



MIDDLEBURY  
PERFORMING ARTS SERIES  
P R E S E N T S

# *Sophie Shao and Friends*

FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 2023  
MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



# **Sophie Shao and Friends**

Scott Yoo, Violin

Sophie Shao, Cello

John Novacek, Piano

## *Program*

**Trio élégiaque No. 1 in G Minor**

**Sergei Rachmaninoff**

(1873–1943)

**Piano Trio**

**Reena Esmail**

Movement I

(b. 1983)

Movement II

Movement III

Movement IV

*Intermission*

**Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 90 “Dumky”**      **Antonín Dvořák**

Lento maestoso – Allegro quasi doppio movimento (1841-1904)

Poco Adagio – Vivace non troppo

Andante – Vivace non troppo

Andante moderato – Allegretto scherzando

Allegro – Meno mosso

Lento maestoso – Vivace

A replay of this concert is available on demand until 7:30 PM ET

on Sunday, April 23 at

<http://go.middlebury.edu/Sophie-2023/>

Tonight’s performance is made possible thanks to support  
from the Paul Nelson Performance Endowment  
and Rothrock Family Residency Fund.

## *Program Notes*

### **Trio élégiaque No. 1 in G Minor**

#### **Sergei Rachmaninoff**

*Program note by John Henken, courtesy of the L.A. Philharmonic.*

Rachmaninoff had a precarious and emotionally fraught childhood. His father dissipated the family fortune and they had to move several times, his sister died in a diphtheria epidemic, and his parents separated. Yet he remained enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory until 1885, when he failed all of his academic subjects (in part, at least, because his now single mother was no longer supervising his homework). That led to him being transferred to the Moscow Conservatory, where he was boarded with a notoriously strict piano teacher, Nikolai Zverev.

That proved to be a blessing for his career, as Rachmaninoff became one of the most prodigiously skilled virtuosos on the keyboard. And at Zverev's apartment, the young musician met many of the leading Russian musicians of the day, including Tchaikovsky and Arensky. Rachmaninoff studied harmony with Arensky at the Conservatory, but

it was Tchaikovsky who proved the most influential, as an idolized mentor.

In January 1892, Rachmaninoff made his official debut in Moscow, playing solo pieces by Chopin, Liszt, and Tchaikovsky, plus some of his own chamber works: two pieces for cello and piano, and his Trio *élégiaque* in G minor, which he had written less than two weeks before the concert in just four days.

Like most of his music of this time, this trio was highly influenced by Tchaikovsky, though the voice is already clearly Rachmaninoff's own. It is cast in a single long movement, with pronounced similarities to the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio in A minor, composed in 1882 after the death of Nikolai Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky's friend, teacher, and the director of the Moscow Conservatory. Tchaikovsky's long first movement was called "*Pezzo elegiaco*" (Elegiac Piece), and like it, Rachmaninoff's "*Elegiac Trio*" ends with a funeral march. There are other points of reference to Tchaikovsky, but the Trio's powerful sweep, along an arc of growing animation before the somber close, is pure Rachmaninoff.

Almost two years later, Tchaikovsky died after a sudden illness (and before conducting the premiere of Rachmaninoff's orchestral fantasy *The Rock*, as he had wished). Rachmaninoff turned again to this format, composing a second *Trio élégiaque* in memory of his mentor.

## **Piano Trio**

### **Reena Esmail**

*Program note by Aaron Grad, written for the work's 2019 premiere.*

"I wish I could live in India and America at the same time," says Reena Esmail (b. 1983), the daughter of Indian immigrants who has become one of the most respected young composers in the United States; "I wish they shared a border, and I could build a little home right in between them. I know I can't do that in the physical world, but this is where I live every day in my music."

Esmail's compositions straddle two of the world's most sophisticated musical traditions. On one side is the art music of Europe and its system of tonal harmony that developed over the last 400-plus years, and on the other, Hindustani classical music from North India,

organized around collections of tones known as raags that go back many centuries further.

