

JACQUES THIBAUD STRING TRIO

audite

BEETHOVEN COMPLETE STRING TRIOS



24 TRACKS

String Trio in E flat major, Op. 3

- I. Allegro con brio 11:26
- II. Andante 7:18
- III. Menuetto. Allegretto – Trio –
Menuetto da capo 3:35
- IV. Adagio 9:41
- V. Menuetto. Moderato – Minore –
Menuetto da capo 3:30
- VI. Finale. Allegro 6:24

Serenade in D major, Op. 8

- I. Marcia. Allegro – 2:13
- II. Adagio 7:23
- III. Menuetto. Allegretto – Trio –
Menuetto da capo 2:18
- IV. Adagio – Scherzo. Allegro molto – Adagio.
Tempo primo – Allegro molto – Adagio 4:40
- V. Allegretto alla Polacca 3:35
- VI. Andante quasi Allegretto – Var. I-4 – Allegro –
Tempo I – Marcia. Allegro 10:01

String Trio in G major, Op. 9, No. 1

- I. Adagio – Allegro con brio 9:28
- II. Adagio ma non tanto e cantabile 7:47
- III. Scherzo. Allegro 2:51
- IV. Presto 5:15

String Trio in D major, Op. 9, No. 2

- I. Allegretto 8:02
- II. Andante quasi Allegretto 5:41
- III. Menuetto. Allegro 3:46
- IV. Rondo. Allegro 6:28

String Trio in C minor, Op. 9, No. 3

- I. Allegro con spirito 7:53
- II. Adagio con espressione 7:46
- III. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace 2:52
- IV. Finale. Presto 5:21



A genre which falls between two stools

If one consults a music dictionary on the subject of the string trio, one will find a discussion – for instance in the section “Formation of the genre in the eighteenth century” – as to whether the trio consisting of a violin, viola and cello should be considered a continuation of Corelli’s trio sonata for two upper parts and continuo, or whether it should be seen as a younger brother of the string quartet. What may, at first glance, appear to be an ivory tower debate amongst scholars has, however, been a pivotal influence on the status and reputation of the trio. Its closeness to the string quartet – the chamber music genre with the highest aspirations ever since Haydn and Beethoven – has furnished the string trio with a deserved level of prestige amongst composers and audience.

That is on the one hand. But on the other, the high standard set by the string quartet also represented the demise of the string trio even before it had had a chance to blossom. The trios of Ludwig van Beethoven clearly illustrate this. In five outstanding works, the young composer developed, and experimented with, the form and make-up of the trio – whereupon he was to set it aside for the rest of his life: from 1800 Beethoven increasingly turned towards the string quartet to solve his musical questions, whilst he ignored other chamber music formations (with the exception of duo sonatas and piano trios). These personal preferences of the composer were to prove detrimental to the string trio: no grand master of the nineteenth century took the trio truly seriously. And it was not until after 1900 that composers such as Reger, Hindemith and Roussel rediscovered the genre – up to Arnold Schoenberg, whose Trio Op. 45 (1946) turned out to be one of his most personal works.

The music business of course reacted to the availability of repertoire, producing far more professional quartets than trios to the present day – and this, in turn, influences the output of composers. And yet every violinist, every violist and cellist will enthusiastically confirm the joy of music-making which the trio induces: the airiness of the writing, the sole responsibility for each part, the directness of the dialogue. The sound is less compact, the individual is less likely to drop away, making the performance of trios technically more demanding, but also less palatable. Perhaps it is for this reason that, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it rarely left the sphere of *Hausmusik*.

“Entertainment” with class – the Trios Op. 3 and Op. 8

“Gran Trio per Violino, Viola, e Violoncello, composto dal Sig.r Luigi van Beethoven, Opera III” – this was the title of the first edition issued in 1796 by Artaria, one of the leading Viennese music publishers. Artaria had used the same title, “Gran Trio”, four years previously for a work by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart which, not without reason, is considered a direct model for Beethoven’s first chamber work without piano: the *Divertimento* K. 563 of 1788 is written, as Beethoven’s Trio Op. 3, in the key of E flat major and has six movements. This was not to be the last time that the young composer followed the example of the recently deceased Mozart in unusual scorings – as for instance in the Quintet for Piano

and Winds Op. 16. However, his guiding principle was always to go beyond imitation and fit his own personality into the new form he had encountered.

Beethoven immediately fulfils this tenet with a powerful opening gesture: in the first bar of the *Allegro con brio*, all three instruments hurl out a chord in the home key of E flat major which is followed by small motif particles and – not until the ninth bar – a form of melodic development. This opening constellation is typical of later works by Beethoven: there are no sustained melodic lines, but instead the material is processed swiftly, with harmonic witticisms, and each instrument is prominently presented. And although the tuneful secondary theme conforms with the winsome style of the time, Beethoven again and again creates energy fields where the music dramatically dashes forwards and the harmonic language takes unexpected turns.

