

VIENNA PIANO TRIO

WOLFGANG REDIK, VIOLIN
MATTHIAS GREDLER, VIOLONCELLO
STEFAN MENDL, PIANO

Thursday, October 16, 2008

~ PROGRAM ~

Piano Trio in B-flat Major, K 502

W.A. MOZART
(1756-1791)

Allegro

Larghetto

Allegretto

Piano Trio in g minor, Op. 15

BEDŘICH SMETANA
(1824-1884)

Moderato assai

Allegro ma non agitato

Presto - Grave, quasi marcia - Presto

~ INTERMISSION ~

Piano Trio in E-flat Major, Op. 100, D 929

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro moderato

Allegro moderato

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WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)
Piano Trio in B-flat Major, K 502 (1786)

The Piano Trio in B-flat Major, K 502 was completed in Vienna on November 18, 1786, during a particularly promising time in Mozart's career. Mozart had no shortage of commissions at this time. He had already seen the success of his opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, and *The Marriage of Figaro* would be completed this same year. He was turning out one masterpiece after another in various musical forms.

It is widely assumed that Mozart composed this trio for his talented piano student, Franziska von Jacquin, and her family. The trio was written in the prevailing Rococo style, the *style galant*, which put emphasis on elegance, grace, and charm. Such music was characterized by simple melodies that were highly ornamented, with accompaniments of less importance. Mozart indicated that the trio should be played in "friendly, musical, social circles."

Mozart called this trio a *terzett*, which, in his day, referred to any three-voiced composition. The trios that he had composed previously he had called *divertimenti*. In the earlier works the cello was treated as a continuo instrument, reinforcing the bass line of the piano, while the violin was also somewhat subservient to the piano. In this trio, the top two voices become equal partners and the cello frequently joins them.

The exposition of the first movement is built around a single theme that is developed throughout the entire movement. A subsidiary theme introduced at the start of the development section is a brief exception.

The *Larghetto* movement reminds one of a leisurely discussion among three friends. The piano introduces the various topics and the violin echoes them. The cello rarely speaks on its own in this movement.

During the final movement, the cello suddenly starts to take on a more active role, often answering the violin. By the conclusion of the movement, the listener is well aware that he is indeed listening to a three-voice composition.

Program note © Margaret Bragg, July 2008

BEDŘICH SMETANA (1824-1884)
Piano Trio in g minor, Op. 15 (1855)

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hapsburg Empire was

under threat from within. The Bohemian people in particular were starting to prize their own culture—their traditions, language, and folk music. A new nationalistic spirit was beginning to flourish which would eventually culminate in the establishment of the Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Bedřich Smetana was the first Bohemian composer of importance to thrive in this new climate.

Smetana was born in 1824 in Litomyšl in northeastern Bohemia. His father was a successful brewer in the service of various noblemen of eastern Bohemia and an enthusiastic amateur violinist. He instructed his son on the instrument at an early age and was pleased when the boy showed much talent on both the violin and the piano. Reportedly, by the age of five, Bedřich was able to play the first violin part in readings of Haydn's string quartets. His father insisted that he obtain a well-rounded education, and after attending school in the small towns where his father was employed, he was sent to Prague, where he met and became a friend and great admirer of Franz Liszt.

Smetana was soon popular as a pianist who was particularly adept at playing for dances, and thus was often employed to play in wealthy homes. In this way he met and fell in love with a family friend and excellent pianist, Katerina Kolarova, whom he would later marry. Having made the decision to become a professional musician, and hoping to be able to earn enough money to support a family in the near future, he began to teach and to study harmony and counterpoint with the distinguished teacher, Josef Proksch. By 1846, Smetana's compositions consisted primarily of piano studies, instrumental and vocal fugues, a *Piano Sonata in g minor*, and a few string quartets written for friends.

In 1849 at the age of twenty-five, Smetana finally was able to marry Katerina. For several years the couple was blissfully happy. Four daughters were born to them and Smetana composed many successful piano pieces. But the period that followed was a very sad one for the young family; three of their four daughters died in two years.

Smetana had been particularly fond of his eldest daughter, Bedřiska, who died of scarlet fever in 1855 when she was only four years old. He had nicknamed her "Fritzi" and was very proud of her early signs of talent. Her death plunged Smetana into utter despair. His diary entry reads, "Nothing can replace Fritzi, the angel whom death has stolen from us." He sought consolation in his composing, working feverishly, and within two months time had produced the *Piano Trio in g minor* in Bedřiska's memory.

An early work, the Piano Trio is not yet representative of Smetana's mature style. Strong influences of both Schumann and Liszt can easily be

detected. The composition begins with a tragic descending theme played on the G string by the violin. This initial theme will recur throughout the work. Sections of a calmer nature, including a piano interlude reminiscent of Liszt, are followed by an even more forceful statement of the elegiac opening material.

The second *scherzo*-like movement begins lightly and playfully, perhaps meant to depict the character of the lost child. An initial trio section unfolds as a delicate and lyrical duet between the violin and cello. A second trio takes the form of a mournful march.

The final movement borrows its theme from Smetana's earlier *Piano Sonata in g minor*. It opens with fast cross-rhythms but is episodic in nature and the rapid activity is often interrupted by beautiful reflective melodies, and by pauses in the music. After a return to the funeral march, the work seems to draw to a close with a feeling of triumph and hope.

The first performance of Smetana's piano trio was given in Konvikt Hall in Prague on December 3, 1855. Smetana was joined by Antonin Bennewitz on violin and Julius Goltermann of the Prague Conservatory on cello. In Smetana's words, "The critics condemned it harshly, but a year later we performed it in our home for Liszt, who embraced me and expressed his congratulations to my wife."

