

audite

Complete Works for Piano Trio Vol. III



SWISS
PIANO TRIO

Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 1,3

- I. Allegro con brio 10:00
- II. Andante cantabile con Variazioni 8:23
- III. Menuetto. Quasi Allegro 4:00
- IV. Finale. Prestissimo 8:16

14 Variations for

Piano, Violin & Cello, Op. 44

- Thema. Andante – Var. I-VI –
- Var. VII. Largo – Var. VIII. Un poco adagio –
- Var. IX. Tempo primo – Var. X-XII –
- Var. XIII. Adagio – Var. XIV. Allegro 14:03

Piano Trio No. 6 in

E-flat major, Op. 70,2

- I. Poco sostenuto –
Allegro ma non troppo 9:49
- II. Allegretto 5:12
- III. Allegretto ma non troppo 8:14
- IV. Finale. Allegro 7:39



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. 1,3, Op. 44 & Op. 70,2

In the oeuvre of every important composer there are so called key works that establish that composer's personal signature as well as the agenda to which he will henceforth continue to sense a commitment. Naturally, such works often appear at the beginning of a career (but by no means always, as the examples of Mozart and Wagner show!) – either as a still unconscious stroke of genius or as an intentional signal of an emancipation from models and teachers. Ludwig van Beethoven is one of those who set such an exclamation point with his first published works, to which musicologists have given the handsome title of „Opus Primum“. This applies to the Piano Trios, Op. 1 as a whole, but especially to the final, exceptional Trio in C minor. The popularity that it has achieved must not be allowed to obscure the fact that the composer, just 25 at the time of its composition, was aiming primarily towards fundamental principles and only secondarily towards success. (Beethoven was never indifferent to success, of course; as a freelance artist, he was extremely dependent on public appreciation, for it influenced both the responsiveness of his patrons and the sales figures of printed copies of his works.) The weight that he ascribed to this work is not merely shown in the outer and inner dimensions of its four movements, but already in its positioning and symbolic charge. It forms the conclusion of the series, thus completing the so symbolically significant number three in which – for a devout Catholic like Beethoven – the belief in the Trinity also resonated. We repeatedly encounter the number three in Beethoven's oeuvre. In the area of piano sonatas, this applies to the Sonatas, Op. 2 (which followed the piano trios), then to Op. 10 and Op. 31 (with these last ones, Beethoven definitively pursued the „new path“ of a poetic recharging of compositional technique) as well as, finally, in the famous last Sonatas, Opp. 109-111, whose internal correlation is made obvious by the constellation of keys arranged in the cycle of major thirds – A-flat, E and C. But there are prominent examples in the chamber music for strings, too, such as the String Trios, Op. 9, the String Quartets, Op. 59 and the Violin Sonatas, Op. 12 and Op. 30. By contrast, pairs of works in Beethoven's oeuvre occur less frequently – examples are the Cello Sonatas, Op. 5 and Op. 102 and the Piano Trios, Op. 70 – but this naturally has no bearing whatsoever on their musical status.

The key of C minor is of similar significance; it is the relative minor of the festive, optimistic „royal“ key of E-flat major and formulates a central trait of Beethoven's personality in musical terms. Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, the composer and aesthete from Baden Württemberg, politically defiant and imprisoned for many years – whose „Kaplied“ the young Beethoven arranged for piano shortly before or after Schubart's death in 1791 – designated the key of C minor as a „lament of unhappy love“ and the „yearning, longing and sighing of the love-struck soul“ in his treatise on keys published posthumously in 1806. This is pure speculation, but in view of Beethoven's lifelong unhappiness in love relationships, it is not far-fetched to think that he may have strongly identified with this interpretation. Irrespectively of this, the key had already gained a tragic-fatalistic aura through Mozart, as found in such masterworks as the Andantino of the E-flat major Piano Concerto, K. 271, the fragment of the Mass, K. 417, the Fantasia and Sonata for Piano, K. 457/475 and especially the Piano

Concerto, K. 491 that served as the model for Beethoven's own Concerto in C minor, Op. 37. After Op. 1, No. 3, C minor recurs in other important compositions of Beethoven: the String Trio, Op. 9, No. 3, the Piano Sonata, Op. 10, No. 1, the *Grande Sonate pathétique*, Op. 13, the aforementioned Third Piano Concerto, the Fifth Symphony, Op. 67 and finally in the last (but in only two movements!) Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 111. With Beethoven, however, C minor is not merely to be understood as the epitome of lamentation and longing, but also as an agitated rebelliousness. Here, we find a musical and emotional legacy of so-called *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress), especially the musical language of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, a composer highly revered by Beethoven. Thus Beethoven's works can be interpreted as a confrontation, sought time and again, with certain tonal characters – a confrontation that runs like a red thread through his works beginning with Opus 1.

