

Cécile Chaminade (1857 - 1944)  
Piano Trio No.1 in G Minor, Op. 11

Chaminade's Piano Trio in G Minor is a precocious work from a long life and career; its composer was only 23 years old and would ultimately live to be 87. Chaminade wrote this first of her two trios in 1880, just one year after Fauré's celebrated C Minor Piano Quartet, and the same year that Brahms began his C Major Piano Trio, the final work on today's program. For all her youth, Chaminade exhibits considerable technical mastery and infectious Gallic charm in her most important chamber composition. Like the chamber music of Saint-Saëns and Fauré, it is poised, elegant, classically oriented and breathes an unmistakably French atmosphere.

Though cast in the minor mode, Chaminade's trio evokes more gentle melancholy and sweet sentiment than serious drama or actual suffering. Three of the four movements are in fairly regular and easily followed sonata form, though with piquant, late-Romantic harmonies and some exotic key relationships. None of the expositions are repeated. The third movement scherzo is a rondo with two contrasting episodes. Both of the short inner movements are in 6/8 meter, but the slowing waltzing gate of the Andante contrasts strongly with the quicksilver, headlong dash of the scherzo. A sparkling piano part gives evidence of Chaminade's career as a keyboard virtuoso, but interestingly it is the cello that particularly shines here, repeatedly getting first crack at the most lyrical melodies.

Like Beethoven and Brahms, this concert's other two featured composers, Chaminade conscientiously evolves much of her material from brief motives that are cleverly developed and transformed. With the last movement, she also follows Beethoven's familiar optimistic trajectory by bringing a minor key work to a final close in jubilant major.