

Piano Trio in D minor op.120

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

The life of Gariel Fauré is the stuff of musical legend: born one of six children in a small town (Pamiers) not far from Carcassonne, into an anything but musical family, his natural talent was spotted by a blind old lady who heard him playing the harmonium in a convent chapel, and persuaded his father to send him, at the age of nine, to music school in Paris. This was the *École de Musique Classique et Religieuse*, founded by Louis Niedermayer, where Camille Saint Saens, who was to become Fauré's lifelong friend, was a teacher. On leaving he was appointed organist at the church of Saint-Sauveur in Rennes, a post from which he was dismissed at the age of 25 for appearing on Sunday morning still dressed for the previous evening's ball. He returned to Paris as organist in a succession of churches, helped by Saint-Saens, and devoted what time his duties allowed to composing. His songs and works for piano achieved modest success, but his reputation as a composer was not really established until he wrote his Requiem, in memory of his father, when he was 41. By the time he was in his early fifties he had been appointed professor of composition at the Conservatoire and at 60 he became the Director. Here he weathered the political storms of that most reactionary of institutions and became known as an innovator and a kindly teacher, but his tenure was cut short by his going deaf, and he retired at the age of 75. Nevertheless, like Beethoven, he continued to compose in his final years, which produced some of his finest chamber works, including the Piano Trio, which was brought to the public by the Olympian trio of Jaques Thibaud, Pablo Casals and Alfred Cortot. Faure originally conceived the piece for clarinet, cello and piano, in which form it is still sometimes played, but the clarinet option had disappeared by the time the work was published. The first movement has the violin and cello swirling round each other over a rocking rhythm on the piano. The *andantino* which follows has a sumptuous melody in which violin and cello are pitched close together. This is subsumed in its development but makes a glorious return later. Faure complained of fatigue whilst writing the trio but one would not believe him when it comes to the finale, which has much drama in the strings and lots of bubbling energy in the piano part.