



Wednesday 9 July 2025, at 20:00

Hoppe-Poltéra-Brautigam piano trio

Esther Hoppe, violin - Christian Poltéra, cello - Ronald Brautigam, piano

Johannes BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)

Anno 1886

**Sonata no. 2, F major for piano and cello,
op. 99 (1886), 28'**

- I. Allegro vivace
- II. Adagio affettuoso
- III. Allegro passionato
- IV. Allegro molto

Piano trio no. 3, C minor, op. 101 (1886), 22'

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

**Sonata no. 2, A major for piano and violin, op.
100 (1886), 20'**

- I. Allegro amabile
- II. Andante tranquillo – Vivace
- III. Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante)

*Ronald Brautigam plays a Blüthner grand piano from 1859,
from the Christoph Kern collection.*

10:30 Theodore Platt, baritone and Malcolm Martineau, piano

15:30 Chiaroscuro Quartet

20:00 Hoppe-Poltera-Brautigam, Piano Trio



About the artists

Copy or the real thing? What you see on stage is an authentic Blüthner grand piano from 1859, but competent copies of the original instruments have played an important role in the flourishing of historical performance practice, and such an instrument can also do one or two things that the original cannot. For example, you can sit with a beer in your hand at the piano workshop and watch it being built from scratch and gradually being led on a slope that you really can't leave again. Just ask Ronald Brautigam. He was a more or less traditional pianist in Amsterdam, but there the piano builder Paul McNulty had also settled, and Ronald loved sitting in his workshop with the mentioned beer and watching a completely new old instrument come into the world. In the end, he bought one of them. It was just to stand next to his modern grand piano, as a kind of reference instrument, a tool he had at hand when he wanted to better understand one of Mozart's bars. Nothing more.

There was no turning back from this slippery slope – and Ronald Brautigam knew it. After a few years of teaching himself an entirely new piano technique “through trial and error,” there was only one way forward: putting his hard-won skills to use in recordings of Mozart, then Haydn, and finally Beethoven. Complete recordings of all the sonatas followed – now widely regarded as reference interpretations. A pianist had offered historical performance practice a finger, and it had taken the whole hand. Brautigam truly had no idea what he was getting into when he sat down with that beer.

“Poltéra knows how to make his instrument sing,” writes *Gramophone*. And that's true – but how does he know? Poltéra himself reflects on how different it must be to grow up in a world where you can hear and watch the great musicians of the past on

YouTube. He imagines he would have been a heavy user. But before YouTube, there were dinner parties. At one such dinner, aged just 12, Poltéra was seated next to the great Isaac Stern after a concert in which he himself had performed. Stern's advice was simple: listen to great singers and copy what they do. Maybe the 12-year-old Poltéra didn't immediately subscribe to that maxim, but it has guided him ever since: teach a child to sing a melody, and it will never shape that melody unnaturally; it will always breathe in the right places. Breathe naturally, and you play naturally. Add teachers like Nancy Chumachenco, Boris Pergamenschikov and Heinrich Schiff to the mix, and that child will one day travel the world with a cello that sings – or even two.

Esther Hoppe made an early mark by winning first prize at the International Mozart Competition in Salzburg in 2002. She followed that by taking top honours at another of the world's great music competitions, the ARD International Music Competition in Munich, as part of the Tecchler Trio. These days, her piano trio colleagues are none other than Ronald Brautigam and Christian Poltéra – two musicians always ready to explore historically informed performance. Their concerts often carry the rich resonance of this approach, aided by outstanding period instruments, such as a Blüthner grand piano from 1859.

When the piano trio format becomes too confined, Hoppe expands into a wider chamber music sound world as artistic director and concertmaster of Camerata Zürich. Since 2013, she has also served as Professor of Violin at the Mozarteum in Salzburg.

Ulrik Damgaard Andersen

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Writing like a mad man at Lake Thun

In the summer of 1886, Johannes Brahms stayed in Thun, in the Bernese Oberland region of Switzerland. For the first time, he rented a house in the village of Hofstetten near Lake Thun and found the space and peace to work intensively. The stay became one of the most productive periods of his career. Within a few months, he composed three major chamber works: the Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major, Op. 99, the Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100, and the Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101.

The Thun period was marked not only by creative focus but also by Brahms's good health and high spirits. He took long walks, swam in the lake, and enjoyed the company of friends and musicians, including Clara Schumann, Joseph Joachim, and the young soprano Hermine Spies. The atmosphere was relaxed, and Brahms felt deeply inspired. In a cheerful letter to his publisher Fritz Simrock, he wrote that he was composing "almost like a madman." It was, in other words, a rare period of intensity and inspiration for the 53-year-old composer.

Opus 99 – the Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major – was written nearly 20 years after his first sonata for cello and piano. Brahms composed it for his friend Robert Hausmann, cellist of the Joachim Quartet, who later gave the premiere with Brahms at the piano. Notably, the sonata treats both instruments as equal partners rather than soloist and accompanist. This ideal was already present in Op. 38, but it is even more pronounced here. Brahms completed the sonata in August 1886 and wrote to both Hausmann and Simrock about its creation and importance. It was published in January 1887.

The Violin Sonata in A major, Op. 100, also composed during the summer in Thun, is sometimes referred to as Brahms's "Thun Sonata." He completed it in July 1886, and the premiere took place in Vienna that December with Brahms at the piano and Joseph Hellmesberger on violin. The sonata was

dedicated to Brahms's friend Hermine Spies, who spent part of the summer with him at the lake. While there is no documented romantic relationship, several letters suggest she was an important source of inspiration. Unlike his two other violin sonatas, in G major and D minor, Op. 100 is remarkable for having been completed in just a few weeks—an unusually fast pace for Brahms.

The Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 101, was composed shortly after the cello sonata and completed in September 1886. It was premiered that same December in Vienna by Brahms (piano), Joseph Joachim (violin), and Robert Hausmann (cello). Its dark key and compact expression set it apart from Brahms's earlier piano trios. In Thun, Brahms had both the ideas and the physical energy to work with great precision and clarity. The trio's tight structure and strong coherence reflect this maturity and discipline.

These three works from 1886 now appear as a kind of chamber music triptych—not because Brahms intended them as a unified cycle, but because they exemplify his mature mastery across three different chamber music formations. They are the work of a composer who had achieved international recognition and could now compose freely, without external demands. At the same time, Brahms remained committed to refining and developing his musical expression. The works from the Thun period are among his most concentrated and perfectly shaped chamber compositions.

At this concert, the works are performed on an original Blüthner grand piano from 1859. Brahms himself had a close relationship with this type of instrument and often preferred Blüthner or Streicher pianos over others. It offers the opportunity to experience this music in a sound world closer to what Brahms envisioned—and what his contemporaries would have heard.

A warm thanks to these foundations and sponsors



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