”

The trio concludes with a final variation so huge that many have considered it a separate movement. It comes to a somber end: Tchaikovsky marks the final page *Lugubre* (“lugubrious”), and over a funeral march in the piano come fragments of the cello’s theme from the very beginning of the first movement, now marked *piangendo*: “weeping.” This theme gradually dissolves, and the piano marches into silence.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger