

OSIRIS TRIO

Ellen Corver piano

Vesko Eschkenazy violin

Larissa Groeneveld cello

Tchaikovsky

Piano Trio in A opus 50

Ernest Bloch

Three Nocturnes



Osiris Trio Ellen Corver piano
Vesko Eschkenazy violin
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Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

Piano Trio in a opus 50

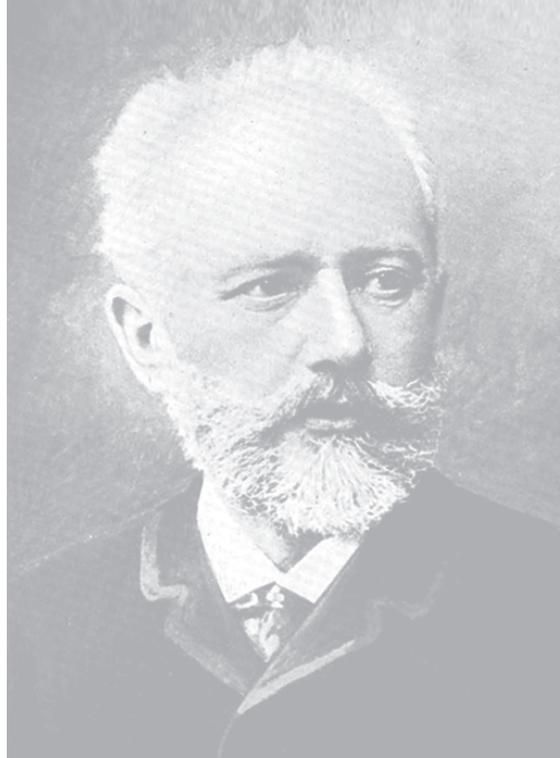
1. **Pezzo Elegiaco** (18:32)
Part A
2. **Tema con Variazioni** (1:12)
3. **Variazione I** (0:53)
4. **Variazione II** (0:41)
5. **Variazione III** (0:59)
6. **Variazione IV** (1:05)
7. **Variazione V** (0:44)
8. **Variazione VI** (2:33)
9. **Variazione VII** (1:28)
10. **Variazione VIII** (2:52)
11. **Variazione IX** (2:54)
12. **Variazione X** (1:47)
13. **Variazione XI** (2:31)
Part B
14. **Variazione Finale e Coda** (7:24)

Ernest Bloch (1880 - 1959)

Three Nocturnes

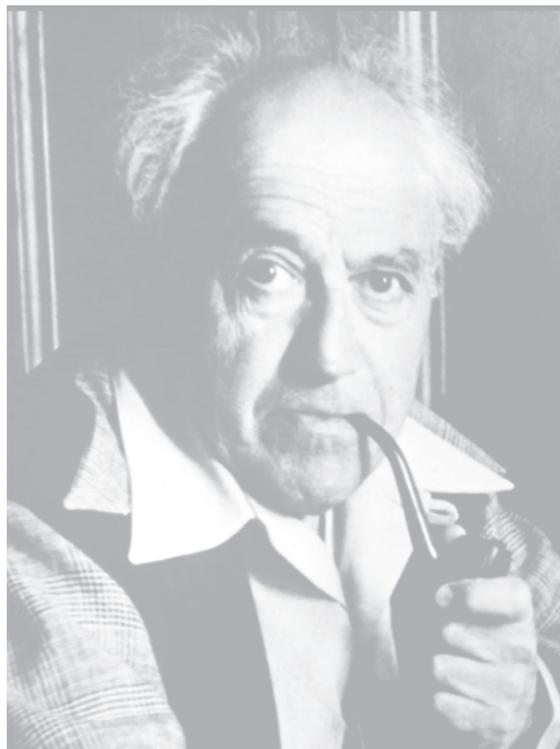
1. **Andante** (2:49)
2. **Andante quieto** (2:39)
3. **Tempestoso** (2:31)

Total playing time: 53:51 min



Tchaikovsky

Bloch





The Osiris Trio was formed in 1988. Since then, the trio has toured five continents and was twice given the honor of accompanying Her Majesty The Queen of The Netherlands on official state visits abroad. Over the past 19 years, the group has won a number of Dutch awards, including the "Philip Morris Finest Selection" Award and the Annie Bosboom Prize. The Osiris Trio has been supported by the Dutch Ministry of Culture since 2001.

