

**NOTES ON THE PROGRAM**  
**Pro Musica 2018-19**  
**Montrose Piano Trio**

In this wonderful program, the Montrose Trio artfully takes us through the development of the piano trio from its origins in Haydn, through its glorious development by Mendelssohn, to its monumental peak with Brahms. Each of the three works expresses one of the finest moments in the compositional life of its composer.

**Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**  
**Piano Trio No. 45 in E-flat Major, Hob: XV: 29 (1797)**  
**Poco allegretto**  
**Andante innocentemente**  
**Finale: (Allemande) Presto assai**

While Haydn is often acknowledged as father of the string quartet, his paternity of the piano trio is sometimes overlooked. Although Mozart had written several piano trios before Haydn, he did not seem as comfortable with the form nor did he write so lavishly for it despite the splendid results of his efforts. The later piano trios of Beethoven and Brahms, we must remember, spring from the earlier efforts of Haydn as well as Mozart. By Brahms' time, the piano trio was reaching its full force, but it was Haydn who began that push. Interestingly, Haydn's piano trios coincided with the development of the modern piano. If anything deterred the Haydn piano trios from their proper recognition, it was probably the early keyboard instruments that could not do the piano parts justice. With time and the development of the modern piano, that obviously has been resolved. While Haydn piano trios may suffer a certain neglect in the performance world, they are, nevertheless, gems of the repertoire and most satisfying for both listeners and performers.

The E-flat Trio is Haydn's forty-fifth and final piano trio, composed at the age of sixty-five when he was well-established in Vienna but still spending time in Eisenstadt with the Esterházy family for whom he would write six masses. He had completed his some sixty-eight string quartets and was on the brink of his two great oratorios *The Creation* (1798) and *The Seasons* (1801). That his health was beginning to decline did not deter him from writing his three last piano trios, Nos. 27-29, all composed in 1797 and dedicated to the accomplished pianist Theresa Jansen. Indeed, she must have been a virtuoso to play the E-flat Trio, a fabulous last statement in the form that no composer seems to have equaled. Beethoven's debt to Haydn is obvious in the work.

We are welcomed into the first movement *Poco allegretto* by a declarative opening chord that quickly leads to a lyrical theme that is broadly elaborated upon throughout the whole movement. We are continuously surprised by the octave leaps, quick turns to the minor, and dramatic pauses. A complex coda leads to a final statement of the theme and an ending with a flourish.

The notion of innocence implied in the second movement *Andante innocentemente* should not obscure the difficulty of this work. With its poignancy and growing tension, the movement is a meeting of simplicity and complexity in the most extraordinary musical way.

The second movement leads directly into the final movement's *Allemande*, a reference to the spirited German dance form with which Haydn has his fun. Haydn takes a humorous pause from his breathless liveliness and then offers a glorious race to the end by all three instruments.

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)**  
**Piano Trio in C Minor, Op. 66 (1845)**  
**Allegro energico e con fuoco**  
**Andante espressivo**  
**Scherzo: Molto allegro quasi presto**  
**Finale: Allegro appassionato**

Mendelssohn's few critics suggest that he missed the mark of greatness because of his birthright as a member of the wealthy bourgeoisie. That Mendelssohn was free of the impoverishment so often associated with musical careers and that he wore his genius lightly should not obscure his greatness. It would seem a harsh sentence for a composer whose particular talent is unmatched, so much so that Robert Schumann, in an 1840 edition of *Neue Zeitschrift*, called him the "Mozart of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."

Yet it was Beethoven that Mendelssohn most admired. He even expressed a concern to his composition teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, that he might be perceived as an imitator of the earlier master. Such was not

the case with Mendelssohn who carried on the tradition of great music in his own way. By the time he was twenty, he would conduct the first performance of *St. Matthew's Passion* since Bach's death in 1750 as well as compose his famous Octet, the first two of his six great string quartets, the overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the first of the two string quintets that would punctuate the beginning and end of his career.

Anti-Semitic trends already evident in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, including Wagner's notorious essay, *Judaism in Music*, limited the spread of Mendelssohn's music, and the Nazi era completely suppressed it. His memorial in Leipzig was destroyed in 1936 by the Fascists. Fortunately today his music has been restored to its rightfully high place in history. In his impressive book, *The Romantic Generation*, Charles Rosen calls Mendelssohn "the greatest child prodigy the history of Western music has ever known." Liszt compared him to Bach.

The Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor was completed in April of 1845 and premiered the following December at the Leipzig Gewandhaus with Mendelssohn himself performing the piano part. It was dedicated to celebrated violinist, composer, and conductor Louis Spohr with whom Mendelssohn would also perform the work.

The first and longest movement of the Trio reflects its movement marking *Allegro energico e con fuoco*. Indeed, it opens with great energy and continues with an unmistakable fieriness. Amid the fire, however, are complex thematic developments and soaring melodic moments that make the fire even more effective before the movement comes to a powerful conclusion. Throughout this movement and the entire work is a notable equality of instruments even though the demanding piano part shines forth as expected in piano trio form.

The second movement *Andante espressivo* opens with a brief piano solo soon joined by the strings that add to the beautifully expressive quality of the music. A certain tenderness dominates as all three instruments have moving solo moments and the piano and cello share a lovely duet moment. Despite the moving quality of the movement, power is not lost.

The brief *Scherzo* is a whole new expression of energy, this time with an element of humor. New demands are made on all three instruments throughout this exciting and breathless movement.

"Passion" is the keyword to describe the Finale marked *Allegro appassionato*. While the tempo is slower than the previous *Scherzo* movement, a passionate power fully reigns. It is in this movement that Mendelssohn catches our attention by quoting the melody associated with the famous hymn we know as "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" which Bach also used in his Cantata 130. Never fear, however, that the quote is a mere copying of notes. And speaking of copying, Brahms used the opening theme of the Finale for the Scherzo of his Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 5 as well as the opening of the first movement as the basis for the piano line in the finale of his Piano Quartet No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 60.

### **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

#### **Piano Trio in B Major, Op. 8 (1854)**

**Allegro con brio**

**Scherzo: Allegro molto; Trio**

**Adagio**

**Allegro**

No composer better represents a melding of Romantic style and Classical form than Brahms. Furthermore, within his lifetime he experienced both the waning of Romanticism and the birth of the controversial Second Viennese School led by Arnold Schoenberg. Nor was Brahms free from a part in this latter musical evolution as evidenced by some of his late works and by Schoenberg's bow to him in his essay "Brahms the Progressive." The famous late 19<sup>th</sup> century controversy that pitted Brahms against Wagner and divided the musical world would seem of less significance if it had not inspired the French to take a new path with Impressionism. Within all these developments, however, Brahms maintained his individual stamp of elegant form, adventurous harmony, gorgeous melody, and grand sweep of emotion.

Although Brahms revised the B Major Trio thirty-five years after its publication in 1854, it remains a work of incredible youthful genius. Specifically, the revisions apply mostly to the second themes in the first, second, and fourth movements and to the omission of the fugue in the final movement although the wonderful *Scherzo* and *Trio* of the second movement he hardly touched. Nor did he tamper with the opening theme of the first movement except in its instrumentation. Whether or not the Trio's highly personal references to Clara Schumann were cause for revision is speculative.

We are invited into the work with an irresistible and noble theme stated briefly by the piano and then taken up and developed by the cello in a moment that any cellist longs for. This full-blown lyricism continues until the enticing *Scherzo* rushes by. Brahms soon turns lyrical again, however, in a highly romantic *Trio* section following the *Scherzo*. It is here that he recalls Heinrich Heine's poem of forbidden and hopeless love. The

mature Brahms is evident in the profound and song-like *Adagio* with its extended conversation between cello and piano. Brahms soars to new heights in the forthright finale *Allegro*, one of the more heavily revised movements in its second melody. Here are references to Clara Schumann by way of Brahms' use of a Beethoven song, "Take, then these songs which I write for you, Beloved." Curiously enough, Robert Schumann used the same song in his great Fantasy in C Major for piano.

Brahms himself expressed concern for improvement in his second writing of the B Major Trio, but whatever compositional sins Brahms may have committed in his youth seem rectified in this later version of the Trio. The revised version was premiered on January 10, 1890 in Budapest. Brahms as pianist was joined by violinist Jenő Hubay and cellist David Hopper.

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