

Aquinas Mar 16

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Piano Trio in E flat Op 1 No 1 (before 1794)

*Allegro*

*Adagio cantabile*

*Scherzo. Allegro assai*

*Finale. Presto*

Beethoven's three Op 1 trios are dedicated to Prince Karl von Lichnowsky who had been generous to Beethoven after his arrival in Vienna. A composer and collector of Bach manuscripts, Lichnowsky had also been very generous to Mozart lending him a substantial sum of money, which Mozart was unable to repay. It has recently come to light that the Prince sued Mozart and, a few weeks before Mozart died, the court found in the Prince's favour and requisitioned half of Mozart's salary from the Imperial Court. Beethoven initially fared better and secured a substantial annuity from the Prince which was paid until the two had a furious quarrel in 1806 causing Beethoven, in turn, to sue Lichnowsky.

Before the three Op 1 piano trios were published by Artaria in 1795, Beethoven had already written a substantial amount of chamber music: at least 3 piano quartets (WoO 36), another piano trio (WoO 38) and a wind octet (Op 103). He probably began work on his Opus 1 trios in his home town of Bonn, but continued to work on them after his move to Vienna in 1792, where Haydn, who was teaching Beethoven, heard them performed.

Haydn advised Beethoven not to publish the C minor trio – the third of the set. Beethoven took offence, thinking Haydn jealous and ill-disposed to him, though Haydn said he was simply trying to protect Beethoven from what he thought would be a hostile public response. Nonetheless, Beethoven delayed publication and revised the trios, partly as a result of Haydn's remarks, but also to ensure good sales on the basis of his growing reputation. His efforts and guile were well rewarded with an initial subscription of 241 copies bringing in the equivalent of many thousand pounds today. The extended family of Prince Lichnowsky, the Trios' dedicatee, bought 52 copies. Not bad for the Op 1 of a 25-year-old.

The Trios are rich in ideas ('When I re-read the manuscripts I wondered at my folly in collecting into a single work materials enough for twenty') and have many of Beethoven's characteristic trade-marks. In Beethoven's hands the piano trio form moves beyond the traditional three-movement design of Haydn and Mozart: he adds a movement, casts the individual movements on a larger scale, and, partly because of improvements in piano technology, is able to free the cello from merely enriching the piano's bass-line.

Perhaps to emphasise these innovations, Op 1 no 1 opens with a backward look to the Mannheim of fifty years earlier. The attention-grabbing rising arpeggio is an example of the Mannheim Rocket – one of a clutch of devices exploited by those composing for the technically brilliant Mannheim orchestra; others included the Roller (a long crescendo), the Tremble and the Sigh. The violin gets to state the second theme (illustrated) whose opening (under x) is reused in the second movement. Towards the end of this genial and boisterous first movement Beethoven plays the false-ending trick – one that Haydn loved – before a long and novel final coda. The *Adagio* slow movement is, unusually in a rondo

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in treble clef, key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and common time (C). It features a rising arpeggio starting with a forte-piano (*fp*) dynamic, followed by a piano (*pp*) section, and then a fortissimo (*sf*) section. A bracket labeled 'x' spans the first few notes of the arpeggio. The bottom staff is also in treble clef, key signature of two flats, and 3/4 time. It is labeled 'Adagio' and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. A bracket labeled 'y' spans the first few notes of this movement.

form with the opening material (illustrated) alternating with new ideas. Its start (under y) has an obvious relationship to the x passage of the first movement.

After the Scherzo we arrive at the boisterous *Presto Finale* which opens with a provocatively playfully jump of a tenth. More provocations follow – a slithery semitone descent perhaps cocking a snook at Mozart's chromaticisms leading into a parody of Haydn's Gypsy Rondo style. But the best is yet to come. After some daring modulations, the strings try to tip-toe away in a slow pianissimo semitone descent, but the piano leaps out at them blowing a giant raspberry (illustrated) and then skips away as if nothing had happened.

