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Adaskin Trio

EMLYN NGAI, violin

STEVE LARSON, viola

MARK FRASER, cello

2:30 pm, Sunday, September 18, 2022

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

University of the Pacific

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN **STRING TRIO IN D MAJOR, OP. 9, NO. 2** (1797-98)
(1770-1827) Allegretto
Andante quasi allegretto
Menuetto – Allegro
Rondo – Allegro

GIDEON KLEIN **STRING TRIO** (1944)
(1919-1945) Allegro
Variace na téma Moravské lidové písne (Lento)
Molto vivace

— *INTERMISSION* —

JOSEPH HAYDN **STRING TRIO IN D MAJOR, OP. 32, NO. 1, HOB. XI:74**
(1732-1809) Adagio
Allegro
Menuetto

ALEXIS ROLAND-MANUEL **STRING TRIO** (1922)
(1891-1966) Allègrement
Sarabande
Ronde

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ARTIST PROFILE



Since 1994, the **Adaskin String Trio** has won over audiences with exuberant playing and programming that blends classical masterpieces with unexpected treasures. Critics agree - their playing has been hailed for "vigor, precision and stylistic certitude" (Charleston Gazette) as well as "spontaneity, intensity and charm" (Peninsula Review). The trio has toured throughout the USA and Canada performing at venues such as the Frick Collection in New York, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, as well as in Boston, Los Angeles, Toronto, Montreal, and Chicago.

This dynamic ensemble commands an impressive string trio repertoire ranging from Haydn and Schubert to Dohnanyi, Villa-Lobos, Schnittke, and composers of today including Chick Corea, Paul Simon, and Michael White. Gramophone Magazine hailed the trio's "superb playing" on their two-CD set of the five Beethoven String Trios, the cornerstone of the repertoire. A particular pleasure for the trio is introducing audiences to gorgeous and rarely heard gems by undeservedly neglected masters such as Taneyev, Martinů, Rozsa, Berkeley, and Klein.

Special collaborations are an exciting part of many of the trio's concerts, from quartets with oboe or piano by Mozart, Elgar, and Brahms to quintets with clarinet or accordion by Golijov and Piazzolla. Their MSR Classics release of the two piano quartets by Gabriel Fauré with long-time collaborator pianist *Sally Pinkas* was hailed as "worth celebrating... splendid" (Classical Voice of New England).

Although the Adaskin String Trio is currently based in New England, the members of the trio are all originally from Canada. They met in Montreal where they each studied chamber music with founding Orford Quartet cellist Marcel Saint-Cyr. They later completed two years as ensemble-in-residence at The Hartt School under the guidance of the Emerson Quartet. The trio is named in honor of Murray Adaskin, one of Canada's most loved and respected composers, and two of his brothers, violinist Harry Adaskin and producer and music educator John Adaskin.

Beethoven: *String Trio Op. 9, No. 2*

Beethoven's string trios (Op. 3, the three of Op. 9, and Op. 8 Serenade) were composed in his early period. His rejection of a valuable commission for a quartet in 1795 is evidence that he purposely limited himself to such works at that time. Possibly he was reluctant to confront the challenges intrinsic in quartet form or because he was also intimidated by the work of Haydn and Mozart. Mozart died in 1791, but, like many artists, became more popular after his death. Haydn—with whom Beethoven had studied for at least a year after arriving in Vienna in November 1792—was still very much alive. Many analysts have pointed to Haydn's accomplishments in his symphonies and string quartets as postponing and constraining Beethoven's forays into those genres, certainly a possible rationalization for the younger composer's focus on the piano sonata and other types of chamber music, such as these string trios, during the 1790s. In any event, Beethoven opted for the trio before turning to the string quartet as an expressive entity.

Even so, Beethoven unquestionably took the task of three-part composition seriously, as demonstrated by the three powerful scores of Op. 9. They are not divertimentos but are created in the significant, customary four-movement form. Beethoven was 28 years old at the publication of these works, and they exemplify a crucial landmark in his development as composer. Many critics place them as his greatest achievement up to that time, even though they have since been eclipsed by his subsequent work.

The three trios of Op. 9 were composed in 1797/98 and published in 1798. They were dedicated—ad nauseam—to Count Johann Georg von Browne-Camus, a Russian of Irish descent who was one of Beethoven's patrons at the time. Each trio is of four movements with sonata form in the first movements, implying that Beethoven did not mean for them to be light chamber pieces. The D Major we hear today is the most predictable piece in the opus lacking symphonic effects but delivering a finely understated warmth and intimate ambiance.

