

Mithras Trio ACCA 20.3.22

### Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) Piano Trio No. 7 in G, Hob. XV:41 (c 1760-1767)

*Allegro*

*Menuet*

*Adagio*

*Finale. Allegro*

Despite its high number in the Hoboken catalogue (41<sup>st</sup> trio out of 45), this work is one of Haydn's first trios, probably dating from the early 1760s. Around that time, Haydn moved from the court of count Morzin in Vienna to the grandly affluent Esterhazy court where he served initially as deputy Kapellmeister to the ageing incumbent and subsequently as his replacement, staying for almost 30 years.

These early trios were written for harpsichord and grew out of the accompanied keyboard sonata. They are dominated by the keyboard: the cello doubles and so reinforces the otherwise acoustically weak bass line while the violin provides an independent obligato accompaniment. Over the next 40 years or so of Haydn's life the piano arrived and developed in power so that in his later piano trios not only is the cello liberated but the violin can challenge a more substantial partner.

Though early in his long list of piano trios, Haydn was probably already in his thirties when he wrote today's G major trio. It is an engaging work with a particularly touching slow movement and shows many of the marks of the mature master. One of these is thematic unity. The opening theme (*illustrated*) is a simple rising statement followed by an



elaborated reply. It provides the raw material for much of the entire work. The *Minuet* has essentially the same phrase but in triple time rather than duple, and its *Trio* also has the same rising figure but in the minor. The keyboard starts the beautiful long *Adagio* with the opening theme's trill and then uses the material of its third bar to build an extended singing melody. The inability of early keyboards to sustain a note is compensated for by extensive use of trills to extend them. It could even be argued that the lively last movement uses a theme (*illustrated*) based on the opening theme; the opening first two bars



become compressed into a single rising chord which continues into a figure made from the descending semiquavers of the opening bars. But that might just be a struggling programme-note writer's fantasy.

### Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op 101 (1886)

*Allegro energico*

*Presto non assai*

*Andante grazioso*

*Allegro molto*

Brahms wrote his C-minor trio 1886 during a prodigiously productive 3-month summer holiday in Hofstetten near the Thunersee in Switzerland. Also composed at this time were the second cello sonata, the second and much of the third violin sonatas and a substantial number of songs. Brahms found walking helped his creativity: "When ideas come to you, go for a walk; then you will discover that the thing you thought was a complete thought was actually only the beginning of one."

The opening of the work (*illustrated*) is one of the most uncompromising in all of Brahms with thunderous octaves and then triplets and quadruplets in a characteristically Brahmsian tussle. The aggressive dots of a martial motif (*illustrated*) soon add to the tension. Bad weather? Bad digestion? Bad love life? Who knows what, if anything, precipitated such an outpouring. But this is music, not real life, so we are soon soothed with the smoothest of the master's melodies, in now amiable *cantabile* octaves between the violin and cello (*illustrated*) with not a tussling triplet in sight. The violin and cello get really quite friendly, helped by the piano. But, of course, the opening tension returns and is developed in contrast to the more agreeable material in one of Brahms' most compact and intense movements.

**Allegro energico**

In contrast to the first movement which so definitely is, the second movement almost isn't. Short, fast and hushed, the muted strings evade attempts to focus on them. It is cast in the ABA form of a Scherzo and Trio but in two rather than the usual three time.

A genial Intermezzo comes next with a guileless tune in an unsettling rhythm (*illustrated*). The 7-beat structure (3+2+2) perhaps comes from Hungarian or Serbian folk music. A more animated middle section mainly in a 5-beat structure (3+2) provides more rhythmic diversion.

**Andante grazioso**

The last movement continues Brahms' almost obsessive use of the rhythmic contrast of three against two. Here he takes a simple phrase of four descending dotted crotchets (each made up of three quavers) with a similar phrase that is syncopated by half a dotted crotchet

(*illustrated*) - definitely advanced-level rhythmic sight-

reading! Somewhat simpler rhythmic games come a little later, subdividing the bar into three rather than two (*illustrated*).

Where the first movement had a daunting, recurring tension, the

geniality of the middle movements has spawned an energetic finale that can convincingly end in the positive blaze of C major.

## Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Piano Trio No 2 in E-flat, D.929 (1827)

*Allegro*

*Andante con moto*

*Scherzo: Allegro moderato*

*Allegro moderato*

Schubert's two Piano Trios date from the final years of his life when, frustrated by his lack of success at opera and dissatisfied with his song writing, he returned to instrumental music. He overcame the daunting shade of Beethoven to compose a series of masterpieces. The two piano trios were written after the octet and the late string quartets (including *'Death and the Maiden'* and the G major quartet) but before the 2-cello string quintet. The trios are both very substantial works, matching his contemporary 'Great' C major symphony in length and musical depth.

Schubert was known to Viennese concert-goers almost exclusively as a writer of songs: many male-voice part songs plus the *Erkönig* and a few other lieder. By 1828 the only public performances of his chamber music had been of just three of his works (including the first Piano Trio) in the Schuppanzigh Quartet's subscription concerts between 1824 and 1827. However, on 26th March 1828, choosing the date to be precisely on the first anniversary of Beethoven's death, Schubert organised a benefit concert of his own music. He could now present a wider range of his music to the public, and the E-flat Piano Trio was the centrepiece. It was performed by the pianist Carl Maria von Bocklet, with Schuppanzigh and his quartet's cellist Josef Linke. In January, this group had previously played the trio at a private party to celebrate the engagement of Schubert's school friend Josef von Spaun. The Trio exists in two versions: the original, which was only published relatively recently, and the initially-published version, which we are hearing today, with a shortened last movement. We are not sure why, or indeed when Schubert made the changes, but it is likely they occurred after these concerts and possibly at the instigation of Schuppanzigh.

The first movement opens with a bold flourish, shortly followed by a more singing theme on the cello (*illustrated*), and a little later by a tripping figure of crotchet and four quavers (*illustrated*) which is a modification of the opening flourish. The material is expounded, developed and recapped at glorious Schubertian length before a final outburst of the opening flourish, and a wistful echo of crotchet and four quavers.



Those quavers are transformed into the opening accompaniment of the beautiful *Andante*. The movement takes some of its material from a Swedish folk-song *'Se solen sjunker'* ('Look, the sun is setting'), which Schubert encountered when the Swedish singer Isak Albert Berg visited Vienna.



Schubert adapts its repeated quaver piano accompaniment, but most strikingly, at bar 13 the cello imitates the song's (*illustrated*) octave descent (on the word 'Farewell') and the subsequent phrase with a leap of a tenth. The 'Farewell' octave fall, which also poignantly ends the movement is likely in tribute to Beethoven, the sun that has set.

The romping *Scherzo* starts as a canon with the piano leading the strings by a bar, but then naughtily slides up a semitone from E-flat to E major (a Beethoven trick) for a different canon this time at an interval of two bars. The second half of the Trio sees the crotchet and four quavers motif return in a different guise.

The *Finale* is unusually long, even for Schubert and even in the revised shorter version. It is in a combination of sonata form (like a conventional first movement) and the more usual last movement form of a *Rondo*. After the unpromising opening theme, which sounds like it might have been overheard in the pub, the second theme of the movement is more exotic.

The time-signature shifts from 6/8 to 2/2, squashing 8 quavers into the time previously taken by 6, and the rapid repeated quavers on the violin and later in octaves on the piano (*illustrated*) produce an effect like a Hungarian cimbalom.



Programme notes by Chris Darwin