

Christopher's Classics - Series XXIV 2019  
presents

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# Wilma & Friends

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Wilma Smith (violin)  
with Anna Pokorny (cello)  
and Ian Munro (piano)

Presented by  
Sunday Classics Inc



Elizabeth Ball Trust

*Performing:*

Beethoven, Munro, Brahms *and* Francaix

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Thursday, March 7th, 2019, 7.30pm  
The Piano, 156 Armagh St, Christchurch

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*The busiest lives deserve beautiful music.*

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## Programme: Wilma & Friends

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Beethoven ~ *'Kakadu' Variations Op. 121a*

Ian Munro ~ *Piano Trio 'Tales from Old Russia'*

*I. Vassilisa and the Baba Yaga*

*II. The Snow Maiden*

*III. Death and the Soldier*

*Interval : 15 minutes, no bell*

Brahms ~ *Piano Trio in C minor Op. 101*

*I. Allegro energico*

*II. Presto non assai*

*III. Andante grazioso*

*IV. Allegro molto*

Francaix ~ *Piano Trio in D major*

*I. Untitled but jerky driving rhythms and solo passages*

*II. Scherzando*

*III. Andante*

*IV. Allegro molto*

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## Notes

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Beethoven ~ *'Kakadu' Variations Op. 121a*

It was common practice in the early nineteenth century for composers to produce variations on popular themes from the stage, hoping that they would sell widely. Beethoven's *Piano Trio Op. 121a* is a set of variations based on *'Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu'* ('I am Kakadu the tailor'), a theme from Wenzel Muller's 1794 comic Singspiel, titled *Die Schwestern von Prag* (The Sisters from Prague).

Although the *'Kakadu' Variations* were likely composed in 1803, Beethoven did not submit them for publication until the revival of Muller's original production in 1814. After making significant revisions to the introduction, Beethoven offered the piece to Breitkopf & Hartel in 1816, describing it as "one of my earlier compositions, though

not among the reprehensible ones.” The German publisher rejected Beethoven’s trio, but it was eventually accepted in 1823 by Chappell in London, and in 1834 by Steiner in Vienna, making the ‘Kakadu’ *Variations* the last of Beethoven’s piano trios to be published.

Unlike his piano music of the same period, Beethoven’s ‘Kakadu’ *Variations* are harmonically and structurally conventional; however, the mood of the revised G minor introduction is so solemn that the piano’s first iteration of the ‘Kakadu’ theme serves almost as comic relief. Ten variations follow this initial theme, the first eight of which become increasingly ornamental as they work through various transformations of rhythm and texture.

In the ninth variation, Beethoven revisits the minor key and adagio tempo of the introduction, and the tenth transforms Muller’s spritely ‘Kakadu’ theme into a mock-fugue coda, the contrapuntal intricacy of which suggests the mature Beethoven also reworked the finale during his revisions.

## Ian Munro ~ *Piano Trio ‘Tales from Old Russia’*

*I. Vassilisa and the Baba Yaga II. The Snow Maiden III. Death and the Soldier*

‘*Tales from Old Russia*’ was commissioned by Sunday Classics Inc for an earlier Christopher’s Classics Concert. The Eggner Trio of Vienna have programmed this work in their concerts and it has recently been played by Wilma & Friends at the Adam Chamber Music Festival in Nelson last month.

After establishing an international career as a pianist, Ian Munro returned to composition in 1992, and has since become one of Australia’s most celebrated composers. His first piano trio ‘*Tales from Old Russia*’ was commissioned in 2008 by Christopher Marshall of Christchurch, New Zealand. Munro revised the piece in 2011 during his time as composer-in-residence at Musica Viva.

At approximately twenty-five minutes in length, ‘*Tales from Old Russia*’ reflects Munro’s enduring interest in music for children. Drawing upon the rich traditions of Russian folklore, each of the three movements is inspired by a tale collected by the 19th-century ethnographer Alexander Afanasyev, the Russian counterpart to the Brothers Grimm.

The first movement sets the story of Vassilisa, a princess-like character whose cruel stepmother sends her to a forest, where she encounters the frightening Baba Yaga. At the conclusion, shimmering ostinato patterns in the piano, soaring violin lines and syncopated cello interjections recount Vassilisa’s cunning escape from the gloom of the forest.

