

18th Dec 2016 (ACCA) TRIO ISIMSIZ

Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809) Piano Trio in A flat, Hob. XV:14 (1790)

Allegro moderato

Adagio

Rondo (Vivace)

Haydn wrote about 45 piano trios throughout his life, starting in his early 30s and ending in 1797 when he was 65. They demonstrate his inventiveness in creating new musical structures, and also his harmonic adventurousness. Charles Rosen described them as '*along with the Mozart concertos the most brilliant piano works before Beethoven.*'

Rosen's emphasis on the piano is apt, since the cello very often doubles the keyboard bass, necessarily compensating for the thin tone of the harpsichord or of the contemporary early pianofortes; the violin though carries a more independent line.

This Ab Trio is contemporary with his Op 64 string quartets and dates from 1790, the year that Haydn, released from many of his obligations at the Esterhazy palace, first visited London. The work was probably composed for the new pianoforte; we know from a letter that Haydn wrote to his publisher Artaria in 1788 that he was then composing a set of trios at a 'grand pianoforte' rather than at the harpsichord.

The opening theme (illustrated) has an assertive dotted rhythm which dominates the first part of the movement; it contrasts with a



smoother, gentle version of a rising scale. At the double bar Haydn ominously shifts this rising figure, now *forte*, through various minor keys for a few bars; he then plays one of his favourite tricks – the music just stops. After two silent bars it starts again in a completely different mood. The keys become extreme, before returning to the home key for the last part of the movement.



The beautiful slow opening melody of the *Adagio* (illustrated) shows Haydn's genius at melting our hearts by the simplest of means. This poignant melody sandwiches a rhapsodic outburst in the minor from the piano, minimally accompanied by pizzicato strings. The work ends with a good-natured Rondo.

Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924) Piano Trio in D minor, Op.120 (1922/3)

Allegro, ma non troppo

Andantino

Allegro vivo

Although Fauré is best known for his vocal writing, in particular his songs and Requiem, he also wrote chamber music throughout his life: two sonatas each for violin and cello with piano, a piano trio, a string quartet, two piano quartets and two piano quintets. The piano trio dates from the last years of his life, together with the second piano quintet and the string quartet. By then he suffered from cacophonous hearing – although mid-range notes were heard at their correct pitch, high notes sounded a 3rd too low and low notes a 3rd too

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Piano Trio in D, Op.70 No.1 (Ghost) (1808)

Allegro vivace e con brio

Largo assai ed espressivo

Presto

1808 saw Beethoven composing at full power: his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Choral Fantasia, the A major cello sonata as well as the two Op 70 piano trios all come from this year. The cello sonata and the piano trios seem to have been part of a conscious decision by him to revisit the chamber music forms with which he had made such an impact shortly after his arrival in Vienna.

Why the 'Ghost' trio? The name was coined by Carl Czerny, pianist, composer, pupil and friend of Beethoven who wrote that the slow movement always reminded him of the appearance of Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*. It is not known whether Czerny was aware that Beethoven had included in the sketchbook that he had used for the *Ghost* Trio preliminary ideas for an opera based on *Macbeth*. Whether or not Beethoven specifically had Banquo in mind, the trio is certainly dramatic.

The opening (illustrated) is ferociously violent with groups of four quavers (bracketed) battling with the triple-time key signature. Immediately, though, the cello presents an 'aching, tender melody' (illustrated); each of its first two bars presents a motif for later development as the movement batters us with conflicting emotions.

Allegro vivace con brio



The eponymous slow movement is marked *Adagio assai* – Very slow – and slow it is, I know of none slower in chamber music. In many performances, each crotchet beat takes almost 4 seconds. A consequence of this sepulchral tempo is that in order to get the players to play fast you have to write lots of notes in the bar: just before the end there are shuddering bars that contain 48 separate triplet hemi-demi-semi-quavers! As Angus Watson points out, these trembling figures are reminiscent of Florestan's despairing aria at the opening of Act 2 of *Fidelio*, and this movement lacks none of its spine-chilling passion. Note that the opening two crotchets (illustrated) D and G are the same notes as the first two crotchet beats in the opening theme of the first movement (*).

Largo assai ed espressivo
(♩ = c.35) Piano



The last movement opens expansively and genially, then pauses twice for breath, gathering its strength to lay some of the preceding ghosts.

Programme notes by Chris Darwin