



56TH SEASON

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MORGENSTERN PIANO TRIO

Catherine Klipfel, piano

Stefan Hempel, violin

Emanuel Wehse, cello

2:30 PM, November 13, 2011

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

In cooperation with Pacific's

Conservatory of Music

Program

Trio No. 6 in G Major, K.564 (1788)

Allegro

Andante (Theme with variations)

Allegretto

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756–1791)

Piano Trio in A Minor (1914)

Modéré

Pantoum: Assez vif

Pasacalle: Très large enchaînez

Final: Animé

Maurice Ravel

(1875–1937)

–intermission–

Trio No. 1 in B Major, Op. 8 (1853, r1889)

Allegro con brio

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Adagio

Allegro

Johannes Brahms

(1833–1897)

Concert Sponsored by Phil and Carole Gilbertson

The MORGENSTERN PIANO TRIO is represented Marianne Schmocker Artists International

<http://www.marianneschmockerartists.com/index.html>

phone/fax 631-470-0393

Artists

It was the inspiration of Catherine Klipfel, piano, Stefan Hempel, violin, and Emanuel Wehse, cellist, who met during their studies at the Folkwang Conservatory in Essen, Germany, to name a piano trio after the popular 19th century German poet Christian Morgenstern.

The Morgenstern Trio emerged on the German music scene as top prize and award winners after only two years of working together. In January 2010, the Kalichstein–Laredo–Robinson Trio Award selected the Morgenstern Trio for the most prestigious piano trio prize in the US, which comes with twenty major debuts.

In 2007 the trio took First Prize at the International Joseph Haydn Competition in Vienna, followed by two second prizes: the Fifth Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition and the prestigious ARD Competition in Munich, where they also received the audience prize. In the previous year they won the competitive scholarship of the German Music Competition and most recently they were named Ensemble in Residence at their alma mater, the Folkwang Conservatory.

Germany's national program for young musicians and the Best of NRW Concert Series have provided the Morgenstern Trio a noticeable platform with numerous concerts across Germany and live radio appearances to showcase their already consummate musicianship. Performances at prestigious festivals followed such as the Pablo Casals Festival in Prades, France, the Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the Heidelberger Fruehling, the WDR Musikfest, and the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival in Finland.

For the 2009 and 2010 seasons, the Morgenstern Trio was selected by ECHO (European Concert Hall Organization) for the Rising Star Series, granting debut concerts on all the important European stages in Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Cologne, Brussels, Birmingham, and Stockholm. Mentors such as the Alban Berg Quartet and Menahem Pressler have given the Morgenstern Trio invaluable coaching and musical insight.

Program

The piano unsurprisingly determines the style of the chamber music that includes it. While the string quartet emphasizes close texture, concentration, and the complete integration of the four instruments, the piano trio generally was originally inclined to be tuneful, playful, and light rather than spiritual. This is exemplified in compositions by Haydn and his contemporaries in which tonal dissimilarities are pitted against complete equality of the three parts. Thus piano trio composition poses difficulties: how to reconcile contrasting sonorities of the piano and the 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 these three composers tackled this problem.

Mozart—Piano Trio in G, K.564

Mozart spent almost 14 years of his short life travelling. At first the visits were modest, but soon the range and focus of his journeys widened. He travelled to Vienna at least four times between 1762 and 1781 when he finally moved there.

There was a great deal of amateur music-making at this time, and that may have been what motivated Mozart to praise Vienna as "true clavierland." Reports of the time tell us that there was hardly a household without a keyboard instrument, played upon with varying degrees of skill. Although much of this amateur music-making had the hidden purposes of either business connections or marriage, there was still some without ulterior motives. This is an important consideration when we examine Mozart's later piano trios. The amateur musician was always the chief customer for new music and the composer had to be aware of this if he wanted to compete.

When Mozart published his first piano trio in 1776, the form was still embryonic. In less than 10 years, however, it had so firmly established itself that it had become an inextricable part of musical life. To

meet the eager demand of amateur musicians for compositions for this instrumental grouping, arrangements for popular works were made with increasing frequency. For example, soon after Haydn's London symphonies appeared, they were published in transcriptions for piano trio.

While Beethoven made his own transcriptions of his Second Symphony and Septet Op. 20 and many of Haydn's string quartets were also so transcribed, Mozart undoubtedly felt that he could gain greater popularity by devoting himself to this new medium in a wholly creative way, writing a total of six over a span of 12 years.

Mozart's last piano trio was based on a piano sonata and a copyist was allowed to write out the piano part for the autograph to which Mozart himself made only slight alterations where the addition of stringed instruments made it necessary. For the most part, they play against the piano in block harmony. Mozart uses counterpoint in the *Andante* more than anywhere else, closely interweaving the voices. As in his previous works, the finale is a rondo. The artless Siciliano theme maintains the folk-song manner of the variation movement.

Ravel—Piano Trio in A Minor

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.

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: can you 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?

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 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—Piano Trio in B, 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 lamenting to Joachim that he should have withheld it and would alter it if only he had the chance. That chance came 37 years later: “You cannot guess how I trifled away the lovely summer,” he wrote to Clara Schumann, 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? 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.

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 is 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 decimates 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.

FIFTY-SIXTH SEASON

2011-2012

*Presented in Cooperation with
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Linden String Quartet

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

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