presents...

Z.E.N. TRIO
Zhang Zuo | Piano
Esther Yoo | Violin
Narek Hakhnazaryan | Cello

Friday, October 18, 2019 | 7:30pm
Herbst Theatre

SCHUBERT
Adagio in E-flat Major, D.897 “Notturno”

BRAHMS
Piano Trio in B Major, Opus 8
Allegro con brio
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro

INTERMISSION

SHOSTAKOVICH
Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Opus 67
Andante; Moderato; Poco più mosso
Allegro con brio
Largo
Allegretto; Adagio

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Christian A. Jessen

Z.E.N. Trio is represented by Harrison Parrott
201 Talgarth Road, London W6 8BJ, UK harrisonparrott.co.uk

Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

For Tickets and More: sfperformances.org | 415.392.2545
San Francisco Performances presents the San Francisco debut of Z.E.N. Trio. Narek Hakhnazaryan made his solo recital debut in February 2018.

The Z.E.N. Trio—pianist Zhang Zuo, violinist Esther Yoo and cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan—met on the BBC New Generation Artists’ scheme in 2015 and have since performed concerts together for BBC radio as well as across the UK and elsewhere in Europe. While the trio’s name, “Z.E.N.” is an acronym for the three artists’ initials, it also represents the philosophy with which they approach chamber music making: the forgoing of the self for total togetherness.

An imaginative and electrifying performer, Zhang Zuo (“Zee Zee”) began her musical training in Germany at the age of five. Upon returning to her native China, she became one of the most sought-after young artists in the nation, collaborating with leading Chinese orchestras with whom she retains a close link. From 2013 to 2015 she was a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist, culminating in her BBC Proms debut. Esther plays regular return engagements with Philharmonia Orchestra at London’s Royal Festival Hall as well as with Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and has performed in tours across Asia and South America. She has worked with conductors such as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Andrew Davis, Pablo Heras-Casado and Osmo Vänskä, and as a recitalist she has performed across Europe and the US, including for New York’s Lincoln Center. In spring 2016 Deutsche Grammophon released her Tchaikovsky album with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Vladimir Ashkenazy, following her 2015 debut on the label, featuring the Glazunov and Sibelius concertos.

Since winning the Cello First Prize and Gold Medal at the XIV International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2011 at the age of 22, Narek Hakhnazaryan has performed with most major orchestras across the globe and has established himself internationally as one of the finest cellists of his generation. From 2014 to 2016 he joined BBC’s New Generation Artists scheme and in August 2016 he made his BBC Proms debut. Narek has performed with orchestras such as the Orchestre de Paris, London Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Sydney Symphony and NHK Symphony, and with conductors such as Valery Gergiev, Neeme Järvi, Mikhail Pletnev, Leonard Slatkin and Tugan Sokhiev. He made a hugely successful debut with the LA Philharmonic (Lionel Bringuier) at the Hollywood Bowl in 2015 and toured with the WDR Symphony (Jukka-Pekka Saraste) in the same year.

**Program Notes**

**Adagio in E-flat Major, D.897**
**Franz Schubert**
(1797–1828)

Schubert’s *Adagio in E-flat Major* was published in 1846, 18 years after the composer’s death, under the name Notturno. Scholars now believe it to be a rejected slow movement for the *Piano Trio in B-flat Major, D.898*. The name Notturno, or “nocturne,” did not originate with Schubert (his manuscript simply says Adagio) and was probably the invention of that first publisher, but it has remained part of the way we think of this music.

Schubert’s sense of this brief movement may be seen in his complex markings: though the dynamic of the opening is pianissimo, Schubert stresses that it should also be appassionato. Over softly-arpeggiated piano chords, violin and cello sing a long duet in thirds. Suddenly the roles reverse: the piano has that gentle melody while the strings frame it with pizzicato accompaniment. The central episode moves into E Major and grows more energetic, the music proceeding along sharply-dotted rhythms. Schubert brings back his opening string duet and weaves material from the trio section into the quiet coda.