The trio's discography encompasses two centuries of repertoire for piano trio and also includes song cycles and a highly regarded recording of Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* that earned the highest rating (10 out of 10) in the Dutch music magazine *Luister*. The Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* concluded its review of a CD of recently written Dutch piano trios by stating "premium international quality."

Diversity typifies the group's repertoire, which ranges from Haydn's oeuvre for piano trio to works by contemporary composers. The production of Klas Torstenssons *In großer Sehnsucht* even brought the trio on stage in a theatrical setting. The Dutch Society of Concert Hall and Theatre Managers recently nominated the Osiris Trio in the category "most impressive performances in chamber music."

Both Ellen Corver and Larissa Groeneveld hold teaching positions at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague. In 2005 violinist Vesko Eschkenazy, concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam since 2000, joined the trio, replacing founding member Peter Brunt (who still supports the trio in its educational and theatrical activities and in running its own chamber music festival).

The Osiris Trio has recently toured the United States, Canada, Indonesia, Sweden and France. A sampling of recent critical praise includes such accolades as: "edgy brilliance . . . largeness in every musical dimension of color, dynamic range and expression" (New York Times); "the Osiris Trio's playing is alive and often out of this world . . . blends utmost cohesion and tonal focus with expressive subtlety and urgency" (Cleveland Plain Dealer); and "nothing less than incandescent and revelatory" (Review Vancouver) Canada.

In June 2007, the trio established its own chamber music festival on the beautiful rural estate of Oranjewoud in Friesland. Over 15 concerts in three days were completely sold out and were given highest praise by audiences and the press.

Piano Trios by Tchaikovsky and Bloch

All his life Tchaikovsky struggled against what he himself called *'the inability in general to maintain a good grip on form. I have fought this innate weakness and – something I'm proud of – not without some decent results. Nonetheless I will go to my grave without having produced anything at all which has a perfect form.'* Dilettantism was anathema to him: *'You really have to outdo yourself if you want to avoid lapsing into dilettantism, of which even someone as gifted as Glinka was not entirely free...'*

Although Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky is generally seen as belonging to the Western-orientated Russian school, as indeed are most of his professional colleagues in Moscow, his musical art was not in fact very far removed from the ideals of the so-called 'Mighty Five' (or 'Mighty Handful'). In 1869 he met Balakirev, the actual founder of this national school in Petersburg. Balakirev recognized the young Tchaikovsky's talent and would ideally have liked to include him in his group. But the greatest problem as he saw it was that Tchaikovsky had received a formal conservatoire education, and that clashed with his ideals of an uncultivated, original Russian music.

Just how great Balakirev's influence on Tchaikovsky was is evident from the history of how the latter's first really successful score, the orchestral work *Romeo and Juliet*, originated. Tchaikovsky knew in the years leading up to 1870 that he was stuck. His composing was not going well, and he apparently had particular difficulty starting a new score. Where should he start from? In a letter Balakirev gave him as his answer that he himself always worked from within a literary context. That made an impression on Tchaikovsky, and the result was a new composition which he completed within six weeks, based indeed on a literary creation – Shakespeare's unforgettable story of Romeo and Juliet.

For Tchaikovsky all his compositions were to a large degree reflections of his innermost stirrings, and in many cases could even be described as autobiographical. This means that not only every melody, including all its nuances and the harmonies accompanying it, but also the entire structure of a piece of music is dependent on an emotional programme, whether or not a name can be put to it. This is probably why Tchaikovsky considered struggle to be the perfect form. The consequence of his way of composing, a conflict between the ideal form and the ideal content, can be heard clearly in his last three symphonies, but no less so in much of his chamber music, such as his *Piano Trio in a,*

which was the result of an event particularly emotional for Tchaikovsky, namely the death of Nikolai Rubinstein.

The Piano Trio in a op. 50 was written in 1881/82 'in memory of a great artist': the pianist, composer and conservatoire director Nikolai Rubinstein (1835-1881.) Although on several occasions Tchaikovsky was driven to despair by Rubinstein's despotic attitude, he did owe him a great debt of gratitude. Without him, Tchaikovsky the composer would never have reached public attention so quickly. It was also at Rubinstein's request that Tchaikovsky wrote his 1st Piano Concerto, even if Rubinstein refused to play the work himself unless it was largely re-written. Tchaikovsky declined to do this, but his love of and admiration for the founder of the Moscow Conservatoire remained intact, as the Piano Trio proves.

