

CELESTIAL SCHUBERT

2:00PM

SUNDAY 13 OCTOBER 2024

REARDON THEATRE



Franz SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

Piano Trio No. 2 in E \flat major, D. 929

1. *Allegro*

2. *Andante con moto*

3. *Scherzo. Allegro moderato*

4. *Allegro moderato*

Zoë Black *Violin*

Timo-Veikko Valve *Cello*

Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

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Along with the single-movement adagio known as the *Notturmo* and the First Piano Trio in B \flat major, the Second Piano Trio in E \flat is one of the last pieces Schubert ever wrote, composed about a year before he died. Unlike many of his late works, Schubert was actually able to hear a performance of this work. After its hugely (and unusually) successful premiere, Schubert made it the centrepiece of a packed-out concert in March 1828 devoted entirely to his own music, a concert which, tragically, would prove to be his first, and last, big triumph. Years later Schumann wrote, “About 10 years ago, a Schubert trio passed across the face of the musical world like some wrathful comet in the sky. It was his hundredth opus, and shortly afterwards ... he died.”

The Second Piano Trio is a work of enormous, almost symphonic dimensions that can run in excess of 50 minutes – a prime example of the composer’s “heavenly length”. The allegro first movement opens with a majestic theme reminiscent of Beethoven, played in unison by all three players, that soon gives way to a vivacious theme in the cello. Chromatic piano runs lead to a wistful second subject in the quite unexpected key of B minor – a far cry from the tonic E \flat major! A triplet figure gains steadily in importance and leads to the third important theme of the exposition, strongly reminiscent of the ‘Unfinished’ Symphony. This theme, with an accompaniment of triplets, dominates the development section, wandering through a number of keys before the return of the energetic E \flat major subject in the recapitulation.

The slow movement commences with a hauntingly whimsical melody first heard in the cello, which Schubert took from a Swedish folk song he had recently heard, *Se solen sjunker* (*See the Sun Go Down*). A friendly theme in E \flat major is introduced by the violin, but the general character becomes more and more intense, twice reaching a passionate climax before the funeral march conclusion. In the graceful, dancing scherzo, back in E \flat major, the piano and strings play in canon, their respective melodies one bar apart. The A \flat trio section is more down-to-earth, despite a reminder of the wistful second subject of the opening movement.

One of the longest movements in chamber music literature, the finale begins with a sprightly melody on the piano, in the same key and with a similar character to the previous movement. Soon, however, it gives way to a more serious theme in the minor key. In a combination of sonata and rondo form, these two themes take over from each other with a brilliant variety of modulations. Twice the cello reminds us of the poignant lament of the second movement, and a final modulation from minor to major brings the work to a glorious conclusion.