

Program

Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 1 (1910) **Erich Wolfgang
Korngold**
(1897–1957)

I. Allegro non troppo, con espressione

II. Scherzo: Allegro–Trio. Viel langsamer, innig

III. Larghetto

IV. Finale: Allegro molto ed energico

Four Movements for Piano Trio (1990) **Bright Sheng**
(b. 1955)

I. Eighth note = 54

II. Quarter note = 66

III. Quarter note = 112

IV. Nostalgia, eighth note = 66

Intermission

Trio No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 66 **Felix Mendelssohn**
(1809–1847)

I. Allegro energico e con fuoco

II. Andante espressivo

III. Scherzo: Molto allegro quasi presto

IV. Finale: Allegro appassionato

Program Notes

By Leonard Garrison

Piano Trio, Op. 1 by Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Erich Wolfgang Korngold is widely admired for his classic Hollywood film scores, including music for *The Adventures of Robin Hood* starring Errol Flynn and *King's Row* starring Ronald Reagan. He was born to a Jewish family in Austro-Hungary and grew up as a child prodigy in Vienna, where among other works he composed his Piano Trio at age twelve. His brilliant career as a composer and conductor in Europe was interrupted by the advent of the Nazi regime, and he emigrated to the USA in 1934.

Korngold's Piano Trio was premiered by three eminent musicians, Arnold Rosé, concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic, cellist Adolf Buxbaum, and pianist Bruno Walter, one of the greatest conductors in history. It is cast in the mold of a traditional four-movement trio and shows the young composer's mastery of the genre. In style and character, the work is close to the music of Richard Strauss.

Four Movements for Piano Trio by Bright Sheng

Bright Sheng was born in Shanghai and graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory. He subsequently studied at Columbia University and has served on the faculty of the University of Michigan since 1993. He has won numerous prizes, notably the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Award, and *Four Movements for Piano Trio* was a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize. His music mixes Eastern and Western elements.

Four Movements for Piano Trio was commissioned by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation for the Peabody Trio, winner of the Naumburg Chamber Music Award. The work was first performed by the Peabody Trio at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, New York City on 24 April 1990. The folkloric style and prelude-like first movement of *Four Movements for Piano Trio* is constructed through the use of heterophony, a device typical of Asian music. The second movement of the work is based on a humorous and joyful folk song from Se-Tsuan. In the third movement, a savage dance, the melody grows through a series of

“Chinese sequences” (my own term to describe a type of melodic development each time the initial motive is repeated, consequently lengthening its duration and widening the tessitura). The last movement evokes a lonesome nostalgia. [Note by Bright Sheng]

Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 66 by Felix Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn’s two piano trios are among the finest ever written, each finding a perfect balance between piano and strings. He dedicated the second trio to Louis Spohr (1784-1859), a German composer, conductor, and violinist who performed this work with Mendelssohn.

The key of C minor is associated with tragedy and heroic struggle, as in the Funeral March in Beethoven’s “Eroica” Symphony, his Fifth Symphony, and Brahms’s First Symphony. As Beethoven does in his Fifth Symphony, Mendelssohn’s Trio begins in C minor and ends triumphantly in C major.

The first movement opens with an agitated theme rendered jittery by scattered accents and occasional sixteenth interjections into the flowing eighth notes. Mendelssohn is a master of transition, and the movement alternates seamlessly between the original agitated material and a second, lyrical idea in A major. The *Andante espressivo* is basically a “Song Without Words,” to borrow Mendelssohn’s own term for his set of works for piano solo—but now shared between piano and strings. In his time, Mendelssohn was most admired for his scherzo style, starting with his depiction of fairies from *The Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Thus, the third movement of this trio, with its quicksilver, light touch, evinces his signature. The finale opens with one of the rare melodies commencing with an ascending minor ninth, an interval one step beyond an octave. Then this composer, Jewish-born but converted to Christianity, introduces a Lutheran chorale tune, “Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir,” known to English-speaking churchgoers as the “Old Hundredth,” concluding on a sanguine note.