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**West Cork Chamber Music Festival 2021**

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## **Bantry and Beyond**

*Coda*

### **27. Citizens of Everywhere (2)**

Filmed at Studio 150 Bethlehemkerk, Amsterdam

**Mairéad Hickey** [violin]

**Ella van Poucke** [cello]

**José Gallardo** [piano]

**Arensky**

*Piano Trio in D minor*

**Mozart**

*Piano Trio in B flat K.502*

**Anton Arensky** [1861-1906]

***Piano Trio No.1 in D minor Op.32***

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Scherzo - Allegro molto*
3. *Elegia - Adagio*
4. *Finale - Allegro non troppo*

The second half of the nineteenth century was a fertile period in the short history of Russian classical music. Tchaikovsky became something of a national hero and the Rubinstein brothers founded the famous conservatoires at Moscow and St Petersburg. There were passionate debates about the influence of European music and whether it would or would not stifle the national character of Russian music. In retrospect the two towering figures were Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky, who managed to stand above purely stylistic concerns and to create music of true substance.

Arensky was a student of both Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky. He was a major figure in his time, a well-known pianist and conductor, professor of harmony and counterpoint at the Moscow Conservatoire, where his pupils included Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Glier, and Director of the Imperial Chapel at St Petersburg. However he was addicted to alcohol and gambling and, like Mussorgsky, met an early death. His works have a ready flow of lyrical melody, often sentimental in the Russian manner, and his easy command of the keyboard made him a wonderful composer of romantic songs. One of his best-known and most successful pieces is the D minor piano trio, composed in memory of the cellist Karl Davidov, who had been director of the St Petersburg Conservatoire.

Arensky's gift for striking melodies is immediately apparent in the first movement whose two main themes are particularly memorable. It is a huge movement constructed with great skill demanding great virtuosity from the players, especially the pianist. Arensky was particularly fond of Chopin and this shows in some of the piano writing and naturally the cello is given some wonderfully expressive moments.

The Scherzo allows the pianist to show off again to great effect, while the trio goes dramatically over the top with an outrageously sentimental theme that the strings revel in delightedly. The *Elegia* is a very Russian mourning for a lost friend. Its second section is particularly effective with the piano picking out the melody over gently sobbing strings, but the whole movement has a quiet but expressive authority.

The Finale begins boisterously with a hard-driven rondo theme. There are three strongly contrasted episodes, each one moving further away from the relentless rhythm of the main theme. The third episode is greatly extended and recalls both the third and first movement before the rondo theme comes sweeping back and brings the work to a resounding conclusion.

*Francis Humphrys*

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** [1756-1791]***Piano Trio in B flat major K.502*** [1786]

1. *Allegro*
2. *Larghetto*
3. *Allegretto*

The piano trio was slower than the string quartet to develop as an important chamber music ensemble. This was partly due to the development of the piano itself, which was still the lightweight fortepiano and nowhere near the modern concert grand. This in turn affected the complex issue of balance given the unequal tone and dynamic properties of the three instruments, a balance that was constantly shifting as the instruments themselves changed. Early piano trios had been little more than accompanied sonatas, one step up from the Baroque continuo set up where bass instruments were brought in to reinforce the harpsichord. The accompanied sonata would primarily be a keyboard sonata with optional lines for cello and violin. We could safely say that in the last years of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven between them created the piano trio out of the ruins of the Baroque trio sonata and the early classical accompanied sonata.

Mozart's five trios in the period 1786-8 set things going, Haydn kept things moving in his London trios of the nineties and Beethoven's three Opus 1 trios of 1795 finished the process. This concert features Mozart's most admired trio from 1786. As with the six great string quartets dedicated to Haydn, Mozart's sketches of the piano trios demonstrate that he struggled to get the balance right.

The opening Allegro borrows the idea of monothematic sonata form from Haydn. The unmistakable opening theme reappears as the second subject dressed up in a different key with varied scoring. Having got over this first surprise and had it re-confirmed in the exposition repeat, Mozart springs a second surprise by beginning the exposition with a completely new and charming theme before bringing back the main theme in the minor. Much of this delicious movement owes its delight to its many reminders of the style of his great piano concertos.

The tender Larghetto speaks for itself, graceful and beautiful and dreamlike. The witty little rondo finale appears in its appointed place and brings the Trio to a lively conclusion.  
*Francis Humphrys*

*Thank you for watching*

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