For his central movement, Munro joins Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov in a list of composers inspired by the popular story of the Snow Maiden. In this 19th-century tale, two childless Russian peasants construct a daughter out of snow, who - after attempting to play with the other children in front of a fire - evaporates into a small cloud.

The final folktale, *'Death and the Soldier'*, is a lengthy story with many variations. In Munro's setting, an undecorated soldier returns home from war only to discover that the notoriously haunted house on the hill is the only place available for him to stay. Before the soldier's heroic eradication of all the ghosts and goblins in his village, Munro invites his trio to perform a haunted march, where a series of percussive effects in the strings accompany persistent knocking against the closed lid of the piano.

## Brahms ~ *Piano Trio in C minor Op. 101*

I. *Allegro energico* II. *Presto non assai* III. *Andante grazioso* IV. *Allegro molto*

After the premiere of his Fourth Symphony in 1885, Brahms turned away from writing large-scale orchestral works and shifted his focus to chamber music. It was during a summer visit to Hofstetten, Switzerland in 1886 that Brahms composed the *Piano Trio in C minor*. He premiered it on 20 December of the same year, alongside violinist Jenö Hubay and cellist David Popper.

The third and final of Brahms's known piano trios, the Trio in C minor displays the composer's penchant for expansive forms in its large four-movement structure. Its harmonic and motivic development, on the other hand, unfolds in the distinctly concise style of Brahms's late period.

In a dramatic opening statement, the piano immediately presents the main theme: a floating upper line, answered by a rising scale in the bass, which recurs throughout the movement in various brief phrases and simple rhythmic sequences. The near-orchestral force of this initial Allegro is contrasted by the subsequent three-minute presto, where muted strings and bouncy pizzicato create an atmosphere of constant restraint.

Brahms initially sketched the Trio's third movement with seven beats to the bar, to make way for the alternating lengths of phrases he wrote in the piano's dialogue with the strings. However, this metre was still too inflexible, and the composer instead notated the movement using a repeated pattern of a three-beat bar, followed by two bars of two beats. In the more fast-paced middle section, the emphasis shifts to create the illusion of five beats to the bar, before returning to the movement's original leisurely pace.

With its 6/8 metre and minor tonality, the finale is a fiery, energetic rondo that finally provides C major relief at the onset of the coda. Unlike Brahms's two earlier piano trios, the lively conclusion rests comfortably in the domain of chamber music, making no attempt to distil the magnitude of a symphony into a piece for three instruments.

## Francaix ~ *Piano Trio in D major*

*I. Untitled but jerky driving rhythms and solo passages II. Scherzando III. Andante IV. Allegrissimo*

As the son of a musicologist and a singing teacher, Jean Francaix's musical talents were fostered from an early age. After taking up composition in 1918 – then aged only six – he caught the attention of Nadia Boulanger, a prominent French organist and pedagogue, who encouraged and developed the young composer's career throughout the 1920s and '30s.

As well as a prolific composer Francaix was a virtuoso pianist, frequently including his own instrument in the extensive catalogue of chamber music he produced throughout the twentieth century. The *Piano Trio in D major* is one of Francaix's lesser known works, composed in 1986 when the composer was seventy-four years old. Francaix's chamber music for strings is scarcely celebrated outside of France (he is noted primarily for his compositions for woodwind and orchestra), but the Piano Trio provides ample opportunity to explore the witty, neoclassical style that typifies the composer's output.

In the opening, untitled movement, jerky, driving rhythms are interspersed with angular yet charming solo passages in the violin and cello. Before ending his introduction with a flurry of activity and a humorous pizzicato cadence, Francaix also delivers a fleeting moment of tenderness with his delicate writing for string harmonics.

In the sweeping Scherzando, rising and falling lines in the violin and cello alternate between evocations of the sublime and the grotesque. This witty effect meets its opposing force in the following Andante, where long, melodic string lines soar above gentle chords in the piano. At almost five minutes in length, the final Allegrissimo abounds with syncopated rhythms, trills, flourishes, and eerie modulations. After another brief, yet hair-raising moment of harmonics, the ensemble drives towards a celebratory finish.

*Notes by Madeline Roycroft*

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## Biographies

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### Wilma Smith ~ violin

Wilma Smith is Artistic Director and violinist of Wilma & Friends, a chamber music series based in Melbourne and presenting concerts throughout Australia and New Zealand. She is also Artistic Director of the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition and teaches violin and chamber music at the University of Melbourne, Monash University, Scotch College and Korowa Anglican Girls' School.

