

# VCC Valley Classical Concerts

In cooperation with the  
Smith College Department of Music

presents

## The Lysander Trio



Sunday, December 15, 2024, at 3:00 PM,  
Sweeney Concert Hall / Sage Hall, Smith  
College, Northampton, MA

# THE LYSANDER TRIO

Liza Stepanova, piano  
Itamar Zorman, violin    Michael Katz, cello

## PROGRAM

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

Trio, op. 70, no. 1, in D major, "Ghost" (1808)

- I. Allegro vivace e con brio
- II. Largo assai ed espressivo
- III. Presto

### **Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)**

Piano Trio (1921)

- I. Moderato ma appassionato
- II. Andante molto semplice
- III. Allegro vigoroso

## INTERMISSION

### **Robert Schumann (1810-1856)**

Trio no. 1, op. 63, in D minor (1847)

- I. Mit Energie und Leidenschaft (With Energy and Passion)
- II. Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch (Lively, but not too fast)
- III. Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung (Slow, with inner feeling)
- IV. Mit Feuer (With Fire)

The Lysander Trio appears by arrangement with  
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# About Today's Concert

John Montanari, Artistic Director

Beethoven's "Ghost" Trio was composed in 1808, placing it in what has commonly been described as his "middle period." This was the period, roughly from 1802 to 1812, when he composed such masterworks as the "Eroica" and Fifth Symphonies, the "Emperor" Piano Concerto, the Violin Concerto, the "Kreutzer" Violin Sonata, the "Razumovsky" String Quartets, and the "Waldstein" and "Appassionata" Piano Sonatas – works that enlarged and deepened their respective genres beyond anything previously imagined, even in Beethoven's earlier examples.

Right from the "Ghost's" provocative opening unison, we are far removed from the technically approachable, pianocentric trios of yore, trios aimed more for the lucrative domestic market than for the concert hall. The cello, mostly relegated in earlier trios to enhancing the pianist's bass lines, here participates fully in the energetic thematic conversation. And who but Beethoven would have imagined the spectral D minor Largo that follows, a movement whose eerie harmonies and jump-scare surprises, predictive of classic horror movie scores, gives the trio its nickname?

Speaking of provocative openings, the first bold bars of Rebecca Clarke's Piano Trio of 1921 introduce us not just to melodic and rhythmic motives that will be transformed throughout the piece, but also to a major creative figure whose regrettably few major works have lately received a measure of the attention due them. Born in England to an abusive and controlling American father and a German mother, Clarke studied composition under Charles Villiers Stanford at the Royal College of Music, though her studies concluded before completion due to the withdrawal of family support.

To support herself, Clarke embarked on a career as a violist, performing with the likes of Pablo Casals, Jascha Heifetz and

# About Today's Concert (cont.)

Arthur Rubinstein. After spending the years during and immediately after World War I in the United States, while also touring internationally, Clarke returned to London in 1924. There, she helped form a piano quartet, the English Ensemble, and became active in broadcasting and recording as a soloist and ensemble artist. From the late 1930's until her death in 1979, Clarke's musical activity declined, though she lived to see an increase in interest in works by women composers, including hers. However, she once remarked that she "would sooner be regarded as a 16th-rate composer than be judged as if there were one kind of musical art for men and another for women."

While pursuing a performing career in the United States, Clarke twice took second prize for compositions submitted, under the pseudonym "Anthony Trent," to competitions held by the Berkshire Festival of Chamber Music (the predecessor of present-day South Mountain Concerts), under the sponsorship of noted music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. The two compositions, the Viola Sonata of 1919 (there are some superb renditions on YouTube) and the present Piano Trio, remain her best-known.

