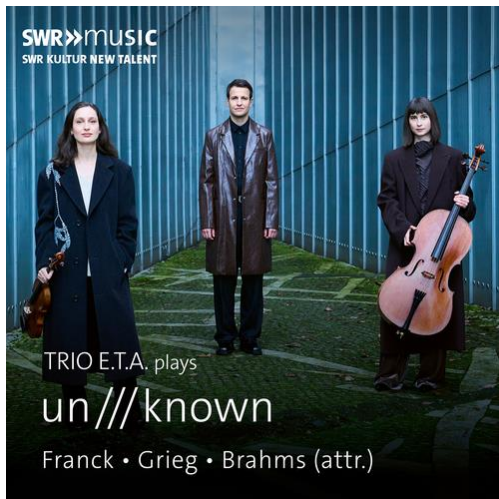




Romantic trio border crossings

The Trio E.T.A. — which has just won **first prizes** at the international chamber-music competitions in **Osaka** and **Vienna** — is focusing in its **new album “un///known”** on its own Romantic DNA, with works by César Franck, Edvard Grieg and a piano trio long ascribed to Johannes Brahms. Together, they comprise a wonderfully multi-layered panorama of European Romanticism.



César Franck (1822–1890)

Trio in F sharp Minor,
Op. 1 No. 1

- [1] I ANDANTE CON MOTO
- [2] II ALLEGRO MOLTO
- [3] III FINALE. ALLEGRO MAESTOSO

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

[4] Andante con moto in
C Minor, EG 116

formerly attributed to

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

- Trio in A Major
(Annex IV/ No. 5)
- [13] I MODERATO
- [14] II VIVACE – TRIO
- [15] III LENTO
- [16] IV PRESTO

Trio E.T.A. Elene Meipariani *violin* | Nadja Reich *cello* | Till Hoffmann *piano*

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He was something like the *spiritus rector* of the Romantic era. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822), an author, but also a composer, a *kapellmeister*, a music critic, an artist and a practising jurist, was second to none in his influence on the way of life and thus art production of the 19th century. He was a **“border-crosser between the arts, between analysis and fantasy,”** according to the Trio E.T.A., which was founded in Hamburg in 2019, taking Hoffmann’s first three initials as part of its name. *“For us, his thinking is an impulse, his humour is sometimes a comfort, his versatility is a model to be imitated.”*

This spirit as embraced by the trio has borne excellent fruit, both nationally and internationally: in the **first half of 2026**, Elene Meipariani (violin), Nadja Reich (cello) and Till Hoffmann (piano) have played their way to first prizes at the **Osaka International Chamber Music Competition** and the **Vienna International Music Competition**. They also received the Rolf-Hans Müller Prize (the first time it has been presented to a piano trio) from public-service broadcaster SWR. In view of the rapidly growing attention and recognition gained by the trio, it seems almost serendipitous that its second studio album is also now being issued around the same time.

On the **new CD, “un///known”**, the three go on a high-class French-Norwegian-German ramble through a Romantic panorama via paths familiar and unfamiliar. The first stage takes the trio, which also won the 2021 German Music Competition, to **César Franck’s Trio in F-sharp Minor** op. 1, No. 1, for piano, violin and cello. This work, which officially opens Franck’s work catalogue — the then 17-year-old Franck published his Opus 1 with three piano trios in 1841 — contains passages of an almost symphonic character. Violinist Elene Meipariani finds it to be the most convincing trio of the cycle: *“This work reminds me of a feeling that is sometimes hard to grasp — of the moment when you believe with youthful openness: everything is possible; of a creative energy that knows no limits. For us, it is*

not just cleverly structured but a work that gives us the feeling of complete freedom on the stage: a freedom underpinned by deep, boundless confidence.”

The journey continues on to the Norwegian Romantic realm with **Edvard Grieg’s Andante in C minor** EG 116 — a true solitaire among the works of this “nature mystic of music”, written in 1878. In the very readable booklet, it is given a poetical counterpart — very much in the spirit of the trio’s namesake and multi-faceted artist E. T. A. Hoffmann —with verses by the violinist and author Maria Reich describing a walk in nature. The piece, incidentally, is Grieg’s only contribution to the piano trio genre.

The Romantic triad is rounded out by the **Trio in A major Anh. 4/5 attributed to Johannes Brahms**. According to the musicologist Ernst Bücken, it was written in the summer of 1853. The attribution history of this four-movement work lasting some 33 minutes is both confusing and fascinating: it was published in 1938, still under Brahms’ name, and had previously been performed as such, but the doubts about its authorship grew constantly, especially as the unsigned manuscript disappeared without trace. Today, the opinion prevails that this trio was possibly composed by a composition pupil of Friedrich Kiel (the so-called “Berlin Brahms”), particularly in view of the fact that the lost trio manuscript was in Kiel’s estate. But is the name of the composer really important? Here, as E. T. A. Hoffmann would immediately agree, the music speaks for itself — even if, amid all the uncertainty about authorship, some characteristic elements in its harmony, the structures of the main themes and the way recapitulations are handled, along with the subtle quote of a motif from Beethoven’s Fifth, display “an unmistakable Brahmsian dialect” (Ruven Wegner).

The artistic recipe of the Trio E.T.A. is its insight that a unified sound is key: *“This kind of togetherness requires a constant readiness to adapt, along with inner alertness. If this harmony as a group succeeds, it is miraculous for us — a kind of utopia in sound in which contrasts carry each other.”* In this regard, the new album “un//known” is a complete success story.

 Julia Mauritz

Lindenstraße 14
50674 Köln

+49 (0)221 - 168 796 24
julia.mauritz@schimmer-pr.de
www.schimmer-pr.de