



TRIO CON BRIO COPENHAGEN

Jens Elvekjaer, piano
Soo-Jin Hong, violin
Soo-Kyung Hong, cello

7:30 PM, Saturday, February 16, 2008

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

In cooperation with University of the Pacific
Conservatory of Music
Stockton, California

Program

Piano Trio in E \flat Major, Op. 1, No. 1 **Ludwig van Beethoven**

Allegro

(1770–1827)

Adagio cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro assai—Trio

Finale: Presto

Piano Trio in a Minor

Maurice Ravel

Modéré

(1875–1937)

Pantoum—Assez vif

Passacaille—Très large

Final: Animé

—intermission—

Piano Trio in B Major, Op. 8

Johannes Brahms

Allegro con brio

(1833–1897)

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Adagio

Allegro



Trio con Brio Copenhagen appears by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists

The Artists

Trio con Brio Copenhagen—the Korean sisters Soo-Jin Hong and Soo-Kyung Hong and the Danish pianist Jens Elvekjaer—was the recipient of the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson International Trio Award in 2005. This biennial award, one of the most coveted in of chamber music, encourages the career of an extraordinarily accomplished “rising” piano trio and includes a recording contract and an extensive tour of 20 major United States venues including Carnegie Hall.

The trio was founded in Vienna in 1999 and first drew attention with a thrilling performance that took the highest prize at the prestigious ARD-Munich Competition in 2002. Since then, they have won first prize in several more competitions in Italy, Norway, Germany and Denmark. Critics have praised the trio for their “sparkling joie de vivre” and “magic dialogue.”

Trio con Brio Copenhagen's busy schedule includes major concert halls in Europe, USA and Asia, including Carnegie Hall, Berlin Konzerthaus, Mozart-Saal, Mozarteum, Seoul and Sejong Arts Centers, B stad Chamber Music Festival, and Bergen and Trondheim Chamber Music Festivals. In 2003, Trio con Brio Copenhagen performed all the Beethoven piano trios in a cycle of three concerts at the Tivoli Concert Hall in Copenhagen. The trio has an extensive history of broadcast concerts in Europe, Korea, and Scandinavia. Trio con Brio Copenhagen is frequently featured as the soloists in Beethoven's Triple Concerto with orchestras such as the Copenhagen Philharmonic, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra/DR, and many others. The two string players are performing on an Amati cello and an Andrea Guameri violin and Jens Elvekjaer has recently been appointed the first Danish Steinway Artist. Trio con Brio Copenhagen teaches regularly at master classes and courses at Trondheim International Chamber Music Festival, the Music Academy in Kristiansand, Norway, the Kuhmo Festival in Finland and in Copenhagen.

The Program

Piano trio composition poses difficulties: how to reconcile contrasting sonorities of piano and string instruments, how to achieve balance between the three instrumental voices, and how to make the cello stand out from the others, which are more easily

heard. Listen in today's performance to hear how three composers tackled this problem.

Beethoven—Op. 1, No. 1

The first real trio for piano, violin and cello was composed by Mozart in 1786 (K.502). “Real” means that all three instruments have parts which are so closely interrelated that, if one were omitted, the entire work would suffer in performance. It was only six years later that Beethoven produced his first trio for this instrumentation. It is interesting to note the sort of music a great composer chooses to offer as his Op. 1. Beethoven's first opus number was assigned to a set of three piano trios dedicated to his patron, Prince Lichnowsky. His piano writing is more dramatic than Haydn's work in this genre, but, of course, Haydn was not a great pianist. In writing for these three instruments, Beethoven follows the classical tradition by allotting the most important parts to the piano. The violin generally plays in thirds and sixths with the right hand of the piano, and only occasionally plays an independent and important melodic part on its own. The cello doubles the left hand of the piano at the octave or the unison, a further carryover from the trios of Haydn.

The Allegro is in sonata form. There are wide-ranging modulations and sudden changes of key in the development section and the closing part (though lacking the Beethoven trademark lengthy coda) is more involved than those of Haydn or Mozart. Even though this is Op. 1, No. 1, you can catch glimpses of a future great composer.