Studies at the Juilliard School and the Yale School of Music grounded Esmail in the practices of the West's classical music, including its precise system of notation that allows performers of any background to interpret unfamiliar nuances. As a Fulbright-Nehru Scholar, she was able to spend a year in India studying the classical music of her ancestors, absorbing the oral tradition built on complex patterns and pitches that often can't be categorized within Western norms.

Writing a Piano Trio has fulfilled one of Esmail's oldest ambitions as a musician. Growing up as a talented pianist, trios with violin and cello were her favorite form of chamber music, and she won a life-changing competition that resulted in her performing Mendelssohn's Second Piano Trio with members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She also counts Ravel's Piano Trio as an all-time favorite work, noting, "So much of what I've learned about color and texture in my writing comes from Ravel." After three years of work and a pile of sketches that is up to 300 pages and counting (with less than three weeks to go before the premiere), Esmail is still polishing off this substantial score

that reckons with the rigorous tradition of the four-movement piano trio.

Authentic raags appear in each movement of the trio, including the monsoon season raag known as Megh that informs a chorale from the strings and other gestures in the first movement. In a tempo marked “Ephemeral,” the smooth modal phrases and long slurs highlight Esmail’s affinity with Ravel, who also looked outside the Western canon to expand his shimmering soundscapes. Flutters, slides and harmonics continue in the slow movement, creating a sense of improvisatory freedom while the music slips in and out of time.

By casting the quivering third movement as a scherzo, Esmail acknowledges her debt to Mendelssohn (the king of those elfin, lighter-than-air diversions), but moments of manic hilarity and sheer muscle recall a more subversive master of the piano trio, Shostakovich. In the finale, a singing string melody supported by “luminous” piano filigree surges to a droning climax marked “powerful, broad, intense.”

When the unhurried ending arrives with glimmering harmonics and crystalline chords, this work completes an arc that places it squarely



within the storied lineage of the “classical” piano trio – while making it clear just how irrelevant such boundaries truly are.

## **Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 90 “Dumky”**

**Antonín Dvořák**

*Program note by Herbert Glass, courtesy of the L.A. Philharmonic.*

The spirit of folk music, which is to say folk stylizations, since the melodies are inevitably his own, is at the heart of Antonín Dvořák’s mature compositions. In his Op. 90, the last of the great Bohemian’s four trios for piano, violin, and cello, he is both at his most original and his folksiest: even the formal layout is derived from the music of “the people” rather than from a classical style.

The Trio was completed in Prague in 1891, following a string of successes and unprecedented acclaim within and outside the Czech borders. Dvořák had recently been appointed professor of composition and instrumentation at the Prague Conservatory. An honorary doctorate from Cambridge followed. In Germany, the Hussite Overture (from 1883) and the recent G-major Symphony (Op. 88) were rapturously received; the likewise recent E-flat Piano Quartet, Op. 84,

and the Piano Quintet in the same key (written three years earlier), Op. 81, met similar approbation at their first Vienna performances and then throughout Germany. England, which had already capitulated to him and his creations a decade earlier, was honored (in Birmingham) with the world premiere of his Requiem in October of '91, several months after his being invited to assume the directorship of the newly established American Conservatory of Music in New York, resulting in a four-year-long sojourn on these shores. It was in all a good year. A very good year.

The subtitle of the Op. 90 Trio, "Dumky" (plural of dumka), describes the style of all six of its movements, a dumka being a Slavic (some sources state specifically Ukrainian) folk song marked by abrupt changes from doleful to exuberant. Op. 90 was introduced in February of 1891 by violinist Ferdinand Lachner, cellist Hanuš Wihan, to whom Dvořák would later dedicate his Cello Concerto, with the composer at the piano. The performance took place in conjunction with Dvořák's being awarded an honorary doctorate by the Charles University of Prague. Tradition has it that pre-publication proofs were read by his good friend Johannes Brahms while Dvořák was in America.

