

Prometheus Trio program – December 7 & 8, 12009 @ 7:30 pm
7pm pre-concert talk with Samantha George, founding Prometheus Trio violinist.

Wisconsin Conservatory of Music * Helen Bader Hall * 1584 N. Prospect Avenue

Trio in E Major, K. 542 (1788)
Allegro
Andante grazioso
Allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Trio in C Major, "*Lovisa*" (1888)
Allegro
Andante--
Allegro con brio

Jean Sibelius
(1865-1957)

INTERMISSION

Trio I, Op. 3 (1935)
Allegro moderato
Adagio espressivo con doppio canone
Fuga

Alan Hovhaness
(1911-2000)

Trio No. 3 in G Minor, Op. 110 (1851)
Bewegt, doch nicht zu rasch
Ziemlich langsam
Rasch
Kräftig, mit Humor

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

PROGRAM NOTES:

The summer of 1788 was a very productive one for Mozart: he completed his last three symphonies on June 26th, July 25th and August 10th, and finished his E-Major piano trio on June 22nd. At the same time, he was in serious financial trouble, writing to his fellow Freemason Michael Puchberg in June:

If you would be so kind, so friendly, as to lend me the sum of one or two thousand gulden for a period of one or two years, at suitable interest, yoU would be doing me a most radical service!

He adds, as a post-script: "--When are we to have a little music at your house again? I have written a new trio!--"

In the 1954 *Mozart Handbook*, musicologist Homer Ulrich compares both the E Major trio and Mozart's Trio in B-flat to his other works for this medium:

The B-flat (K. 502) trio is a whole is a great musical achievement and is perhaps equaled only by the E Major Trio, K. 542...if the E Major Trio seems more brilliant than the B-flat, it is only because of its brighter tonality. If it seems richer, it may be because of remote and colorful modulations. Drama, lyric beauty, charm, repose, fire--everything is there. One cannot choose between these two masterworks; they remain among the great music of the Classical Period.

Certainly the present trio is a wonderful work. The lyrical Allegro first movement flows from one gorgeous theme to the next; Mozart often repeats the Andante grazioso theme of the second movement but never orchestrates it in exactly the same way twice, so that the listener is endlessly diverted. The last movement, a sparkling Allegro, is a sonata-rondo of great brilliance, calling for simultaneous virtuosity and sweetness of sound from all three players, and bringing the work to a triumphant finish.

Best known for compositions involving large forces (whether for orchestra alone, orchestra and chorus, or his dazzling violin concerto), Jean Sibelius also composed many songs, a number of pieces for solo piano, and a handful of chamber works. Among the latter, in addition to the often-played "*Voces Intimae*" (Intimate Voices) string quartet, Op. 56, there are pieces for violin and piano, cello and piano, an early quintet for piano and strings, and five piano trios, of which tonight's "Lovisa Trio" (1888) is the fifth.

According to the introduction to the work printed in the score (which unfortunately omits the author's name), the young Sibelius spent "many happy summers at the home of his aunt [Evelina] in the seaside town of Lovisa" and composed this particular trio there. As the composer "played the violin, his brother played the cello and his sister the piano, it was natural that the young composer came to write a number of works for this combination."

Sibelius biographer Erik Tawaststjerna comments that the "Lovisa" Trio had "a youthful freshness", and the work opens with an exuberant fanfare followed by an arching, yearning theme passed between the three instruments. Off-beat accents underline the feeling of exuberance; lyrical triplets evoke the yearning. The exposition of the sonata-form first movement concludes with a "march rhythm" that Tawaststjerna singles out as reflecting the "[youthful] optimism" of the work.

All three moods return in the ensuing development, often juxtaposed in sudden shifts in harmony, dynamic or texture. A full-scale recapitulation is concluded by rousing chords.

The student Sibelius was very interested in Tchaikovsky's music, and it is possible to think of the trio's central Andante as a slow and very melancholy serenade. Underneath the plaintive tune, there is a dance, however, with stomps in the bass, and flowing sixteenth notes in the middle of the texture. As the dancers take a breath, a ten-bar *fugato* ensues, with the left hand of the piano stating the subject, followed first by the right hand, then the violin, and finally the cello. All four voices crescendo and slow down together--but as they pause, the dance resumes, now with dramatically arpeggiated chords in the piano and thirty-second notes in the cello. Gradually the dance slows; a quiet transition leads without pause into the jovial opening theme of the work's final Allegro con brio.

Despite its dramatic contour, this theme's opening quarter-eighth-quarter-eighth rhythm give it a dance-like quality, and an almost jig-like feel pervades most of the movement. As a sharp contrast, a central section is (states Tawaststjerna) "built on a *cantus firmus* in C minor with a good deal of contrapuntal writing in quavers and semi-quavers." After many dramatic changes in dynamic, the contrapuntal section gives way to a return of the rollicking opening theme; with the advent of the coda, Sibelius marks ever-accelerating tempi, only putting on the brakes at the very end of this high-spirited piece.

