

TRIO CON BRIO COPENHAGEN

Sunday, March 6, 2022

Program notes by Connie Mayo



Piano Trio in E minor Hob. XV/12

Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809)

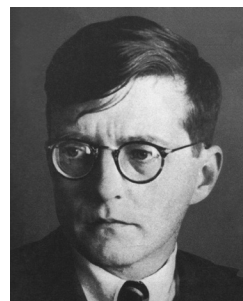
- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Andante
- III. Rondo: presto

Haydn played a key role in the piano trio's rise to prominence in musical culture. He wrote 45 throughout his life, and they were quite popular. The early ones with just two movements are essentially sonatas for piano with violin and cello accompaniment. As he experimented, increasing the melodic role of the strings, a more sophisticated and balanced dialogue evolved between the three voices. Known as "conversational style," this new form, cultivated by Haydn, became the standard in chamber music for the next 200 years.

His Piano Trio in E minor was composed between 1788 and 1789 and was probably intended as a salon piece to be played at home by musician friends who were capable amateurs. Haydn preferred to write for specific people or performers and didn't like to compose without knowing his audience. In 1788 Austria entered the Austro - Turkish war between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire which devastated the Austrian economy. The harsh, curt statements in the trio's first movement evoke a mood of confrontation and fear. The violin and cello are permitted to play the melody to some extent, though the piece is still largely a vehicle for the piano. This elegant and charming piece is one of just a few of Haydn's piano trios in a minor key, however, only for the first movement. The 2nd and 3rd movements move to the parallel major.

Haydn had a long and very productive career. At age six he left his family to become a choirboy at St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, a leading musical center of Europe. There, instructed in voice, violin and harpsichord, he regularly sang in performances of the greatest music being produced in Europe. When his voice broke at age fifteen, he was dismissed and began composing, teaching and studying the scores of C.P. E. Bach whose music he admired. Through musical connections he was eventually appointed Director of Music at the Esterhazy Court, home of the richest and most powerful noble family in the Hungarian nobility, where he remained for nearly 30 years writing music at his employer's bequest.

Haydn was hugely influential in shaping the style of music that defines the Classical period. He created new musical forms, developed larger structures using lighter, clearer texture and increased dynamic and emotional content. Given the title, "father of the symphony," he was also the first of the group of musicians known as the "Viennese Classics:" Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.



Piano Trio No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 67

Dimitri Shostakovich (1906 - 1975)

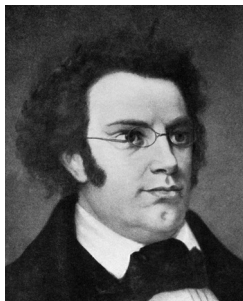
- I. Andante - Moderato - Poco più mosso
- II. Allegro con brio
- III. Largo
- IV. Allegretto - Adagio

Shostakovich was a Soviet era Russian composer and pianist who worked in an environment of fear and restraint under continual political scrutiny by the Stalinist regime. Soviet doctrine required that music express, "the victorious progressive principles of reality in images that are heroic, bright and beautiful." Modernism wasn't tolerated by Stalin, whose taste was for upbeat, easily accessible music that celebrated the superiority of the state. Required to work within these constraints set by the government, Shostakovich had to consider how to survive as a composer without compromising his integrity.

Influenced by Mahler and Stravinsky, Shostakovich's style is original and characterized by ambivalent tonality, sharp contrasts and elements of the grotesque. Much of his music expresses the misery of his people and projects a message of sorrow, suffering, isolation and protest. He considered many of his works, particularly the symphonies, to be "tombstones" for the many victims who suffered under the tyranny of Marxism.

Born in St Petersburg, he was exceptionally talented and entered the Petrograd Conservatory at thirteen, where he studied piano and composition and wrote his first symphony. It was premiered to great acclaim in Europe and the US and he became world famous at the age of nineteen. Until the production of his opera, Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District, he enjoyed significant success. But In 1936 after Stalin attended a performance of the opera calling it immoral and "chaos instead of music," further performances were banned and Shostakovich received the first of two official denunciations of his work. In 1948 he was denounced a second time in the Zhdanov Doctrine. Most of his works were banned; he was forced to publicly repent, and his family had privileges withheld. It is said that he, "waited for his arrest at night out on the landing so that at least his family wouldn't be disturbed."

Shostakovich wrote his second piano trio in the summer of 1944 as a tribute to his close friend the musicologist Ivan Sollertinsky. While writing it, he was deeply affected by grim reports of Jewish concentration camp inmates being massacred by the Nazis and was horrified by stories that SS guards had made their victims dance beside their own graves before being shot. The slow, grieving melody played in harmonics by the cello in the opening is a lament to those souls, as is the dark, Jewish-themed totentanz in the finale. Ideas that would have been unacceptable in his more public symphonic works could be more safely expressed in his chamber music. Shostakovich played the piano part at the trio's premier in Leningrad. In later years he continued composing despite Soviet repression of his work.



Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 99

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Andante un poco mosso
- III. Scherzo. Allegro - Trio
- IV. Rondo: Allegro vivace - Presto

The B-flat trio is a glorious masterpiece of poetic and dramatic beauty. Lively, buoyant and lyrical, it is one of the most revered chamber works in the classical repertoire. Schubert writes as if the fullness of his heart cannot be contained. With soaring melodies, innovative harmonies, fluctuating emotions and boundless energy, he embodies the romantic spirit.

Unlike Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Liszt and other great composers of the 18th and 19th centuries, Schubert was not a virtuoso performer who could introduce his music in concert. Though relatively unknown throughout his life in Vienna, his friends regularly gathered at each other's homes to play his music. These evenings—known as Schubertiads—featured a combination of chamber music, songs, and works for solo piano, and sometimes included other musicians, poets, and painters.

Unwilling to take a risk on an unrecognized composer, publishers largely rejected his work. Schubert wrote the B-flat trio when he was 30, the last year of his life. Robert Schumann, who called the trio, “a cherished inheritance,” discovered it a decade after it was written among bundles of stacked music in the home of Schubert's brother. In the grand sonata style of Beethoven, it displays a maturity far beyond his years.