The Adagio is a rondo with extended coda. Beethoven's skill at counterpoint shows in the first couplet: listen to the dialogue between violin and cello and the piano accompaniment, which is a rhythmic contraction of the violin melody.

This Scherzo is the first time Beethoven has used this form, and he was obviously experimenting with sonorities. Listen to the held notes in the violin and cello as the piano plays either a single melodic line or in octaves. There is a final coda that also shows a departure from classical tradition.

The Finale, in sonata form, is striking for the second theme that seems to appear from nowhere; yet after we have heard it once, we have not a feeling of déjà vu, but

of having known it all our lives.

Compare the lyricism and brevity of this melodic fragment with those appearing later in his work such as the second themes of the “Coriolanus” overture or the second movement of the Pastoral Symphony. Half of the extended coda to this movement is a development of this theme and gradually leads to the development of other melodic fragments heard earlier.

How successful is Beethoven in dealing with the challenge of the piano trio form? Does he stick too much to the classical form as developed by Haydn or does he successfully move beyond that to produce a “real” trio for piano, violin and cello? You can argue that Beethoven poured real substance into this Op. 1. He was not writing “background music” for aristocratic soirées, and he was ensuring that, while the piano is still frequently dominant, the genre of the piano trio was no longer merely a piano sonata with some accompaniment or obbligato passages for violin and cello. In the opening movement, there are abrupt shifts in tonality and other devices that point to the seriousness of his undertaking, and in the slow movement there is not only an abundance of thematic material but a fully developed mastery in the way it is handled.

Ravel—Trio in A Minor

Together with the Shostakovich, Maurice Ravel's piano trio is regarded as one of the major works of the twentieth century piano trio literature. Its originality, extensive technical expectations, and force of musical expression place it in an important and permanent position in the standard repertoire of the piano trio. This chamber work, composed in the early days of the war in 1914, was first performed in Paris in January 1915.

According to Ravel himself, the first movement draws on a Basque dance form most obvious in the opening theme. Each measure is counted as three main beats to the bar in a 3+2+3 rhythmic pattern. Listen for the first subject in the right hand of the piano in chords initially played against four quarter notes in the left. The violin offers

a strongly contrasting second subject but maintains the original metric pattern. The development is in sonata form but Ravel introduces his own touches: see if you can hear the different harmonies in the recapitulation where a rhythmically modified version of the second theme in the strings accompanies the appearance of the main theme in the piano. This juxtaposition of themes was a favorite device of Ravel's, who used it in other of his works (*Menuet antique*, the menuet in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, etc.).

A pantoum is a 4-line Malaysian verse form in which the second and fourth lines reappear as the first and third lines of the succeeding verse, continuing in this form until the final verse in which the even-numbered lines revert to the odd-numbered lines of the first verse. Ravel follows this pattern strictly; listen and see if you can follow it. The piano opens with the spiky first theme derived from the first movement, while the strings respond in double octaves with the smoother second theme. Remarkably, Ravel is able to overlay the pantoum format on top of a traditional scherzo and trio A-B-A form. He writes the trio theme in a completely different meter (4/2) from the original eighth-note motive (3/4), so that the two time signatures coexist.

The third movement, a passacaglia, is based on the opening eight-bar phrase but Ravel does not use passacaglia in the strict sense of its meaning. Rather than use the theme as the foundation against which to build his counterpoints, his treatment consists mainly of variation and harmonic development. This movement builds single-mindedly to a powerful climax and then dies away.

Against a backdrop of violin arpeggio harmonics (previously used by Ravel in his *Chansons madécasses*), the piano presents the five-bar first theme of the *Finale*. As in the first movement, irregular time signatures are again in use: the movement alternates between 5/4 and 7/4 time. As the most orchestral of the four movements, the *Finale* exploits the resources of the three players to the utmost, and Ravel rounds off the work with all the themes of the earlier movements in a final, cheerful fling.