Wilma was born in Fiji and raised in New Zealand. She studied in Boston at the New England Conservatory with the legendary Dorothy DeLay and Louis Krasner then was founding First Violinist of the Lydian String Quartet, winners of the Naumburg Award for Chamber Music and multiple prizes at the Evian, Banff and Portsmouth International String Quartet Competitions. She was Concertmaster of the Harvard Chamber Orchestra and Handel and Haydn Society and performed regularly with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Boston Pops Orchestra.

Invited to return home to form the New Zealand String Quartet, Wilma was First Violinist until she was appointed Concertmaster of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, a position she held for nine years before moving to Melbourne to be Concertmaster of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra from 2003 to 2014. Wilma also appears as Guest Concertmaster with Sydney, Adelaide, West Australian, and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras along with Orchestra Victoria and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra.

### Ian Munro ~ composer/pianist

Ian Munro has emerged over recent years as one of Australia's most distinguished and awarded musicians, with a career that has taken him to thirty countries in Europe, Asia, North America and Australasia. His Premier Grand Prix at the Queen Elisabeth International Competition for composers (2003) is a unique achievement for an Australian and follows on from multiple prizes in international piano competitions in Spain (Maria Canals), Italy (Busoni), Portugal (Vianna da Motta) and the UK, where his Second Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition in 1987 established his international profile.

After completing his early training in Melbourne under the guidance of Roy Shepherd, a pupil of Alfred Cortot, Ian furthered his studies in Vienna, London and Italy with Noretta Conci, Guido Agosti and Michele Campanella. His international career began in the UK, where he performed with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia, English Chamber Orchestra, London Mozart Players, BBC Concert Orchestra, and

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, broadcasting widely for the BBC. Elsewhere, he performed with orchestras in Poland, Italy, Portugal, Russia, the USA, China, New Zealand and with all the major orchestras in Australia in over sixty piano concerti. Also a widely experienced chamber musician, Ian joined the acclaimed Australia Ensemble in Sydney in 2000.

With an extensive piano discography on ABC Classics, Hyperion, Cala, Naxos, Marco Polo, Tall Poppies and Warehouse labels, Ian is now equally in demand as a composer. He was Featured Composer for Musica Viva in 2011 and his Flute Concerto and Song Cycle *Three Birds* received their premieres in 2016 with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Australia Ensemble respectively, among many other of his chamber works for various ensembles.

## Anna Pokorny ~ cello

Anna graduated as a cello student of Howard Penny from the Australian National Academy of Music in 2012. She holds a Bachelor of Music from The University of Western Australia where she studied with Dr Suzanne Wijsman, and in 2013-14 undertook further postgraduate performance study at the International Menuhin Music Academy in Switzerland with Professor Niall Brown.

Throughout her study Anna performed in master classes with David Geringas, Steven Isserlis, Mischa Maisky, Maxim Vengerov, the Borodin String Quartet, Doric String Quartet, Brodsky String Quartet and Eggner Trio. In 2012 she was an Australian Chamber Orchestra Emerging Artist.

Since 2012 Anna has had the pleasure of performing with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, ACO Collective and West Australian Symphony Orchestra. As a chamber musician she has appeared in concert series and festivals across Australia including the Perth International Arts Festival, Metropolis Music Festival and Bangalow Music Festival.

She is the recipient of numerous awards including the Pauline Steele Prize for Bach, ANAM Prize for Most Outstanding Performance in a Recital, Woodside Concerto and ANAM Chamber Music Competition Winner, Ian Potter Cultural Trust Scholarship, and the Ernest V. Llewellyn Memorial Fund Travel and Study Scholarship.

**Next Concert:**

**Julien Van Mellaerts ~ *Baritone***  
**and James Baillieu ~ *Piano***



**Performing: *Schubert, Schumann - Dichterliebe;***  
***Britten and other songs***

**Thursday 4th April 2019,**  
**7.30pm, at The Piano 156 Armagh St, Chch**

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Tickets: Door Sales: \$45 (students \$20)) Subject to availability,  
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**Acknowledgements : Elizabeth Ball Trust, Rata Foundation, The Piano,**  
**Antonio Strings, Gloria Street, The Philip Carter Family Concert Hall**  
**at The Piano and private donors - thank you all.**