

PROGRAM NOTES

Franz Josef Haydn—affectionately nicknamed “Papa Haydn” for his prolific and dazzling contributions to both the string quartet and symphonic genres—also left quite a mark on the “accompanied trio” genre, composing 45 trios for piano and strings. **The Trio in E Major** (1797) that we will perform today combines some of the best-known qualities of both Haydn’s string quartet and his piano trio writing. The opening movement features strongly independent writing among the instruments, recalling Goethe’s apt description (applied to quartet playing) of “four highly intelligent people conversing with one another.” The final movement, like many Haydn trios, is more of a romp; we’ve loosened our ties—violin has partnered with piano right hand and cello with piano left, and we’ve all progressed outdoors for a lively dance. Somewhere in the middle of this dance, we are interrupted by a summer storm, which appears in the parallel minor key and recalls the incredible E Minor middle movement of the Trio. This striking second movement, completely unique among Haydn’s chamber music, begins with a starkly dramatic unison between the three instruments that evolves gradually into a “walking bassline.” Only once does this tormented ostinato leave the bass, and it does so even more dramatically when, late in the movement, the bass parts (cello and piano left hand) take the melody! The movement is divided roughly into two equal parts, the first consisting of a long, meandering piano solo, cadencing in the relative major; the second part features the full trio and cadences in the tonic minor. In this long-scale harmonic structure the movement is in fact modeled on the famous second movement of Bach’s Italian Concerto and is one of few works we know that adopts this breathtaking model in its entirety.

Ravel’s Piano Trio in A Minor (1914) was written relatively early in the composer’s career, a work both imperfect by Ravel’s standards and exquisite by anyone else’s. Composed 10 years after the (truly early) String Quartet, the Piano Trio is closer in texture to Ravel’s large orchestral works. Indeed, Ravel uses his skills as an orchestrator to draw a breath-taking range of colors from the piano trio instrumentation. A complex exoticism is on display throughout, whether in the opening Basque rhythms of the first movement, the second movement’s “Pantoum” structure (imitating a Malaysian verse form), or in the “Eastern” pentatonic melodies that appear in every movement. These seemingly superficial elements might seem trivial in any other composer’s hands. What renders the Ravel Trio extraordinary, however, is the way in which he is able to interweave and completely integrate these elements in the fabric of the music, yielding an end result that is strikingly new yet completely organic.

To pair with the Ravel Trio, we’ll be performing our own arrangements of two roughly contemporary works. The first, **Ravel’s own Malagueña** from his **Rapsodie espagnole** (1907), was one of the composer’s first major orchestral successes. As the second movement of the four-movement, Spanish inspired “Rapsodie,” the Malagueña, a traditional dance movement, is one of the most Spanish-inflected of the four movements, drawing on Ravel’s Spanish heritage and recalling not only the opening, lilting rhythms of the Trio, but also the bravado and flair of the

Trio's second movement. Our second arrangement is Berg's ***Traumgekrönt*** from his ***Sieben frühe lieder (Seven Early Songs)*** (1905-1908). Originally for voice and piano, these songs were later orchestrated in an extremely colorful rendition by Berg himself. The idea of "sensuality" or "color" in sound is often associated particularly with the early 20th-century French composers, but this Berg song is an ideal example of the kind of lush and opulent, coloristic writing so associated with early 20th-century Vienna. The Berg song sets the following text by Rainer Maria Rilke:

Traumgekrönt -- "Crowned with Dreams"

It was the day of the white chrysanthemums --

Its brilliance almost frightened me ...

*And then, then you came to take my soul
deep in the night.*

I was so scared, and you came sweetly and gently, --

I had been thinking of you in my dreams.

You came, and, soft as a fairy-tale melody

The night rang out ...

The Trio in B Major, Op. 8, is at once the first and last of **Brahms'** trios for piano, violin, and cello. Composed in 1854, when Brahms was only 21 years old, the work displays all the exuberance of Brahms' youthful, lyrical style. Yet its original, 1854 version, while it displays many moments of genius, is also one of the most meandering, least defined of Brahms' early sonata forms. Unsurprisingly, Brahms the perfectionist seized the opportunity to revise the early work for a later publication in 1889, after he had already composed his second and third trios for this instrumentation. This later version combines the inspired freedom of youth with a mature conciseness, displaying one of Brahms' later stylistic hallmarks-- "developing variation," a process of unifying the musical structure by arriving at each new theme through a process of constant "development" or "working through" of existing musical materials.

The B Major Trio is often remembered for the beautiful opening duet between piano and cello-- one of the most romantic and heartfelt duos in all of chamber music, let alone trio writing. Less immediately striking, but accumulating over the course of the work, is the amount of music that appears in a dark or sorrowful minor mode. Both the second theme of the first movement and middle section of the third movement are in an increasingly sorrowful G# Minor. The entire work is also entirely in the key of B, but alternating between B Major and Minor, creating a kind of tension and increasingly dramatic pull towards the minor over the course of the work. Most shocking is the last movement, which Brahms begins with only a tonally ambiguous, off-tonic "suggestion" of a key, creating a sense of anxiety that is left unresolved until the movement's final page. We'll leave you to experience how it all ends ...