Like this evening's Sibelius Trio, the Hovhaness is an early work; it owes its presence on tonight's program to the fact that it was dedicated to Sibelius, whose music fascinated the young composer. Like the Sibelius (and, it must be said, not un-typically for a recent student whose compositional assignments would necessarily include much counterpoint), the work contains much such writing. Following his opening unison sea-chantey-like theme, and a somewhat mystical section in which the strings pass fragments of this theme back and forth over dream-like piano syncopation, a version of the theme appears as a three-voice fugato (piano right hand followed by violin, then cello and piano left hand together). A return to the opening is followed by a second mystical section, now with the cello plaintively singing the tune amid shimmering piano eighth notes and a few *espressivo* calls from the violin.

Violin and cello begin the *Adagio* second movement in unison over drone-like piano chords. but soon diverge. In the central section, marked *Doppio Canone* (double canon), Hovhaness' counterpoint studies come to the fore: the strings intone their theme, now in canon at the octave and two measures apart, while the right hand of the piano contains two voices in another canon at the third, and two beats apart--all over a piano left hand in constant, quiet motion. As the double canon concludes, the opening theme returns, presented in imitation by violin, cello, piano right hand and finally piano left hand.

Hovhaness' concluding Allegro ma non troppo is a three-voice fugue for violin, piano right hand, and cello doubled

(in Baroque *basso continuo* style) by the left hand. The fugue (very brief) episodes between entrances of the fugue subject; especially notable is the appearance of the subject in augmentation (twice as slowly) in the bass, under somewhat raucous dotted rhythms in the violin and piano right hand. A final return to the original version of the subject brings this youthful work to a *fortissimo* close.

Robert Schumann composed his first two piano trios in 1847; he returned to the form for a final time with the G Minor trio of 1851. As Schumann sent the work to his publisher, he noted that he had "heard it played two days ago, and it went splendidly; I thought to myself, 'Now you can send it out into the world!'"

Schumann biographer Robert Haven Schauffler notes that this particular trio "has never been appreciated by the public at large, nor was it by Clara", but it is a lovely piece, full of characters familiar from other Schumann works, from the brooding introspection of the opening theme to sweet yearning of the contrasting (yet certainly related) second subject. Both themes are voiced within the context of a rhythmic perpetual motion. Scholar Mosco Carner writes that Schumann had a tendency with certain pieces "to build up a whole movement from a single-pattern theme, to swamp it with a melodic-rhythmic ostinato, the most example of which is the first movement of the D minor Symphony. It is psychologically interesting to note that it is usually in movements or single pieces of a curiously restless, one might almost say, demoniac, character that Schumann resorts to this toccata-like treatment."

At only two points in the movement does Schumann stray from this particular rhythmic framework. In mid-development, the grandiose melodic contours of the themes and their legato accompaniment give way to an edgier texture, with *pizzicato* strings and *staccato* piano tossing a more step-wise line back and forth, and *sforzandi* marking dotted-rhythm exclamations in all three instruments. Pizzicati continue to punctuate a return to the original texture during the re-transition; it is only when these die away that Schumann reaches the movement's recapitulation.

Following the return of his second subject, Schumann begins the movement's coda in a faster tempo dominated by the main theme. As this fades, the composer briefly alludes to the pizzicato theme of the development, then quickly brings the movement to a somewhat enigmatic close.

The ABA second movement opens with a nostalgic, song-like theme handed between violin and cello (the piano gets the theme exactly once, in the theme's return); the central section of the movement is more agitated and includes a brief mention of the main theme from the first movement. In the third movement, the characters are reversed: the main theme, in stark piano octaves over tautly-sustained string harmonies, has an agitated quality, while the trio that follows centers around a syncopated violin theme of great sweetness. The dotted rhythms and triplets of the second trio contrast both previous sections: Schauffler comments that this "most jolly and uninhibited of strains was evidently dashed upon paper as if to cry 'To hell with discretion!'"

Unabounded joviality continues in the work's G Major finale (marked "forcefully, with humor"); the opening near-unison statement is followed by off-beat boom-chicks in the strings accompanying a jubilant piano theme, and the momentary melancholy of a string theme in the relative minor is followed by a quick return to opening material. Schumann returns to the syncopated theme from the first trio of the third movement, now in cello and piano rather than in the violin, for his next contrasting subject; he follows this theme with a swaggering dotted-rhythmic theme in G Minor. Gradually, elements of the first theme return and eventually pre-dominate; one more return to the syncopated theme and an atmosphere of general rejoicing brings the good-hearted trio to a rousing conclusion.

--Stefanie Jacob