**Piano Trio in B Major, Opus 8**
**Johannes Brahms**
(1833–1897)

The *Trios in B Major* had a curious genesis: Brahms composed it twice. He wrote the first version in 1853–54, when he was only 20, and the trio was played in that form for many years. Then in 1889, when the 56-year-old Brahms was at the height of his powers, he returned to this work of his youth and
has a wonderful be

Trio in B Major combines some of the

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The stunning Largo is a passacaglia. The piano announces eight solemn chords that form the bass line of the passacaglia, and there follow five repetitions as the strings sing poised, grieving lines above the piano chords. The concluding Allegretto follows without pause. This movement is said to have been inspired by accounts that the Nazis had forced Jews to dance on their graves before execution. Shostakovitch does not try to depict this in his music, but the sinister, grotesque dance for pizzicato violin that opens this movements suggests a vision of horror all its own. Shostakovitch makes the connection clear with the second theme, of unmistakably Jewish origin, for piano above pizzicato chords. The close brings back themes from earlier movements—the cello melody from the very beginning and the entire passacaglia theme—and finally the little dance tune breaks down and the music vanishes on quiet pizzicato strokes.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger

subjected it to a revision so thorough that it amounted to a virtual re-composition. With characteristic understatement, Brahms said that his revision “did not provide it with a wig, but just combed and arranged its hair a little,” but a comparison of the two versions shows how greatly Brahms had refined his compositional techniques across the course of his career.

It was the development sections of the early version that bothered the mature Brahms most, and when he revised the trio he kept the opening section of each movement virtually intact but wrote new second subjects for the first, third, and fourth movements. The development sections, which had been episodic and unfocused in the first version, became concise and economic in the second, and—as revised—the Trio in B Major combines some of the best features of early and late Brahms: his youthful impetuosity is wed to an enormously refined technique. Brahms joked that perhaps he should change the opus number from 8 to 108 but finally decided to let the original number stand, and that is misleading—far from being an early work, the later version offers some of his most mature and sophisticated music.

The Trio in B Major has a wonderful beginning. Piano alone suggests the shape of the first theme, and then the cello sings that theme in its full span. This is one of those melodies of that characteristic Brahmsian nobility—his individual voice was clear right from the start. The piano introduces the singing second subject (a new theme that Brahms created as part of the revision), and the development focuses mostly on this theme. But in a magical touch Brahms brings back the opening melody—now marked Tranquillo—and embellishes it softly as the movement gradually gathers strength and drives toward its firm concluding chords.

The scherzo was the one movement that Brahms kept almost intact, only substituting a new coda for the original. Brahms moves to B minor here, and the staccato opening has a spooky, muttering quality. This sets up the middle section beautifully, giving way to another one of those great Brahms themes that flows along nobly. The opening material returns, and Brahms concludes with the new coda.

The Adagio has a solemn, chorale-like beginning, as piano and strings exchange phrases, but the real glory of this movement comes with its lovely second subject, sung by the cello. This theme was composed by the mature Brahms during the revisi

vision, and it is of such expressive autumnal lyricism that it transforms the original movement from the effort of a tentative beginner to the work of a master.

The finale pulses darkly forward on dotted rhythms. Its second subject, also added during the revision, is a firmly-striding idea that Brahms marks pesante (heavy). The movement drives implacably to its powerful close, and—in a surprising touch—Brahms ends not in the expected home key of B Major, but in B minor.

Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Opus 67

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

The Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941 was the greatest catastrophe ever to befell any nation. In four years, 20 million Russians died, and the country sustained damage and suffering that no amount of time could fully repair. Shostakovich, then in his late 30s, reacted to the war with two quite different kinds of music. The public Shostakovich wrote the “Leningrad” Symphony and marches and songs. Patriotic and optimistic, these made the right noises for the time—and for the Soviet government. But the private Shostakovich recorded his reactions to these years in other music. The Eighth Symphony of 1943 and the Piano Trio in E minor of 1944 reveal a much less optimistic Shostakovich, one anguished by the war. This was not the kind of music a Soviet government committed to the artistic doctrine of Socialist Realism wanted to hear, and performances of the Trio were banned for a time, and the Eighth Symphony was singled out for particular censure at the infamous meeting of the Union of Soviet Composers in 1948.

Two particular events in the winter of 1944 appear to have inspired this trio. The first came in February, when Shostakovich’s closest friend, Ivan Sollertinsky, died (the Trio is dedicated to his memory). The second was the discovery—as the Nazi armies retreated—of atrocities committed against Russian Jews. Shostakovich completed the Trio in the spring and played the piano at its first performance in Leningrad on November 14, 1944.

The very beginning of the Andante—an eerie melody for muted cello, played entirely in harmonics—sets the spare and somber mood of this music. The other voices enter in canon, with the main theme of this sonata-form movement a variation of the opening cello melody. The Allegro con brio opens with fanfare-like figures for the strings. This is one of those hard driving, almost mechanistic Shostakovich scherzos, and its dancing middle section in G Major brings scant relief.

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET with DAWN UPshaw

Soprano

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