Were you able to hear how Ravel tackled the problem? By adopting an orchestral approach to his writing and making extensive use of the extreme ranges of each instrument, he creates an unusually rich

texture of sound. He also liberally employs effects such as trills, tremolos, harmonics, glissandos, and arpeggios. Finally, to achieve clarity in texture and to secure instrumental balance, he spaces the violin and cello lines two octaves apart, with the right hand of the piano playing between them.

Brahms—Op. 8

There are only 24 surviving chamber works by Brahms. The composer destroyed so many of his own works that these surviving pieces are, as Sir Donald Tovey remarked, only the tip of the iceberg showing above the water. We know there were piano trios existing prior to Op. 8 because in 1853, Brahms wrote to Robert Schumann (who had just published a most laudatory article about the 20-year old composer) stating "...above all it induces me to use extreme caution in selecting pieces for publication. I contemplate issuing none of my trios..." The master obviously knew what he was doing when he censored himself; all 24 of his extant chamber works remain in the standard repertory.

There are, in fact, two versions of the B Major Trio, the first written by the 20-year old Brahms in 1853 and the second, a major revision of the first, completed 37 years later. Almost as soon as it was completed, Brahms was grieving to Joachim that he should have withheld it and would alter it if only he had the chance. That chance came 30 years later: "You cannot guess how I trifled away the lovely summer," he wrote to Clara Schumann in 1889, telling of his revisions and calling it Op. 108. "It will not be as dreary as before," he wrote, "but will it be better?" The answer lies in the fact that the first version has become virtually extinct.

The first movement begins with a long and marvelously original opening shared by piano and cello. The violin, silent at first, finally enters and adds a warm third voice as the melody grows into a great unison statement. Brahms never allows this opening melody to reappear in its full, leisurely form—even in the recapitulation. Even though marked *allegro con brio*, this tempo is fulfilled only when the music swings into its dynamic development. As always with Brahms, the recapitulation is a completely rewritten version of the exposition. The coda is a moment of sheer

loveliness where the violin and cello have melting discourse against a quietly murmuring piano.

Part of inspired revision is knowing what to leave alone, and the *Scherzo* is the only movement to escape the composer's editing. It is all kinetic excitement, filled with a weird menace that is inseparable from a Mendelssohn-like grace. Listen to the strings move in small, confined patterns while the piano breaks away in chilling arpeggios. It is like being ushered in from the cold to a warm and brilliant ballroom. A coda, the only addition in 1889, brings the movement to an end with fluid agility.

The *Adagio* is almost religiously contemplative in its mood. The piano executes sustained, descending chords that are answered by comforting up-turned phrases in the strings. This dialogue continues until at last all join forces. The middle section contains an eloquent song for the cello reflecting the creativity of a mature Brahms. The opening section returns without the isolation of piano and strings and joined by a new, gently-moving figure in the upper register of the piano.

The last movement (like the *Scherzo*) is in B Minor, one of the rare instances where a work begins in major and ends in tonal minor. Listen for the cello taking the lead accompanied by light piano triplets. You will have to wait for the violin to enter, but it will be worth it to hear the fine effect it produces against continuing triplets in the piano and plucked bass notes in the cello. The second theme is effective in its brightness and both themes figure in the development section.

And how does Brahms fare in tackling the piano trio problem? He achieves success with the format, but to do so he plows under three-quarters of the original work of a 20-year old and replaces it with 37 additional years of maturity. The perfect waltz and the returning *Scherzo* have the three instruments kept in perfect equipoise, fully solving the difficult problem of balancing the two strings and the piano.

—Notes ©Dr. Michael Spencer

FIFTY-SECOND SEASON

2007-2008

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UOP Conservatory of Music;
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2:30 PM Sunday, October 7, 2007
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2:30 PM Sunday, November 4, 2007
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7:30 PM Saturday, February 16, 2008
Faye Spanos Concert Hall

La Catrina Quartet

2:30 PM Sunday, March 16, 2008
Morris Chapel
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Stanford Woodwind Quintet

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- Concert programs are subject to change without notice.
- Seating is unreserved for the 2007-08 Season.
- Contributions, including memorials, are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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