

FRIENDS OF
CHAMBER MUSIC
50th Anniversary

Gryphon Piano Trio

Jamie Parker, piano
Annalee Patipatanakoon, violin
Roman Borys, cello

2:30 PM, February 19, 2006
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
In cooperation with University of the Pacific
Conservatory of Music
Stockton, California

Program

Piano Trio No. 4 in E Major, K. 542 (1788)

Allegro
Andante grazioso
Finale: Allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

Old Photographs (2000)

Christos Hatzis

(b. 1953)

—Intermission—

Piano Trio No. 3 in c Minor, Op. 101 (1886)

Allegro energico
Presto non assai
Andante grazioso
Allegro molto

Johannes Brahms

(1833-1897)

Piano Trio No. 2 in d Minor, Op. 67 (1944)

Andante—Moderato
Allegro non troppo
Largo—
Allegretto

Dmitri Shostakovich

(1906-1975)



The Gryphon Trio appears by arrangement with Musicians Corporate Management, Ltd.
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The Artists

Performing internationally since 1993, the Juno award-winning Gryphon Trio is one of North America's premier chamber ensembles. They have toured throughout Canada and the United States including the Lincoln Center and the Corcoran Gallery. They have performed in Mexico, Germany, France, Belgium, Russia, Poland, Greece and Egypt. Since 1998, the Gryphon Trio has been the Ensemble-in-Residence at the Music Toronto chamber music series.

This exceptionally creative chamber ensemble delivers stunning performances of the classics as well as the very newest music. Recently, the trio premiered the ambitious theatrical production of Christos Hatzis' *Constantinople*, 90 minutes of musical theater combining classical music with choreography, projected visuals, stage design, and digital technology.

The Gryphon Trio presents lecture-demonstrations, giving a survey of the diverse repertoire for piano trio. Examples from the Classical, Romantic, and 20th Century periods are presented in an invigorating way leaving the audience with a broader appreciation of style, form, musical interplay and historical context. Having commissioned and premiered over twenty works to date, the Trio has found that contemporary compositions often speak a language that younger people understand. Performed alongside examples from the standard repertoire, the Trio has found that these works can fuel a stimulating discourse.

The Trio's namesake, the Gryphon, is a mythical creature that is half lion and half eagle. Known as a guardian of treasures, the Gryphon is representative of the connection between psychic energy and cosmic force.

Jamie Parker, Annalee Patipatanakoon and Roman Borys teach at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music. Dr. Parker is the Rupert E. Edwards Chair in Piano Performance.

The Program

The keyboard trio claims two forbears: the trio sonata and the accompanied keyboard solo, both featuring the keyboard as primary. Before Mozart restructured it, the piano trio was first and foremost music for the piano with the strings providing only supportive accompaniment. Even Mozart called his earlier trios *divertimenti*, in which he used the cello to reinforce the bass line of the piano, and furnished the violin with a role subservient to the keyboard. However, by giving independence to each of the three instruments, he formed a perfect union between the intellectual stimulation of

counterpoint and the charm of the *style galant*. In today's performance we hear the piano trio interpreted in this manner by composers living in each of four centuries.

Mozart: Trio in E, K. 542

1788 was a busy time for Mozart. *Don Giovanni* premiered in Vienna but ran for only 15 performances; the Mozarts were forced to relocate their Vienna residence; and their fourth child, Theresia, died of intestinal cramps. It was at this nadir in Mozart's fortunes, however, that one of music's greatest miracles occurred. During that summer of 1788, and in the space of only six weeks, he composed the three greatest symphonies of his life, prefacing this astounding accomplishment with his greatest work in the genre of piano trio, the Trio in E flat, K.542, finished within 4 days of the E flat symphony. Mozart planned his trios for publication to earn a bit of money and for his own performances with talented amateurs. K.542 is dedicated to Michael Puchberg whom he was forever hitting up for loans. There is a record of Mozart performing it in the Saxon court and 60 years later it became the favorite opening piece of Frédéric Chopin.

E major was a key Mozart sometimes used in his operas to support images of the unusual or the supernatural; he rarely used it in his instrumental works, but in this, the most fragile and ethereal of all his trios, it seemed to suit him well for harmonic adventurousness. This composition exhibits a range of expression and a beauty of sonority that make it as treasurable as Mozart's creations of larger dimensions. Its texture is transparent, and the prevailing mood seems to be one of vernal happiness.