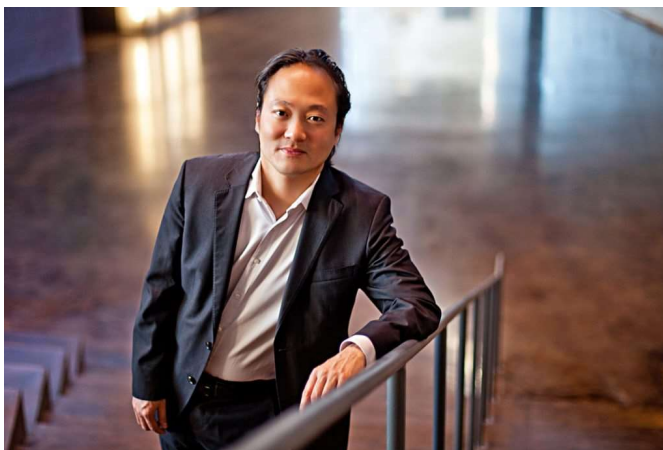
It isn't obvious at first, but the work has a discernible form, although not the sonata form of Dvořák's prior trios. The first three dumky are a subtly connected whole: "confirmation of this," according to Dvořák scholar Otakar Sourek, "is not only in the 'attacca subito' after the first two, as compared with 'a short pause' after the others, but in the logical unity of the content, from the cries of anguished lamentation to quiet mourning, followed by the heart-balm of consolation and reconciliation, and also in the strikingly close key relationships: the first dumka in E minor (at times E major) concluding in the key of C-sharp minor, in which the second dumka remains throughout, while the third set is in A major."

Also worth noting is that while the first three dumky are contrasted as mentioned above, a single mood dominates two of the next three: the march-like fourth is the work's pensive slow movement, although here as in the subsequent dumky there is just enough contrast to remain true to the form; the energetic, contrapuntal fifth is its scherzo. The finale, alternating between C major and C minor, reverts to the even-handed alternation of the mournful and effervescent that characterizes the first three dumky.

## *Artist Biographies*

### **Scott Yoo, Violin**

American conductor Scott Yoo is the Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Mexico City Philharmonic and the Music Director of Festival Mozaic. He is



also the Host and Executive Producer of the all-new PBS series *Now Hear This* presented by *Great Performances* – the first show about classical music on American prime time TV in 50 years. He is the Conductor of the Colorado College Music Festival, and the founder of the Medellín Festicámara, a chamber music program that brings together world-class artists with underprivileged young musicians. Mr. Yoo has led the Colorado, Dallas, Indianapolis, New World, San Francisco and Utah Symphonies, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra in their Elliott Carter Festival, and in his Carnegie Hall debut. In Europe, he conducted the English Chamber Orchestra, City of London Sinfonia, the Britten Sinfonia, L'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Odense Symphony, and the Estonian National Symphony. In Asia, Mr. Yoo has led the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, and the Seoul Philharmonic

and Busan Philharmonic in Korea. Mr. Yoo recently conducted the London Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in recordings for Sony Classical.

A proponent of the music of our time, Mr. Yoo has premiered 76 works by 39 composers.

With the Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, Mr. Yoo recorded Mark O'Connor's *American Seasons* for Sony Classical; John Harbison's chamber orchestra works with soprano Dawn Upshaw for Bridge Records, nominated for a National Public Radio Performance Today Award; and song cycles of Earl Kim with sopranos Benita Valente and Karol Bennett for New World, named a Critics Choice by the *New York Times*. Other recording projects include complete orchestral works of Earl Kim with the RTE National Orchestra of Ireland for Naxos; the works of Carter, Lieberson, and Ruders; and the cycle of Mozart Piano Concertos.

