

Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 1, No. 1

Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro

Adagio cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro assai

Finale: Presto

When Ludwig van Beethoven moved to Vienna from his family home of Bonn he spent some time studying with Franz Joseph Haydn, while establishing himself as a pianist and composer. Haydn, the best known composer in Vienna at the time, appears to have been an encouraging mentor (as he had been to Mozart a decade earlier), while at the same time pursuing his own career in the form of very lucrative concert series in London. Young Ludwig's early years in Vienna were quite successful, during which time he performed concerts, built a reputation as a composer, and made connections to members of aristocratic society that would later become his patrons.

Though he had already written quite a lot of music, the works that Beethoven selected as his first truly mature and significant works were a set of three trios for piano, violin, and cello, which were first performed by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, violin and Anton Kraft, cello, with the composer at the keyboard.

Over the next several years Beethoven set about conquering many of the other 'standard' genres of the day: sonatas for solo piano (Op. 2, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, and 14), for piano and violin (Op. 12), for piano and cello (Op. 5); string trios (Op. 3 and 9), quartets (Op. 18), even a quintet (Op. 4); and of course concertos for piano and orchestra (Op. 15 and 19), culminating in his first symphony (Op. 21) in 1800. It wasn't until later in his career that Beethoven again returned to the piano trio, but he then provided us with three masterpieces: the two trios Op. 70 (1808) and his famous 'Archduke' Trio, Op. 97 (in 1811). In retrospect this is a rather overwhelming amount of music! But even up against these later, better known pieces, the work that Beethoven chose to begin his first set of published chamber music Opus 1, No. 1 stands up very well. In it we find not simply an imitation of the trios of Mozart and Haydn, but Beethoven's unique voice.

Polonaise-Fantasia in A-flat major, Op. 61

Chopin (1810-1849)

Born in Poland near Warsaw, Frédéric Chopin spent most of his career in Paris under the relatively liberal rule of King Louis-Philippe. During this period Paris was in many ways the musical capital of Europe, with rich opportunities for composers and performers drawn in from throughout Europe, especially for those who specialized in Grand Opera and virtuoso performers. Unlike Franz Liszt, who built his career upon public piano recitals, Chopin performed in the more intimate venues of private salons and made a comfortable living as a teacher of piano lessons to the aristocracy and the publication of many popular works for solo piano.

The last of his Polonaises, the Polonaise-Fantasia, Op. 61 is among the more substantial of his solo pieces, in both duration and scope. It was written in 1845-6 and dedicated to a friend and patron, Mme. Veyret. At over twelve minutes for a single movement, the larger expanse of this piece

allows Chopin to diverge from the relatively simple formal structures that are common in his shorter works. Although still largely in some sort of the three-part 'ternary' form common to many of his pieces which would usually include two contrasting themes ABA, Chopin includes episodes with no fewer than four different themes which have the space to develop and change affording a wide range of technical and musical expression.

INTERVAL

Passacaglia after the Suite No. 7 in G minor

by G.F. Handel

Johann Halvorsen (1864-1935)

In 1722 George Frederic Handel, then living in London where he was at that time a very successful composer of operas, published a set of suites for solo harpsichord, that included a "Passacaglia" in G minor. A passacaglia was, even at that point, a rather antiquated genre consisting of a continuous series of short variations on a single theme. In 1894 the Norwegian composer Johann Halvorsen made an arrangement of Handel's keyboard piece for violin and viola. In the process he greatly expanded upon the original, to create a very challenging, virtuosic piece. Frequent double-stops and arpeggiated passage-work make the texture sound very full. Halvorsen's piece was later re-arranged yet again, this time for violin and cello, and it is that version on the programme today.