The opening allegretto exhibits a clearly expressive force in the part for the violinist, but the relentless accompaniment gives the movement a restless atmosphere. The

allegretto leads to an energetic second theme with a livelier, eccentric subject where the other members of the trio reach equal footing. These finally lead to a third theme of a more reserved character, marked dolce, which enters to complete the exposition.

The second movement, with its fluid 6/8 rhythm and its minor mode, has the sense of an esoteric dance. Best described as rather playful but melancholy, it is a poignant and sentimental serenade. Listen for some very notable pizzicato that affords texture and delicacy to the sound from only these three instruments. This movement is not very long, in a more or less ternary form, again with a coda, ending in the minor key.

A lively minuet foretells that Beethoven would soon forsake this courtly dance in favor of the more vigorous scherzo. It's not an action-packed movement; lighter in atmosphere but still with shades of melancholy, it is bouncier and more simply charming than everything so far. Listen for the two-note rhythm in the trio as it moves from player to player.

The theme that begins the rondo finale, marked allegro, is also not one of immediate breathtaking charm. Introduced and repeated twice by the cello, it develops as the rest of the ensemble picks it up and finally makes its way to the violin. There's a second theme that enters, scarcely more romantic than the first, before the first reappears. The real alchemy of this movement is in the development rather than in the inherent charms of the subjects themselves.

The string trio form was abandoned and never returned to by Beethoven after he composed his first string quartets (Op. 18) in 1801, and the Romantic composers, apart from Schubert and Dvořák, virtually ignored the form thereafter.

Gideon Klein: *String Trio*

Gideon Klein was amongst those composers who created music while enslaved in the Terezín concentration camp. Terezín was established by the Nazis initially as a camp for advantaged and intellectual Jews, and a mass of artists, musicians, and literary types appeared among the inmates. Other composers included Hans Krása, Pavel Haas, and Viktor Ullmann, all of whom

succumbed before the end of the war and whose music, together with Klein's, remained generally unknown until the 1990s.

Gideon Klein was born in Prerov, Moravia to a family rooted in Jewish tradition who were also innovative in outlook and encouraging of culture and art. At age six, Gideon's gifted musicalness emerged, and he began to study piano with the head of the local conservatory. When he was eleven, he journeyed to Prague for piano lessons, moving there the following year to live with his sister. In fall 1938, he was accepted to Professor Kurz's Master School of the Prague Conservatory, registering at the same time at Charles University for courses in philosophy and musicology.

Klein wrote not only in the prevailing Expressionist style but also experimented with pieces that used advanced twelve-tone techniques and microtonal intervals. The Nazis closed Czech schools of higher learning in 1939 when he was studying piano, composition, and musicology at the Prague Conservatory and the Karl University. Although granted a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music in London, he did not attend as authorities denied his petition to leave the country due to his Jewish roots. Working under a pseudonym in small avant-garde theaters in Prague, he struggled for two years, and in December 1941 he was deported to Terezín.

Along with most of Terezín's artistic population, Klein was transferred to Auschwitz in October 1944. Instead of being directly killed, he was relocated from there to the sub-camp at Fürstengrube, where prisoners worked in a coal mine. Klein likely died at Fürstengrube, although his death is not recorded. Perhaps the last major work anybody composed in Terezín was Klein's String Trio, its three movements being finished nine days before his deportation to Auschwitz.

The trio is in three movements: "Allegro," "Variace na téma Moravské lidové písně" (Variations on the theme of a Moravian Folksong), and "Molto

vivace." The middle movement is the only directly programmatic part of the trio, while movements I and III have a distinctively Czech nature energized by virtually neoclassical transparency. These surrounding movements have a brighter character that contrasts with the bleaker theme and variations, the poignant soul of the piece. Those outer movements provide a setting for the slow, melancholic central theme and variations, which is longer than the two brief, spirited outer movements combined.