Clues to the expressive intent of Robert Schumann's Piano Trio in D minor can be found in the movement headings presented, interestingly, in German: "With energy and passion," "Lively, but not too swift," "Slowly, with intimate emotion," and "With fire." As is often the case when encountering Schumann's works, one is tempted to interpret the wide swings between dark brooding and bustling energy as expressive of his contrasting musical and literary personalities, the bold and confident Florestan and the dreamy, poetic Eusebius. (Check out Schumann's solo piano suite "Carnaval," in which these two characters each make an appearance.) Composed in 1847, the Trio is the culminating work of a five-year period in which Schumann produced his finest chamber music, including three String Quartets, the Piano Quartet and the Piano Quintet.

# Artist Information

## THE LYSANDER TRIO

Itamar Zorman, violin; Michael Katz, cello; Liza Stepanova, piano.

The Lysander Piano Trio has been praised by *The Strad* for its “incredible ensemble, passionate playing, articulate and imaginative ideas, and a wide palette of colors” and by *The Washington Post* for “an uncommon degree of heart-on-the-sleeve emotional frankness” and “vivid engagement carried by soaring, ripely Romantic playing.”

The Trio has developed a reputation for exciting programming, finding creative ways to connect well-known masterworks with pieces by lesser-known and underrepresented composers, discovering common threads across cultures and times. Their debut recording, *After A Dream* (CAG Records), was acclaimed by *The New York Times* for its “polished and spirited interpretations.” Its most recent album, *Mirrors*, featuring world premiere recordings of six works the ensemble has commissioned or premiered, was released in early 2021 by First Hand Records. *Mirrors* included the world premiere recording of Jennifer Higdon’s *Love Sweet* for soprano and piano trio, with acclaimed soprano Sarah Shafer. *Musical America* praised *Mirrors* for being “strikingly inventive...meticulous,” while *Gramophone* noted that “all six of this release’s compositions benefit from the Lysander Trio’s finely honed ensemble values and well-characterized solo contributions.”

In the 2023-24 season, the Trio performed in series around the US, Canada, and Israel, including their debuts at Parlance Chamber Concerts, Feldman Chamber Music Society, Chamber Music Society of Williamsburg, Northeast Kingdom Classical Series, Blue Hill Concert Association, University of Idaho’s Auditorium Chamber Music Series, Nelson Overture Concerts Society, Kelowna Chamber Concert Association, and Israel’s Keshet Eilon.

In the spring of 2023, the Lysander “brought the house down” (at Dumbarton Concerts) with its new tango-infused collaboration with Argentine bandoneon player and composer JP Jofre. They look forward to continuing the collaboration in upcoming seasons.

The Trio has a long-standing commitment to working with living composers and building a new repertoire for the piano trio. The ensemble’s commissions include Gilad Cohen’s *Around the Cauldron* (2017), co-commissioned by Concert Artists Guild and premiered at Weill Recital Hall; *Ghostwritten Variations* by Venezuelan-American composer Reinaldo Moya; Jakub Ciupinski’s *The Black Mirror*; and Jennifer Higdon’s *Love Sweet* for soprano and piano trio, which received its world-premiere recording together with acclaimed soprano Sarah Shafer on the group’s 2021 release, *Mirrors*.

ITAMAR ZORMAN, violin

Itamar Zorman, a violinist renowned for his profound musicianship and technical brilliance, continues to captivate audiences worldwide. Zorman's artistry is characterized by its depth of expression, technical precision, and captivating stage presence. His performances are often described as poetic and introspective, reflecting his deep connection to the music.

A recipient of numerous accolades, including the 2011 International Tchaikovsky Competition, the 2014 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and the 2013 Avery Fisher Career Grant, Zorman's career has been marked by significant milestones. He has performed with leading orchestras such as the American Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, and the Israel Philharmonic, collaborating with distinguished conductors like Valery Gergiev and David Robertson. His commitment to chamber music is equally evident, as he is a founding member of the Israeli Chamber Project and a member of the Lysander Piano Trio.

Mr. Zorman is currently on faculty at the Eastman School of Music. He plays on a 1734 Guarneri del Gesù, from the collection of Yehuda Zisapel.

