

audite

Complete Works for Piano Trio **Piano Trios No. 2 & No. 5**



SWISS
PIANO TRIO

BEETHOVEN

Piano Trio No. 2 in G major, Op. 1,2

- I. Adagio – Allegro vivace 11:52
- II. Largo con espressione 9:47
- III. Scherzo. Allegro 3:43
- IV. Finale. Presto 7:55

Piano Trio No. 5 in D major, Op. 70,1

- I. Allegro vivace e con brio 10:42
- II. Largo assai ed espressivo 8:39
- III. Presto 8:53



The Complete Works for Piano Trio by Beethoven

Following great critical acclaim – as well as numerous awards for their complete recordings of the Piano Trios by Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky and Robert and Clara Schumann for the audite label – the Swiss Piano Trio have, since January 2015, been working on their most significant recording project to date: that of the complete Beethoven Piano Trios. After the successful release of the first volume, they now present the second instalment of their five-part series, revealing fascinating insights across the entire development of Beethoven's musical language, from the astonishing three Trios Op. 1 from his early, Classical period, through his middle period, to which the Trios Op. 70 can be attributed, to the *Archduke* Trio Op. 97, marking the beginning of his late oeuvre.

Alongside the famous works, the Swiss Piano Trio are also recording the Trio Op. 38, an original arrangement for piano trio of Beethoven's Septet Op. 20 which has been left out of many complete recordings. The Triple Concerto for Piano Trio and Orchestra Op. 56 is also not to be missed: here, Beethoven ingeniously employs the chamber formation of the piano trio as an ensemble of soloists in dialogue with the orchestra.

Rather than issuing the works in chronological order, as is the case with most complete recordings, it is our philosophy to present each of the five CDs as a diverse programme, combining early and later works as well as the variations, creating five exciting concert programmes which allow the listener directly to compare Beethoven's different creative periods.

Beethoven's trios make up their own musical cosmos whose stylistic spectrum represents an enormous challenge to their interpreters. The early trios in the Classical style demand a much slimmer and more transparent tone than the almost symphonic *Archduke* Trio Op. 97 or the so-called *Ghost* Trio, Op. 70 No 1, whose novel sound effects in the second movement already anticipate the Romantic style.

Carl Czerny's *Reminiscences of Beethoven* (Vienna, 1842) has proved to be an inspiring treasure trove with regard to interpretation – in the chapter “Über den richtigen Vortrag der sämtlichen Beethoven'schen Werke für das Piano mit Begleitung” (On the correct performance of Beethoven's complete works for piano with accompaniment), he comments on all the piano trios and adds suggestions for interpretation. As Beethoven's pupil, and later also friend, Czerny had studied nearly all works for, and with, piano under the guidance of the composer and was thus also intimately familiar with the chamber works. His tempo markings, however, are surprising at times, in some slow movements revealing themselves to be more flowing, whilst others are more held back than expected, as for instance in the third movement of the *Ghost* Trio. This leads to results which show this wonderful music in a new light.

In these recordings the Swiss Piano Trio deliberately steer away from the encyclopaedic approach and instead concentrate on the pleasure and delight in Beethoven's inexhaustible creativeness and his ever-fresh music.

Martin Lucas Staub

Translation: Viola Scheffel

Works for Piano Trio by Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Trios Op. 1,2 and Op. 70,1

The exciting contrasting of the Trios, Op. 1, No. 1 and Op. 97 which formed the upbeat to the complete recording of Beethoven's works for piano trio by the Swiss Piano Trio (audite 97.692), also determines the programme of the second volume. By comparing the Trio, Op. 1 No. 2, published in 1795 as part of the *Opus Primum*, with the Trio, Op. 70, No. 1 of thirteen years later, the contrasts are again shown between differing compositional concepts and ideas from Beethoven's different creative periods. Already a fleeting comparison of the works shows that Beethoven based the two trios on different formal concepts, although they belong to the same genre. Thus Op. 1, No. 2, with its four-movement design and the slow introduction to the first movement, takes up genre traditions from the symphony and string quartet. Contrasting with this, the three-movement Op. 70, No. 1 frees itself from fixed formal concepts and embarks upon the path of a consistent individualisation upon which Beethoven had already embarked, above all, in the realm of the piano sonata.

This path was supported by the rapid advances in piano-building during the early 19th century in which not only the range was expanded, but, above all, the bass register became fuller in tone. This also had consequences for the piano trio, for the *colla-parte* use of the violoncello to support the low register of the piano was no longer needed. Although Op. 1, No. 2 still reveals several unison spots between the violoncello and piano bass range, we notice a great reduction in bass doubling in the case of Op. 70, No. 1. Here, the violoncello is instead confronted with the violin as an emancipated partner on an equal footing. Completely new possibilities in the piano trio are thus opened up to the composer for the purposes of thematic processing.