Haydn: *String Trio Op. 32, No. 1*

String trios from the classical era are woefully under-represented in the performing and recording repertoire. It's not because the instrumental grouping is unusual — there were hundreds of string trios written between 1750 and 1827, the approximate dates of the classical era. And it is not because only one or two were worth performing. As expected, the string trios of Haydn are finely crafted works, in some ways heralds of his string quartets. However, many of Haydn's 123 (or 126 or 146 or some other number, depending on who is counting) string trios were originally written for baryton, viola and cello. The exact number may never be known because Haydn termed many of his early efforts in this form *divertimentos* or *cassations*, some are missing, and corrupt publishers, out to make a quick guild, issued innumerable illegitimate works. At any rate, they are the most intensively cultivated genre of Haydn's early career.

The baryton, a member of the gamba family and related to the modern-day cello, dates from the early 17th century. It was quite a handful to play, having one manual with 6 or 7 bowed gut strings, and another with anything from 9 to 20 sympathetically resonating metal strings lying under the finger board that are plucked, producing a harpsichord-like sound. The player is required to have the same nimble mental skills of an organist, playing two lines of music simultaneously. It is a rare instrument: evidence of extant instruments and descriptions found in documents suggest

that few were ever built and fewer than 50 originals remain.

It was Prince Nikolaus, a nobleman of the Esterhazy family that was among the landowner magnates of the Kingdom of Hungary, who brought the instrument to its highest levels of popularity in the 1760s and 1770s. Nikolaus had, as did much of the European aristocracy, his own court musicians, the equivalent of a modern-day stereo or home theater. Nikolaus also had the good fortune of inheriting both his title and Joseph Haydn, the Esterhazy Kapellmeister or music master (literally "master of the chapel choir") from his deceased brother. Nikolaus had previously played the viola da gamba (an instrument like the baryton, but without the sympathetic strings), but in 1765 he purchased a baryton.¹ In the same year, Haydn received an official reprimand from the prince for neglecting his duties. To please his new boss, Haydn quickly and voluminously honored Nikolaus' wish for multiple compositions for the baryton. Sadly, the trios are Haydn's least-known works due to the rarity of the instrument.

This trio, written for amateurs, is largely briefer and less elaborate than Haydn's more famous series of symphonies and string quartets. Comprising just three movements, the first is slow and is followed by a second movement in fast tempo. There is a minuet, which is placed as the finale. The first and last movements are in the home key of the trio and the middle effort is closely related. Today, the violin plays the baryton part.

When the prince played baryton trios, the viola part was taken by Haydn, and the cello part by whoever was the cellist in the prince's orchestra at the time. In the music itself, the baryton part takes the melodic line. The trios are not chamber-music in the recognized meaning of the word but accompanied solos. Prince Nicholas was no democrat where music was concerned and cared little about sharing honors with the professional musicians who assisted him. Nevertheless, many times the three parts are about equally interesting.

Roland-Manuel: *String Trio*

Alexis Roland-Manuel was a French composer and critic, recalled today mainly for his critical comments. Born in Paris to a family of Belgian and Jewish origins, he studied composition under Vincent d'Indy and Albert Roussel.

When a young man he befriended composer Erik Satie, who facilitated his making various influential musical connections. In 1911, Satie introduced Roland-Manuel to Maurice Ravel, whose pupil, friend, and biographer he soon became.

In 1947, he was appointed Professor of Aesthetics at the Conservatoire de Paris, where he remained until his retirement in 1961, making many contributions to musical theory and criticism, including assisting Igor Stravinsky by ghost-writing the theoretical work "The Poetics of Music." As well as theoretical works, he wrote and composed various works for stage (especially comic operas) and screen, developing a partnership with director Jean Grémillon, composing the scores for five of his films.

Roland-Manuel's criticism included several papers on the music of Ravel from the viewpoint of a considerate pupil and a lifetime friend. The titles include "Ravel", "Ravel et son oeuvre", and "Ravel et son oeuvre dramatique." Arthur Honegger dedicated *Pastorale d'été* to Roland-Manuel. He died in Paris in 1966.

The composition is suggestive of Ravel in many ways but even so is still different: the organizational form for the trio is more polyphonic than is normal for Roland-Manuel, and he treats Classical styles in a looser manner. For example, the second theme reoccurs before the recapitulation of the sonata form first movement. Listen to how this makes the whole structure into a palindrome. The Sarabande has a swinging quality but evokes a song rather than a dance, and the piece concludes with a feisty, refreshing rondo.

— notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

¹ Prince Esterházy's instrument was kept in the family's collections after his death. Much later (1949), it became the property of the (then-communist) Hungarian government when, on coming to power, it confiscated the Esterházy estates and installed the instrument in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, where it may be viewed today.

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