As a violinist, Mr. Yoo has appeared as soloist with the Boston Symphony, Dallas Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Colorado Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, New World Symphony, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. He has also made guest appearances with

chamber music festivals throughout the United States, including Bargemusic, Boston Chamber Music Society, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Kingston Chamber Music Festival, Laurel Music Festival, New Hampshire Music Festival, and Seattle Chamber Music Festival.

After beginning his musical studies at age three, he received First Prize in the 1988 Josef Gingold International Violin Competition, the 1989 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, and the 1994 Avery Fisher Career Grant. In 1993, Mr. Yoo founded the Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, conducting the ensemble in its subscription series at Jordan Hall in Boston and the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall in Troy, NY, and on tour at such venues as Avery Fisher Hall and the 92nd Street 'Y' in New York, and the Library of Congress in Washington.

Scott Yoo was born in Tokyo and raised in Glastonbury, CT. He attended Harvard University, where he received a bachelor's degree. He studied violin with Roman Totenberg, Albert Markov, Paul Kantor and Dorothy DeLay, and conducting with Michael Gilbert and Michael Tilson-Thomas.

<https://scott-yoo.com/>

## Sophie Shao, Cello

Cellist Sophie Shao, winner of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and top prizes at the Rostropovich and Tchaikovsky



competitions, is a versatile and passionate artist whose performances the *New York Times* has described as “eloquent, powerful,” “beautifully phrased and interestingly textured,” the *LA Times* noted as “impressive”, and the *Washington Post* called “deeply satisfying.”

Shao has appeared as soloist throughout the United States, Europe and Asia, with the Houston Symphony, American Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, Pacific Symphony, BBC Concert Orchestra, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Symphony Orchestra.

She particularly loves playing chamber music and has been a frequent recitalist and guest in festivals such as Chamber Music Northwest, Festival Mosaic, Santa Fe, Vail, Marlboro Music. She was a member of Chamber Music Society Two/Bowers program, a young artist residency of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

Ms. Shao's recordings include Andre Previn's *Reflections for Cello, English Horn, and Orchestra* on EMI Classics, Howard Shore's *Mythic Gardens* on Sony Classical, Marlboro Music Festival's 50th Anniversary on Bridge Records, and the Complete Bach Suites.

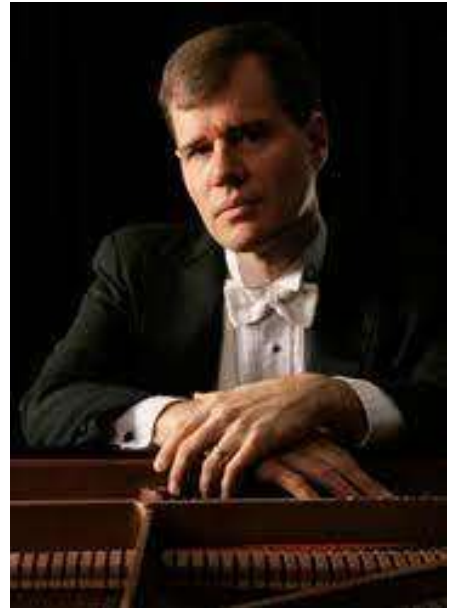
A native of Houston, Texas, Ms. Shao began playing cello at age six, and was a student of Shirley Trepel, the former principal cellist of the Houston Symphony. At age thirteen she enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where she studied cello with David Soyer and chamber music with Felix Galimir. After graduating from the Curtis Institute, she continued her studies with Aldo Parisot at Yale University, receiving a B.A. in Religious Studies from Yale College and an M.M. from the Yale School of Music, where she was enrolled as a Paul and Daisy Soros Fellow. She is on the faculty of the University of Connecticut and plays on an Honore Derazey cello ca. 1855, formerly owned by Pablo Casals.