## MICHAEL KATZ, cello

Michael Katz, a cellist celebrated for his rich, expressive tone and technical brilliance, continues to captivate audiences worldwide. Recent highlights include critically acclaimed performances with renowned orchestras such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the Israel Philharmonic, collaborating with esteemed conductors like Gustavo Dudamel and Zubin Mehta. His solo recitals at prestigious venues like Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, and the Philharmonie de Paris have further solidified his reputation as one of the most sought-after cellists of his generation.

Beyond his solo career, Katz is an active chamber musician. As a member of the renowned Lysander Piano Trio, he has toured extensively, performing at major music festivals and concert halls. His recent recording of the complete Beethoven cello sonatas has received widespread critical acclaim, showcasing his interpretive depth and technical mastery. Katz is also a dedicated educator, serving on the faculty of the Juilliard School and the New England Conservatory.

## LIZA STEPANOVA, piano

Praised for her “thoughtful musicality” and “fleet-fingered panache,” Liza Stepanova has established herself as a versatile and sought-after pianist. Her performances have captivated audiences worldwide, and she continues to inspire and engage with music lovers through her teaching, recording, and concert activities.

In recent years, Stepanova has performed at prestigious venues and festivals, including the Berlin Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, and the Kennedy Center. She has toured with the Lysander Piano Trio, performed with renowned conductors, and given world premieres of new works by contemporary composers. She is also a co-founder of the Chamber Music Athens festival.

Stepanova's discography includes critically acclaimed albums featuring solo piano works, chamber music, and art songs.

LIZA STEPANOVA, piano (continued)

Her recent album, *E Pluribus Unum*, highlights contemporary immigrant composers. She has also collaborated with Grammy-winning producer Adam Abeshouse and has been praised by publications like *The New York Times* and *BBC Music Magazine*.

Liza Stepanova is an associate professor of piano at the University of Georgia. Stepanova has also been a faculty member at SongFest at The Colburn School and has collaborated with esteemed musicians at renowned festivals worldwide.

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# From the Valley Classical Concerts President

On behalf of the Board of Valley Classical Concerts, I would like to welcome you to our 2024-25 season. Founded as Music in Deerfield, VCC is now celebrating its 45th year of presenting internationally known classical chamber music ensembles for the enjoyment of music lovers in the Pioneer Valley and beyond.

We hope you are as excited as we are to hear these fabulous artists, from young prizewinners to musicians who have played together for decades. Many of them are returning simply because they appreciate the enthusiasm of our audience, and the marvelous acoustics of Sweeney Concert Hall.

I would like to thank and to gratefully acknowledge our many generous corporate sponsors, individual and Board donors, and Smith College, who have helped make this season possible and who have supported VCC over the years. They are all listed in the playbill.

Enjoy the music, encourage friends and family and younger adults and students to come to the concerts, and please consider donating to Valley Classical Concerts! Without continued financial support from our loyal patrons and lovers of chamber music, Valley Classical Concerts would not exist.

Dr. William Harbison, Board President

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Saturday December 21, 2024 at 7:30 at Grace Church, Amherst

*Vermeer's "The Concert"*  
March 7-8, 2025 in the Warbeke Room, Pratt Hall, Mount Holyoke College,  
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Two performances: Friday March 7 at 7:30pm and Saturday March 8 at 3pm

*Venetian Vespers*  
Saturday May 3, 2025 at 7:30 at Grace Church, Amherst

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*The Israeli Chamber Project*

**Saturday, November 2, 7:30 pm**

*The Ciompi String Quartet with pianist Ieva  
Jokūbavičiūtė*

**Sunday, December 15, 3:00 pm**

*The Lysander Trio  
(note date change)*

**Sunday, February 9, 3:00 pm**

*The Lydian String Quartet  
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**Sunday, March 9, 3:00 pm**

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