Trio for Piano, Violin and Violoncello in G major, Op. 1, No. 2

The Piano Trio in G major, Op. 1, No. 2 begins weightily with a 27-bar *Adagio* introduction whose habitus is reminiscent of an overture in the French style. The violin anticipates the main theme of the ensuing *Allegro vivace*, consisting of repeated notes and a double-turn motif, but it is greatly expanded in the slow tempo and also extended by a descending arpeggiated triad at the end as a transition. The appearance of the expected principal key of G major does not occur simultaneously with the beginning of the fast section as expected; the key is only established in the 16th bar of the *Allegro vivace* by means of a cadence. Through this, Beethoven intensifies the renewed thematic entrance in the violin eight bars later, now in G major. After an academic cadence, we hear the secondary theme in the violin. The theme begins on an upbeat consisting of passing semiquavers, creating an elated, dance-like effect through the alternation between tied notes and staccato. The exposition and development are characterised by many imitations between the instruments. A four-note motif forms the beginning of the development, consisting of a chromatically framed fifth that was already extensively used in the Baroque period as a figure for contrapuntal processing techniques. This four-note motif is derived from the skilfully hidden and initially somewhat trivial-sounding accompanying figure of the first 16 bars of the exposi-

tion. Beethoven uses it as a counter-subject, completely in the sense of older compositional techniques, thus placing it on an equal level with the principal theme. The development, therefore, does not follow the dissection of formerly intact thematic formation, but is rather a contrapuntal and harmonic unification of shapes that were still unconnected at the beginning of the movement. The 16-bar formation at the beginning of the exposition was, of course, unsuitable as a movement opening, having required a slow introduction to precede it. Moreover, the four-note motif can also be heard as a melodic development of the expressive energy of the diminished seventh chords in the introduction. The first 16 bars of the *Allegro vivace* are now plausible at this crucial point – the beginning of the development – in retrospect, as is the necessity of a (slow) introduction resulting from it. The close musical connection between the sections requires a comparative and perspective-orientated manner of listening.

One reason for this problem-orientated way of composing can also be found in Beethoven's biography: beginning in 1794, at the time of the composition of Op. 1, Beethoven was studying counterpoint with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger in Vienna. Alongside some short fugues, written testimony to this instruction is found in pages of sketches, one of which shows the beginning of the slow middle movement of Op. 1, No. 2.

This movement is in the mediant E major, superscribed with *Largo con espressione* and cast as a large-scale lied form with coda in 6/8 metre. Both of the movement's themes are reminiscent of vocal themes in their cantabile quality, and are combined with each other by means of contrapuntal compositional techniques. Already in Beethoven's Opus Primum, therefore, one can find compositional techniques of an older style which, beginning in 1815 with the writing of the *Missa solemnis*, will reappear with greater intensity later on. There follows a brief *Scherzo. Allegro*, which is also strongly contrapuntal. The Trio of the third movement in B minor has somewhat foreign-exotic associations with its octave leaps, long trills, the turning motif in the piano and the violoncello's rather peculiar bass part. The final movement of the Piano Trio – *Presto* – makes an elatedly lively and cheerful impression with the repeated semiquavers and ensuing arpeggiated ascending triads as well as its 2/4 metre, which reinforces the *Presto* effect. Although Beethoven adheres strongly to the sonata-allegro form here with a repeated exposition, development, recapitulation and coda, the movement seems like a rondo with its 48-bar group of principal motifs, continuous quaver pulse and fast-paced tempo. The field of tension between form and virtuosity which is clearly in the foreground in this movement, as well as the extended development, caused the Beethoven scholar Alexander L. Ringer to characterise the final movement as “an almost pictorial summer-night's spectre”.

Trio for Piano, Violin and Violoncello in D major Op. 70, No. 1

Beethoven's Piano Trio, Op. 70, No. 1 is also spooky, even in its title. Carl Czerny, a pupil of Beethoven, wrote about the second movement: “The character of this *Largo*, to be performed very slowly, is spookily unearthly, almost like an apparition from the underworld”. Thus the epithet “Ghost Trio” was established. After it was completed in the summer of 1808, in immediate proximity to the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, Beethoven dedicated the work to a patroness, Duchess Anna Marie von Erdödy. The first performance also took place at her estate. The slow middle movement in D minor, *Largo assai ed espressivo*, conjures up gloomy moods: a long, extended motif played in unison by the violin and vio-

loncello (descending fourths followed by an upward leap of a sixth) is repeated four times ascending, accompanied by pulsing chords in the piano part. A cantabile melody then follows in the cello's upper register, immediately imitated by the violin and thus creating a little duet. Alongside surprising dynamic contrasts, an essential reason for Czerny's description of the middle movement is, above all, the use of the piano tremolo as a sound effect creating an unusual timbre. E. T. A. Hoffmann also emphasised this special sound effect in his famous review of the Piano Trio, Op. 70, No. 1 in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of 1813: "It is almost the only way that the tone of a good grand piano can be brought out in a surprising, effective way. If these sextuplets are played with a skilled, light hand, with raised dampers and the soft pedal, then it creates a rustling reminiscent of an Aeolian harp and harmonica."