Program note © Margaret Bragg, July 2008

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Piano Trio in E-flat Major, Op. 100, D 929 (1827)

Beethoven's death had a tremendous impact on Schubert. There are conflicting accounts as to whether or not Schubert and Beethoven ever actually conversed, but we know, from Schubert's statements and from his music, the awe and respect in which he held the great composer who was already a legend in his own time. He started work on tonight's piano trio in the aftermath of a public commemoration marking the six-month anniversary of Beethoven's death; it held special importance for him. To his great satisfaction, it was a big success and his first instrumental work to be published outside of Vienna. In the nearly two years left to Schubert before his own early death, and despite serious illness, Schubert would be inspired to write an astonishing number of instrumental masterpieces. He seems to have understood his right to carry forward the unique legacy extending from Haydn and Mozart through Beethoven, the future of which was now in question. So in tonight's *Piano Trio Op. 100*, Schubert set out

to pay specific homage to Beethoven through a musical program which he hid in full view. There is no evidence that he told anyone what he was doing; we are indebted to the American musicologist Christopher Gibbs for its detailed revelation.

On the large scale, the Trio models Beethoven's Fifth Symphony by using motives to connect movements and placing music from an earlier movement into a later one. Also, it is conceived in four movements like Beethoven's later trios. But it is the slow movement, *Andante con moto*, which contains the overt homage to Beethoven lying under cover out in the open. This movement, which has in fact long been likened to a funeral march, opens on an emotional plane specifically modeled after the *Marche funèbre*, that famous second movement of Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony*, which he dedicated "to the memory of a great man." Both openings share the same tonality and the same rhythmic pattern. In Schubert's movement, shortly into the opening theme, at the falling octaves—which really cannot be missed—Schubert quotes a Swedish song "See, the sun is setting." The words at this point intone "farewell, farewell." Furthermore, Schubert concludes this slow movement with a quote of the final measures of Beethoven's *Marche funèbre*: a repetition of the broken minor chord that closes that movement. It could not be clearer, once one knows it is there—yet it is done so much in Schubert's own voice, with the emphasis and tempo changed, that it has evaded detection all these years. Later, the opening theme of the slow movement and its associated quote from the Swedish song will be heard on three separate occasions in the final movement, always played by the cello, sometimes in anger, sometimes in sorrow. Incidentally, in the original edition, the last movement was published with large cuts at the insistence of Schubert's publisher. Even one of the current Urtext Editions contains only the cut version. Fortunately, the original manuscript has survived, so that the most recent recordings and some of the now-available printed editions of this great work are the way Schubert, and not his publishers, conceived it.

This work, which Schubert considered among his best, was premiered on the first full anniversary of Beethoven's momentous death by the most famous chamber musicians in Vienna, led by Schuppanzigh – a prestigious concert and incidentally one of the few times Schubert got to hear a public performance of his larger works. This event, which also contained other works of Schubert's, gives some idea of Schubert's growing importance. One would like to think that those on stage and in the audience understood to whom the baton of Vienna's extraordinary legacy was now being passed.

Program note, August, 2008 © Nora Avins Klein

Vienna Piano Trio

For almost 20 years, the Vienna Piano Trio has been performing regularly in virtually every major music center in Europe, the Americas, Australia and the Far East. The trio was founded by violinist Wolfgang Redik, cellist Marcus Trefny and pianist Stefan Mendl in 1988. Extensive studies with various highly renowned musicians paved the trio's way to an international career soon after. The most important teachers and mentors of the ensemble include Isaac Stern, Ralph Kirschbaum and Joseph Kalichstein as well as the members of the Trio di Trieste, the Beaux Arts Trio, the Guarneri Quartet and the LaSalle Quartet. In the summer of 2001, Matthias Gredler replaced Marcus Trefny as the trio's cellist.

The Vienna Piano Trio regularly performs at music festivals such as the "Schubertiade Schwarzenberg", the festival "Aix-en-Provence," the "Mozartwoche Salzburg," the "Beethovenfest Bonn," the chamber-music festival in Kuhmo (Finland), and the festivals in Ottawa and Lanaudiere. In addition, the group tours worldwide, performing in major music cities worldwide. From 1997 to 2006, the Vienna Piano Trio held its own annual series of concerts as part of the Wiener Musikverein's "Jeunesse Musicale."

The 2006/2007 season marked the inaugural season of the ensemble's residency at the "Wiener Konzerthaus," where the trio performed four concerts for the "Wiener Konzerthausgesellschaft" in the venue's "Mozartsaal."

The Vienna Piano Trio's discography includes works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Dvořák, Shostakovich and Schnittke, all released on the British label Nimbus Records. Its recordings have earned the trio highest critical acclaim as well as several awards.

In the summer of 2002, the Vienna Piano Trio recorded all of Franz Schubert's piano trios for the label MDG (Musikproduktion Dabringhaus & Grimm). This was followed in December 2003 by a recording of all piano trios by Antonín Dvořák, also for MDG.

In November 2005, MDG published the trio's latest CD, including works by Schönberg, Mahler and Zemlinsky. In the autumn of 2007, the trio recorded the piano trios by Bedřich Smetana and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

In addition to its performances, the ensemble has begun teaching on a regular basis. The three musicians have given master classes at London's Wigmore Hall and Royal College of Music, at Sydney's Conservatory of Music, at the University of Wellington (New Zealand), as well as in Finland, France and the United States.

Visit the Vienna Piano Trio on the World Wide Web at viennapianotrio.com.