The conceptual aspiration of the C minor Piano Trio is shown by the extent to which its themes and motives are closely related to each other. In this work, in contrast to the two other trios, they are applied on a scale spanning all the movements – through the quotation-like return of the first movement's main theme in the Finale. The aim, to attain an expressive and constructive compression by inventing corresponding "sustainable" figures and thus a new instrumental virtuosity, gives a position of rhetorical prominence to the piano, for it can formulate more complex musical units in contrast to the two string instruments. After the introduction played together in unison with the germ cell of the entire trio (the minor third pendulum movement of C, E-flat, C, completed to form a triad by the target note G), the piano presents the main theme all by itself. Its shape, however, is already a variant of the third pendulum, for the third now appears in a falling direction and intervallically filled (E-flat, D, C), so that the note G is now reached from above rather than below. In the Minuet, the C-minor triad and its counterpart, the dominant seventh chord on G, form a circular motion with chordal compactness: the thirds in the left hand are taken up by parallel thirds in the cello and violin. By contrast, the Finale begins with an ascending arpeggiated triad (a "Mannheim rocket" which we already know from the Finale of the First Piano Trio in E-flat major) leading to the familiar minor-third pendulum. In the intimate theme of the E-flat major Andante, followed by five variations, the falling thirds are then connected and melodically liquefied; thus Beethoven provides the necessary lyrical contrast to the forward-driving energy of the other three movements – all trapped in the principal key of C minor. Thus the inner motion of variations 3 and 5 express joyful emphasis, whereby the lucid coda leads back to the meditative mood of the theme following a brief disquiet caused by the diminished chords at the beginning.

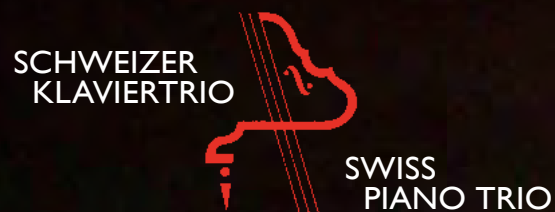
The constructive compression spanning all four movements is perhaps best comprehended by the image of the spiral, a circular ascending movement. The musical form resulting from this is not only motion, of course, but also the instrumental drama of three protagonists. The end of the C-minor Trio is as eloquent as it is ambiguous: it fades away in a resigned pianissimo, denying the listener the kind of triumphant gesture that is almost forcefully demanded in the Finale of the Fifth Symphony. At the same time, the scales strive upwards into brightness, and the final sound, a triad, provides the redemptive major key. Beethoven thus leaves it open as to whether the long shadows cast by the beginning of the Trio have disappeared. We are not simply released by the composer, but forced to continue reflecting on his work.

Such reflectiveness applies to an even greater degree to the Second Trio from Op. 70 in E-flat major; written in 1808, Beethoven continues here where the First – by now already almost “classical” – Trio from Opus 1 left off. He takes it into a completely different realm in an incomparable way. The metamorphosis takes place on several levels, both in the overall construction and in the details. In terms of key, the firm framework of the two outer movements in E-flat major is preserved. But the second movement, an Allegretto in $\frac{2}{4}$ meter, surprisingly begins in the mediant of C major, then turning to that “lamenting” C minor that will ultimately prevail. This ambivalence corresponds to the capricious motivic upbeat with the “inverted” dotted (Lombardian) rhythm in the piano, answered by a gentle line in parallel sixths and simultaneously by a chromatically gloomy line in the strings reminiscent of the canonical theme of the first movement’s slow introduction. Then the strings and piano exchange roles: the alternation of “bright-dark”, or (to adopt a term from the field of the fine arts) “clair-obscur”, begins. The third movement is another Allegretto, this time in a dance-like $\frac{3}{4}$ metre; its key, the subdominant A-flat major, corresponds to that of the slow movement in Op. 1, No. 1, the second movement in that work. Here, an utterly subjective sound-world unfolds that was to hold a lasting fascination for the succeeding romantic generation of composers. For example, Schubert seems to have borrowed the suggestive arpeggiated figure of his famous A-flat Impromptu, Op. 90 / D 899, No. 4 from the middle section of this movement, in which there is a similar figuration in triplets in the right hand of the piano part. Another piano passage, appearing before the final theme of the exposition, presents a capriciously chromatic turn of phrase; its grotesque yet good-natured tone was taken up and further developed by the young Schumann. The Trio’s unpredictable turning points – such as the quasi-chorale in the development of the first movement or the conflict between forward-driving (in duplets) and dammed-up (in triplets) metres in the Finale – caused Beethoven’s admirer E.T.A. Hoffmann to speak, in his extensive and enthusiastic discussion of both Trios, Op. 70, of a “remote spiritual realm of tones” to which the composer introduces the listener. He was able to recognise that the aim of great art is not merely to provide a pastime or diversion, but to make possible an entry into a “circle of magical phenomena”.

The fact that Beethoven’s works also contain another, coolly calculated aspect of constructive exhaustion of musical ideas that can almost be called modern, is proven by the 14 Variations in E-flat major, Op. 44, probably composed around 1800 and unfortunately all too rarely performed. Here, the “royal” key is not used for programmatic purposes (as in the *Eroica* Symphony or the *Les Adieux* Sonata), but is placed at the service of effectively calculated exhaustion of a theme – rather along the same lines as the *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35 for piano. This theme basically consists of nothing more than an ordinary, primitive broken triad introduced in unison as a bass line. The ensuing variations, organised into two groups of seven each, demonstrate how this “nothing” increasingly gains in profile and substance over the course of the work. In the concluding double variation (realised by means of the splitting of the piano and strings into independent groups), the composer then glances back at the distance travelled with this theme – half with a wink, half wistfully – but, in any case, in an ingenious compression of the principal musical idea in a manner unmistakably Beethoven’s own.

Wolfgang Rathert

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 Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, 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 Bernhard Hanke

executive producer:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

piano technician: Martin Henn (op. 1 and op. 44)

Pascal Monti, m-fréquence (op. 70)

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