Framing the middle movement are two *Allegros*. The first movement contains passages of exceptionally distant and rapid modulation, handled so elegantly that they nearly escape notice. This opening *allegro* is based on two lovely themes of liquid beauty which Mozart endowed with surprising depths of feeling as the movement's sonata form unfolds. The opening *Allegro* contrasts a gently lilting theme with virtuoso scales soaring upwards.

At the center of the work stands the slow movement, an exquisite and elegant *Andante grazioso*, in a hybrid variations-sonata structure developed from a folk-like theme that portends some of the happiest melodic inspirations in *The Magic Flute*. It exhibits a great deal of imagination in its harmonic and contrapuntal treatment, but the brilliance is permeated with a melancholy that is deepened by modulations to remote keys. Its grace and poise remind one of Schubert in

character, and the constant return to a gentle melody suggests a certain poetic and timeless quality. To the Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein, and to more than a few others, it has provoked comparisons with the pastoral idylls of the painter Watteau.

The *Finale* is a delicate *allegro* that portrays a wealth of melodic invention. Both outer movements are striking for their melodic content, but especially in the *Finale* is the *concertante* writing for each of the three instruments evident. Some tasteful episodes of piano and violin virtuosity are woven into the sonata-rondo that closes this enchanting Trio. It is just such balancing of emotions as illuminates this composition that marks the greatest music of Mozart's maturity.

Hatzis: Old Photographs

Born in Greece, educated in the U.S., and a Canadian citizen since 1985, Christos Hatzis is considered one of Canada's most important composers. His commanding and diverse music is engaging audiences worldwide, and he is the recipient of awards such as the Jean A. Chalmers National Music Award, the Jules Léger Prize, and the Prix Italia, among others. A Professor at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, Hatzis writes frequently about contemporary music and its relationship to society.

The Gryphon Trio commissioned and gave the premiere performance of *Old Photographs* on October 17, 2000, at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Performing Arts, Toronto, ON. The piece was extracted for piano trio alone from the multimedia work, *Constantinople*. Within the context of that larger work, it offers relief from the tragic passion of a number of the other movements.

Old Photographs is based entirely on western musical form, opening with a slow and reflective theme for solo piano suggestive of the Romantic period. As the work progresses, the piano is joined by the violin and cello and the music begins to slowly drift stylistically away from the initial opening pattern and move toward early 20th century popular idioms that suggest an Astor Piazzola tango.

Brahms: Trio in c, Op. 101

It had to be one of the most musically productive holidays ever. During his summer retreat in 1886 at Hofstetten near Lake Thun in Switzerland, Brahms composed three of his best loved chamber music masterpieces: The Cello Sonata in F, Op. 99, the Violin Sonata in A, Op. 100,

and the piece we hear today, the Piano Trio in C Minor, Op. 101. In a postcard to his future biographer, Max Kalbeck, Brahms wrote "...I'm happy with my decision, it's absolutely magnificent here. By the way, I would also just mention that there is a ton of Biergartens..."

Brahms began composing and playing the piano as a child. At 13, he turned to playing in taverns and brothels to earn money. Some have suggested this experience soured him forever to the idea of marriage. Whatever the reason, Brahms chose to channel his passion into composition. Brahms was only 20 when he met Robert Schumann, who was to become his great mentor, and Robert's "child bride" Clara, who was to be his great love, although that love was probably expressed solely through friendship and musical inspiration. Despite occasional breaks in that friendship, Clara remained Brahms' life-long supporter and confidante.

Depending on how one chooses to count, Brahms wrote three, four, or five piano trios: The first, Op. 8, can be considered two as he virtually rewrote the 1854 piece in 1890; then there are the two trios of Op. 87 and Op. 101; and finally there is the posthumously attributed Trio in A. Opus 101, his last for piano, violin and cello, was written in his room overlooking Lake Thun with a view of the glaciers and craggy mountains across the waters, and there is an elemental power from that vista that makes itself felt in all of the music that he composed while there.

The late Op. 101, completed just before the revised Op. 8, is the shortest and most intense of the three (or four...or five). In fact, despite being in four movements, it is almost the shortest of his 24 pieces of chamber music. This piece may mark the divide between middle and late Brahms, for we observe the tendency toward compression of both form and content. Melodic gestures spring forth and then submerge back into the melange from which they came before they can complete what they start to say.

The *Allegro energico* almost explodes with a driving triplet rhythm that energizes much of the movement. Its themes are thrown out with an almost orchestral power, communicating tension from its opening instant. A warmer second subject, scored for the strings in octaves, brings little relief and the movement remains taut throughout. There is no exposition repeat and both development and recapitulation are brief. The opening theme returns only in the final moments, driving to an unrelenting close.