### Frank Martin (1890 – 1974) Trio on Popular Irish Folk Tunes (1925)

*Allegro moderato*  
*Adagio*  
*Gigue*

Frank Martin was born in Geneva, the tenth child of a Calvinist, Huguenot pastor; this Christian background particularly influenced his large-scale theatrical and choral works. Much of his chamber music was written in the 1920s and 30s during which time he was heavily involved in the Geneva Chamber Music Society that he had founded. Today's Trio comes from early in this period. His most individual music, however, started to emerge in the mid-1930s when he developed his own more tonal and rhythmically energetic variety of Schoenberg's 12-tone system. The toe-tapping rhythmic liveliness of the outer two movements of this Trio may not be entirely due to its Irish sources. In the 1920s Martin worked closely with Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. "Dalcroze Eurhythmics" emphasised the importance of bodily movement in music education, and was taken up later by "Music & Movement" in the UK and the Orff approach in the US.

### Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Piano Trio No. 2 in C, Op 87 (1882)

*Allegro*  
*Andante con moto (Tema con variazioni)*  
*Scherzo: Presto – Trio: Poco meno presto*  
*Finale: Allegro giocoso*

By 1880 Brahms had not composed a piano trio for almost 30 years, but then, like no. 87 buses, two came along at once: one in C, the other in E-flat. Brahms often started to compose contrasting pairs of works at the same time; he started these trios shortly before the contrasting Academic Festival and Tragic Overtures. After composing the first movements of both trios, he set them aside and, ever self-critical, eventually destroyed the one in E-flat - despite Clara Schumann's preference for it. A couple of years later, after finishing his second piano concerto, he returned to and completed this C major trio.

In the 30-odd years since his Op 8 B major trio, the piano had become more powerful,

and Brahms had gained experience of writing for piano with a larger group of strings (piano quartets and a quintet) or as soloist in a piano concerto. Consequently, the relationship between the strings in the Op 87 trio is different from that in the much earlier Op 8 trio. The difference is evident from the start: the work opens with the violin and cello playing the expansive main theme (*illustrated*) in octaves treating them as a single voice against the piano. In fact, all the other movements also open with the strings in octaves. Despite the increased power of the 1880s piano, and Brahms' proclivity for dense chording, it is important to bear in mind that the Streicher piano that he was then composing at was considerably lighter in sound than a modern Steinway concert grand: "to hear Brahms's music on an instrument like the Streicher is to realize that the thick textures we associate with his work, the sometimes muddy chords in the bass and the occasionally woolly sonorities, come cleaner and clearer on a lighter, straight-strung piano. Those textures, then, are not a fault of Brahms's piano composition." (Edwin Good).

Half-way through the movement Brahms plays a master stroke, the tempo notches up *animato* and the cello transforms the jauntily dotted opening phrase by slowing it in a heartfelt *espressivo* (*illustrated*) above ripples on the piano.



A further modification of the opening gives the theme for the variations of the second movement. The rising third (now A to C) is still there, but the original dotted rhythm is reversed into a 'Scotch snap' (as in 'body coming through the rye').



At the end of the theme Brahms pulls a cunning technical trick: the two halves of the last 7 bars (*illustrated*) consist of a phrase followed by its inversion (rising intervals replaced by



downward and *vice versa*). Such devices reflect Brahms' thorough classical schooling (inversion of fugue subjects was a favourite baroque device), but using inversion to complete a melody looks forward, and perhaps contributed to Schoenberg's famous view of "Brahms the Progressive".

The *Presto Scherzo* again starts with string octaves with the hallmark rising third, but this time in a fleeting pianissimo in C minor. It is gloriously contrasted in the slightly slower trio section by one of Brahms' wonderful soaring melodies (*illustrated*) back in C major.



String octaves and a rising third again start off the playful *Finale* - *Allegro giocoso*. The piano accompanies with a descending figure of repeated quavers (*illustrated*) which is extended and frequently recurs as a sort of laughing motif throughout this good-natured movement.