Thus this work became one huge 'in memoriam', one great elegy, consisting of two extensive sections: the actual elegy (*Pezzo elegiaco: Moderato assai*) and a Theme with twelve variations and a coda. The first part is typical of Tchaikovsky's grand and often supersensitive style. According to his brother Modest, the theme and variations reflect Rubinstein's love of folk music, and refer in particular to an excursion to the country in 1873 by teachers from the conservatoire, during which Rubinstein asked the farmers to sing and dance for him. In addition, every one of the variations was said to summon up memories of Rubinstein for those who knew him.

Of the twelve variations the Waltz (the sixth variation) is furthest removed from the theme. The Waltz, after all, reminds one of the then already very popular opera *Eugene Onegin*, and particularly of the waltz at the beginning of its second act. At the end of the extensive cycle of variations, in the coda, the elegiac atmosphere and the theme of the first part are restored: a masterful twist which immediately makes you forget the bulkiness of the variations and places the whole Trio in the perspective of its tragic background – the death of Rubinstein.

Furthermore, for the Piano Trio Tchaikovsky wrote an almost disproportionately demanding piano part, no doubt recalling the rejection of his 1st Piano Concerto, but not without awareness of his own pianistic ability (even if the first performance was actually given by the composer Taneyev.) Herman Laroche, the well-known critic of the time and friend of Tchaikovsky, wrote of the latter's piano-playing:

'Tchaikovsky played the piano well, and could tackle the most difficult pieces with power

and brilliance. For my taste his playing at that time was somewhat rough; it lacked warmth and depth –thus precisely the opposite of what the reader would expect. The fact of the matter is that Tchaikovsky was scared to death of sentimentality, and as a result did not like unduly expressive piano-playing[...]His musical feeling was curbed by a certain chastity, and out of fear of vulgarity he was capable of going to extremes in the other direction.'

Ernest Bloch belongs to the large group of twentieth-century composers who, though not wishing to be associated with the avant-garde, equally did not distance themselves from the latest developments. He studied violin and composition in his native city Geneva, and later in Brussels and Frankfurt. His early compositions reveal a great curiosity about everything that was new and unknown at the time: Wagnerian chromaticism, the orchestral expansivity of Richard Strauss, and then the subtle timbres of Debussy and the block chords of Stravinsky.

In 1916 Bloch left for the United States, where he soon became highly regarded as a conductor, teacher and composer, and where he lived for a long time. Immediately after the First World War he devoted himself particularly to representing Jewish culture in his music. To achieve this he on the one hand employed recognizably oriental melodics, as in *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra (1916) and in *Baal Shem* for violin and piano (1923), and on the other hand he chose, as did many of his generation, a Neo-Classical style in order to objectivise his emotions somewhat, as in the *1st Concerto Grosso* (1925) and *the Piano Sonata* (1935.)

Even with this latter category of music, though, and in the many other compositions which Bloch wrote during his long and productive life, the Jewish atmosphere, the Jewish spirit remains prominent. He himself wrote the following about it in 1927: *'It is not my desire to produce a reconstruction of Jewish music [...] I am a Jew. I strive to write Jewish music, not to sell myself, but because it is the only way I can create vital music. If, indeed, I am capable of that at all...It is the Jewish soul that interests me, the complex, burning, driven soul which I can feel vibrating throughout the Bible [...] That is all present within us, within me, it is my better self. I attempt to hear all of that within myself and to transform it into music [...].'*

The *3 Nocturnes* for piano trio were completed in 1924 and belong to a significant body

of Classical-Romantic Jewish works which saw the light of day during the first three decades of the twentieth century. On the one hand the *Nocturnes* belong in a Classical-Romantic tradition, in which expressivity is the aim (rather than a Neo-Classical or Neo-Baroque control over form), but at the same time the Jewish identity of the music is in this case made evident, sometimes explicitly and at other times in a more disguised manner.

In the first *Andante* the atmosphere is one of expectation and enchantment: it is evening, the candles are being lit and there is singing here and there. The *Andante quieto* also concentrates on evening song, perhaps anticipating some solemn feast-day to come. With the *Tempestoso* we seem indeed to have ended up at a celebration. Or is it above all the smouldering, agitated and yet repressed excitement about a celebration which (yet again) is still to come?

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Piano tuner and technician: **Evert Snel** (Steinway D)

Photos trio: **Marco Borgreve**

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Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

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1. **Andante** (0:00)
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