The uncanny mood of the second movement could also be interpreted programmatically, for it was on a sketch-page for this movement that the composer notated some ideas for a projected *Macbeth* opera based on the bloody, sombre drama by Shakespeare.

The slow movement is framed by two strongly contrasting movements – *Allegro vivace e con brio* and *Presto*. Beethoven had actually replaced the earlier, customary three-movement design of the piano trio with a four-movement conception in Op. 1. But in Op. 70, No. 1, he consciously returned to the three-movement layout. Here, it is the ideal form in which to intensify the contrasting effect between the movements. This formal retreat is thus shown to benefit the piano trio's expressive quality.

The first movement is idiosyncratically conceived: it begins with a fast, brusque descending gesture in quadruple unison – fortissimo – repeated five times ascending and thereby striding across a distance of four octaves. A cantabile, piano-dolce legato theme then follows like a woodcut. The pivot point and hub of the two themes is a long, drawn-out pedal point in the violoncello on the note F, which is outside the key and ends with the passing of the first theme. As the movement design already shows, on a large scale, the two central themes are contrasted with each other here as well, although parallels between the two can also be found. A contrasting secondary theme is therefore not necessary – Beethoven simply dispenses with it. In the development, both themes are then processed, each one by itself first and then simultaneously, motivically and thematically. The third movement, Finale, is marked by a pronounced virtuosity. Already in the first bars, one can recognise harmonically extravagant turns of phrase and modulations, the "solutions" of which are repeatedly attempted anew during the course of this final movement. Here, too, Beethoven dispenses with a secondary theme so as to focus on contrasting harmonic progressions rather than on two themes. This zest for harmonic experimentation, as well as the juxtaposition of contrasting musical ideas extending beyond individual movements, creates an intensification of expression combined with a closer linking of the movements to each other. Both aspects constitute fundamental concepts for Beethoven's late works.

Florian Amort

Translation: *David Babcock*



Since its foundation in 1998 the Swiss Piano Trio has gained a remarkable reputation both among experts and audiences as an ensemble of extraordinary homogeneity, technical perfection and great expressiveness. Today, the Swiss Piano Trio is one of the most acclaimed chamber ensembles of its generation.

The Swiss Piano Trio won first prize at the International Chamber Music Competition in Caltanissetta (Italy) in 2003 and at the Johannes Brahms Competition (Austria) in 2005. In the same year, the Trio won the Swiss Ambassador's Award at Wigmore Hall. The Swiss Piano Trio has received important artistic impulses from Menahem Pressler (Beaux Arts Trio), Stephan Goerner (Carmina Quartet), Valentin Berlinsky (Borodin Quartet), the Vienna Altenberg Trio, the Trio di Milano and the Amadeus Quartet.

The ensemble has given many concerts in more than 40 countries on all continents. The concert venues include music centers such as the Zurich Tonhalle, Victoria Hall Geneva, London's Wigmore Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Teatro Teresa Carreño Caracas, the Teatro Coliseo Buenos Aires, the QPAC Brisbane or the National Centre for the Performing Arts Beijing.

In performances of triple concertos, the Swiss Piano Trio performs as a soloists' ensemble together with orchestras such as the Russian National Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège, the National Symphony Orchestra Ukraine, the Queensland Orchestra Brisbane, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and many more. The ensemble regularly follows invitations to renowned festivals such as the Menuhin Festival Gstaad, Ottawa Chamberfest, Canberra International Music Festival, Esbjerg International Chamber Music Festival and the Kammermusikfestival Schloss Laudon in Vienna. Moreover the Swiss Piano Trio gives master classes in many countries.

Numerous radio, television and CD recordings with works by Mozart, Mendelssohn, Robert and Clara Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák and Eduard Franck as well as piano trios by the Swiss composers Paul Juon, Frank Martin and Daniel Schnyder document the artistic activities of the ensemble. Since 2010, the Swiss Piano Trio issues its recordings on audite. All previously released recordings received several awards and distinctions.

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Swiss Piano Trio, the festival KAMMERMUSIK BODENSEE was created in 2008. Its artistic director is the pianist of the ensemble, Martin Lucas Staub.

audite

Angela Golubeva, violin • Sébastien Singer, cello • Martin Lucas Staub, piano

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Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

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