<http://sophieshao.com/>



## **John Novacek, Piano**

Versatile Grammy-nominated pianist John Novacek regularly tours the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia as soloist and chamber musician/collaborator. The past several seasons included solo concerto performances with the Mexico City Philharmonic, Austin Symphony Orchestra, Springfield (MA) Symphony Orchestra, Traverse (MI) Symphony Orchestra, Dayton Philharmonic, Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra, National Academy Orchestra of Canada, Symphony Nova Scotia, and the orchestras of Festival Mozaic, CCSMF, and Mendocino Music Festival. Regular performance venues include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center's David Geffen and Alice Tully Halls, Kennedy Center, Chicago's Symphony Center, Hollywood Bowl, Paris's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, London's Wigmore Hall and Barbican, and Tokyo's Suntory, Opera City, and Bunkamura Halls.



Mr. Novacek is a frequent festival invitee, having participated in Mostly Mozart, Aspen, Great Lakes, SummerFest La Jolla, Cape Cod, Caramoor, Music in the Vineyards (Napa), Colorado College, Festival Mozaic (San Luis Obispo), Ravinia, Seattle Chamber Music, Wolf Trap,

Mimir (Fort Worth and Melbourne, AU); Scotia, Toronto Summer Music, Ottawa Chamberfest, SweetWater and Festival of the Sound (Canada); BBC Proms (England); Braunschweig (Germany); Lucerne, Menuhin Gstaad, and Verbier (Switzerland); Sorrento (Italy); Serenates d'Estiu (Mallorca, Spain); and Stavanger (Norway). A familiar media presence, Novacek is regularly showcased on NPR's *Performance Today*, *St. Paul Sunday*, and (as composer/ performer) *A Prairie Home Companion*, plus has recently been prominently featured in discussion and demonstration on the highly successful PBS/Great Performances series *Now Hear This*, hosted by Scott Yoo.

A highly sought-after collaborator and chamber musician, Mr. Novacek has performed with Leila Josefowicz, Yo-Yo Ma, Joshua Bell, Cho-Liang Lin, Lynn Harrell, Emmanuel Pahud, Jeremy Denk, Renaud Capuçon, Truls Mørk, Matt Haimovitz, and Elmar Oliveira, as well as with members of the Emerson, Ying, Pacifica, St. Lawrence, Guarneri, Miró, and Tokyo String Quartets, and Beaux Arts Trio; also with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Chicago Symphony Orchestra in an orchestral obligato role. Mr. Novacek is a member of the multifaceted piano trio Intersection, with violinist Laura Frautschi and cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper.

As a tireless advocate for contemporary music, Mr. Novacek has worked closely with John Adams, Jennifer Higdon, John Harbison, George Rochberg, Gabriela Lena Frank, Kenji Bunch, Roberto Sierra, and John Zorn, and participated in numerous world premieres. Mr. Novacek himself is an active and well-regarded composer whose works have been taken up by many prominent soloists and ensembles; commissioning entities include the Pacific Symphony, Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Liaison, Ying Quartet, Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo, The 5 Browns, Concertante, Millennium, Eastman School of Music, Scotia Festival, Schubert Club, and Seattle Commissioning Club. In addition, he has arranged for The Three Tenors, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, and pop diva Diana Ross, and served stints as assistant pianist-arranger to Hollywood legends Lalo Schifrin and John Williams.

A much-recorded artist, Mr. Novacek's recordings have garnered numerous international awards (*Gramophone*, *BBC Music Magazine*, Grammy nomination for 'Best Chamber Music Performance'); labels include Philips, Nonesuch, Naxos, Arabesque, Warner Classics, Sony/BMG, Koch International, New World, Universal Classics, Ambassador, Azica, Marquis, Arkay, Neuma, IBS Classical, Pony Canyon, Four Winds, and EMI Classics.

Mr. Novacek received his M.Mus. at Mannes, studying piano with Peter Serkin, and chamber music with Felix Galimir and Julius Levine.

John Novacek is a Steinway Artist.

<http://parkerartists.com/John-Novacek.html>

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*We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure.*

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