The *Presto non assai*, functioning as a scherzo and also in C minor, is more restrained, vacillating between a bitter-sweet dance and a doom-laden death march. The

strings are muted and the score marked *semplice* (simple). The music skims along fluidly in the piano with strings echoing in a manner that the critic Tovey described as hurrying by "like a frightened child." The middle section, with arpeggiated pizzicato chords riding above the staccato piano, is quite effective.

Much has been made about the rhythmic complexity of the *Andante grazioso*. Brahms, predating Brubeck by 80 years, originally thought the work should be in 7/4, but later changed it to one measure of 3/4 followed by two measures of 2/4. Then the middle section, marked *quasi animato*, continues the rhythmic complexity switching between 9/8 and 6/8. He alternates sonorities throughout this movement by allowing the melodic line to flow back and forth between the piano and the combined strings.

The *Allegro molto* finale returns to both the mood and tonality of the first movement. The movement is in modified sonata form and there is nothing of the cheerful rondo-finale here. Although the opening is subdued, it quickly gives way to the same craggy outbursts heard in the opening movement. Only in its final moments does Brahms relent and let the music break free to end on the tonic major. C Major has rarely sounded so fierce. Despite the beauty of the slow movement, it is the vigor of this emphatic finale that remains with us after work concludes.

Shostakovich: Trio in d, Op. 67

We celebrate Shostakovich's centennial with one of the 20th century's essential masterworks and one of its creator's greatest compositions. It draws on a wide range of inspiration, ranging from Bach to klezmer, as it depicts the myriad of emotional territories spanning hope, horror, and tragedy.

Shostakovich is always viewed in the context of the oppression and brutality of Stalinist Russia. He was alternately exalted and condemned by the Soviet regime that he tried to please. There is no ambivalence, however, with regard to his feelings toward the horrors of war and the Nazi regime. He clearly sought to express his horror in this 1944 piano trio, a bleak, driven work inspired by the inhumanity of the holocaust. One of the greatest masterpieces of 20th century music, Opus 67 clearly bears the marks of those bitter, desperate times. It is a tense, tragic memorial to his friend Ivan Sollertinsky, a wit, critic, scholar, musicologist, and polymath who died in a Nazi death camp.

The opening movement, an elegiac and lyrical *Andante moderato*, begins quite strikingly in fugal style based on a theme in the cello

playing harmonics at the top of its range. The violin follows in its lower register, and then the piano, each playing a 13th lower than the previous voice. This compelling and haunting effect is replaced midway through with a more animated derivative of the first theme. Keeping in gravely lyrical character, the subsidiary theme, a terse, descending scale motive in simple rhythms, is vigorously discussed by the three performers. A compact recapitulation and a dying coda close the movement.

The second movement, a sardonic scherzo, is a sheer delight. Its central section is a folksy song embellished with spirited grace notes from the violin, and it surges forward with rhythmic abandon and an intoxicated, compelling spirit. Sollertinsky's sister described this movement as an exact portrait of her brother.

The penultimate movement is the composer's quiet lament for his lost friend, and in it, the trio reaches its emotional climax. The short, eloquently expressive *Largo* is an epitaph in passacaglia form, with the violin and cello weaving a continuous series of variations over the sustained, repeated, hymn-like chords of the piano. The devices that seemed insolent in the beginning of the movement sound almost ominous, and the music ends quietly in an unsatisfying resolution.

The third movement leads without pause into the final *Allegretto* whose structure is similar to a rondo having the character of a ceremonial folk dance, a war dance, or a grim processional. The *Finale* contains a Hebrew theme as a tribute to Sollertinsky's heritage; this theme has been likened to a macabre dance of death inspired by the horrific reports of Nazi atrocities. It is very rhythmic and hammers relentlessly reaching an extended climax midway through the movement. The first movement's opening slow section appears again only in a much faster tempo. The piece becomes more ethereal, and there is a poignant reference to the third movement's passacaglia before the work reaches its quiet conclusion.

Few composers of the 20th century have portrayed the agonies of human suffering like Shostakovich. He was beaten down but was able to write highly original and distinctive music of introspective melancholy, brooding intensity, frightening violence, and harmonic astringency peppered with occasional flourishes of brilliance and playfulness. He made something attractive and artistically lasting out of wholly intolerable aspects of life and death.

—Notes by Dr. Mårch Yecies-Parnel

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