Piano Trio in C major, Op. 87

Brahms (1833-1897)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Presto

Finale: Allegro giocoso

While many other late nineteenth-century German composers were directing their energies toward writing in the newer genres of programmatic symphonic poems (Franz Liszt) and gargantuan Music Dramas (Richard Wagner), Johannes Brahms continued to compose in the genres of the previous generations: the typical Romantic Lieder and solo piano pieces to be sure, but also symphonies and a prolific amount of chamber music. Of this repertoire his works for piano with other instruments seven sonatas, five trios, three quartets, and a quintet are particularly treasured by connoisseurs.

The Trio in C major, the second of his works for piano, violin, and cello was written between 1880 and 1882, received its official premiere in Frankfurt in 1882 with the composer at the keyboard. It is in four grand movements - an opening sonata-form movement, a second-movement set of variations on a theme in A minor that features a characteristic (short-long) rhythm called a 'Scotch snap', a whirl-wind Scherzo that shows the influence of Felix Mendelssohn and contains a gem of a trio, all wrapped up with a bright finale. Brahms's music is frequently very thick in texture, with the two string instruments often doubling each other at the octave in order to balance the flurry of notes in the piano part.

Notes by Christopher Hutton, Poinsett Piano Trio © 2009

POINSETT PIANO TRIO

Although the members of the group have known and performed with each other for several years, the Poinsett Piano Trio was founded in 2008. All three members live in Greenville, South Carolina (USA) and teach at Furman University, a liberal arts college with a strongly performance-oriented music program. The ensemble is named in honour of Joel Roberts Poinsett, a statesman, physician, and botanist from South Carolina. Poinsett is most remembered today as the discoverer of the Mexican Poinsettia plant, whose bright red flowers are popularly included in festive Christmas decorations throughout North America.

Pianist **David Gross** was born in Berlin (F.R. Germany) and presented his first public performance at the age of seven. He earned prizes at the international piano competitions in Marsala (1988), and Bremen (1993). David has taught at Western Michigan University, Goshen College and the Hochschule "Hanns Eisler" in Berlin (State Conservatory), and is currently Associate Professor of Piano at Furman University. He was educated at the Hochschule Munich, Hochschule Hannover, Yale University, and the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, and his teachers include Ludwig Hoffmann, Arie Vardi, Daniel Pollack, Claude Frank, and John Wustman. An active performer throughout Europe and the U.S., David has made numerous solo recordings for German National Public Radio as well as CD releases on Signum (Edouard Lalo, Piano Concerto) and Centaur (Jan Václav Voríšek, piano works).

Deidre Hutton is the only member of the group to have been born in the United States, and holds dual American and European Union citizenship.

She is an avid solo, chamber and orchestral performer having played at numerous music festivals throughout the United States. In addition, Deidre has performed in numerous orchestras in the US and Europe. She was Assistant Concertmaster of the Roanoke Symphony (Virginia). Deidre studied at the Eastman School of Music with Oleh Krysa and earned her Master's degree with Roland and Almita Vamos at Northwestern University. In addition, she studied in London under Itzhak Rashkovsky while a member of Haydn Chamber Symphony of London and as concertmaster of the Imperial Collegium Musicum Ensemble. She is currently Adjunct Professor of Violin at Furman University and teaches a private studio of talented high-school students.

Cellist **Christopher Hutton** is a dedicated chamber music performer, and has performed in a broad range of settings, including duo recitals in his home country of New Zealand (most recently with pianists Paul Wyse, Sergey Schepkin, and Thomas Lausmann) and chamber music performances in the United States and Europe. He has recorded for New Zealand's Concert FM, Germany's SWF Radio, and appears on a disc of contemporary music on Albany Classics. Christopher served as co-principal cellist in the New World Symphony Orchestra under music director Michael Tilson Thomas and has played in the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra as well as other orchestras in the United States. Christopher studied at Boston University with Leslie Parnas, and earned his Masters and Doctorate with Paul Katz and Steven Doane at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music. Since that time he has taught at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the University of Delaware, and the Eastern Music Festival before joining the faculty at Furman University in 2003.