The following *Andante* comes closest to the stylistic tradition of the divertimento, which not only expands in a standardised number of movements, but also favours catchy and dance-like types of music – “diverting” music, as the Italian genre title suggests. The *Andante* is suffused with a pounding rhythm, reminiscent of certain scenes from Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* which are dominated by a similar insistently regular rhythm. Regularity and predictability are suspended in the following *Menuetto*, where Beethoven ingeniously shifts the metrical accents. The second *Menuetto* is preceded by the central *Adagio*, whose aria-like melody extends into a lesson in the interaction of three string instruments: from changing “coalitions” through canonic structures and diverse accompaniments to small cadenzas. The finale combines rhythmic concentration with the virtuoso gesture which, in the development, expands into a fugue – as though Beethoven needed explicitly to demonstrate his contrapuntal skills that he had been taught by Haydn and Albrechtsberger.

Even before its publication, the Trio Op. 3, whose exact origins are unknown, travelled, courtesy of a French émigré, to Leicester, where a documented performance of it took place in 1794 – a coincidence brought about by the changeability of the times, but also the beginning of Beethoven’s international renown. The fact that Beethoven was full of ideas and able to treat favoured genres of the *ancien régime* such as the divertimento or the serenade with a good measure of imagination and irony became clear in his *Serenade*, Op. 8, printed by Artaria in 1797. Here, Beethoven handles the various musical sections even more freely. The opening march, traditionally played by the musicians while they were moving through the streets towards the venue, already appears so gripping and highly charged that one thinks more of Rossini than Beethoven. The following, serenade-like *Adagio*, apparently at times evoking a guitar, is a richly melodic showpiece with intimate interaction which is followed by a brutal minuet – it becomes clear that Beethoven took musical contrasts and junctions very seriously in his opus 8.

The greatest surprise comes in the *Serenade*’s central movement, which begins as a second *Adagio* with a sense of deathly pale elegy, interrupted twice by an irreverent, even insolent *Scherzo* – the spirit of the comic opera *à la* Pergolesi appears to have entered directly into chamber music.

A polonaise (*Allegretto alla Polacca*) instead of a second minuet seems to be a premonition of the finale of the “Triple Concerto”, but Beethoven follows it with several variations on a folk-like, “Haydnesque” theme, in which every instrument from the violin downwards is given the main role for a while – proving that Beethoven trusted the musicians of Vienna’s bourgeois and aristocratic salons to cope with a fair share of technical and expressive challenges. The march heard at the beginning also marks the close of the piece.

“Beauty, Novelty, Taste” – the pioneering Trios Op. 9

In contrast to the previous trios, the 28-year-old Beethoven dedicated his opus 9 set to an important patron, documenting the composer’s increased level of fame and his successful self-marketing. Beethoven referred to Count Browne as “Le premier Mécène de sa Muse” – the “First Patron of his Muse” – in the first edition of his String Trios Op. 9, printed in 1798 by the Viennese music publisher Johann Traeg. Count Johann Georg von Browne-Camus was a descendant of an Irish noble family and served as an imperial Russian envoy in Vienna. Beethoven benefitted from his extraordinary wealth and thanked him through several dedications, including the Piano Sonata Op. 22.

A dedication to a music connoisseur of course committed Beethoven to especially high quality. “Lightness in tone, variety, multiple movements, colourful scoring” – the characteristics of the divertimento-like trios Opp. 3 and 8, according to Rudolf Stephan – yielded, in the new opus, to an aspiration that looked towards the string quartets of Haydn and Mozart. According to the American Beethoven biographer Alexander Wheelock Thayer, none of Beethoven’s previous works could compete with the beauty, novelty of invention, taste of performance or treatment of instruments of these trios; he even went so far as to favour the trios over Beethoven’s first set of quartets, Op. 18, which was soon to follow. Whether one agrees or disagrees with this verdict, in the history of the string trio, Beethoven’s Op. 9 unquestionably represented a milestone.

The surviving sketches indicate that Beethoven revised the *Adagio* introduction to the first Trio in G major after he had completed the set, in order to impart a form of motto to the entire cycle. These fifteen bars therefore already reveal important musical parameters such as a sense of sonority (unison beginning), dynamic spectrum, dialogue principle and equality of the three parts. The strangely disjointed, even jagged, *Allegro* theme ostentatiously presents its various motifs before the movement unfolds with playful elegance, sonic transparency and perfect proportions.

In the ensuing *Adagio*, especially prized by his contemporaries for its “heavenly melodies”, Beethoven masterfully solves one of the string trio’s main problems: the inherent lack of sonority is compensated for by double stopping, repeated notes and varied dynamics. A true innovation comes in the *Scherzo*, which is freed of its hitherto binding scheme of sequential patterns: the central section is given an original ending, the repeat of the main section is no longer just furnished with the instruction of “da capo” but specifically written out with Beethoven adding vari-

ants in the violin part. The finale appears as a furious *perpetuum mobile* with recurring holding points and extensive chordal sequences granting the substance of a multi-layered finale to the buoyant last dance.

Beethoven seems to have placed the Second Trio in D major in the centre of the cycle in order to provide a clear contrast to its more dramatic sister-work. A moderate *Allegretto* – unusual as a first movement in the composer’s oeuvre – opens the work with typical Beethovenesque rhetoric. A pianissimo passage produces a simple melody, from which the violin emerges. This is repeated one tone higher until, after some hesitation, the built-up energy erupts, releasing several motifs which are to return in the course of the movement. The musical language appears as a detailed puzzle which only takes shape in the *Andante* (again with the adjunct of “quasi *Allegretto*”), featuring an elegiac serenade-like tone and shape. The *Menuetto* predominantly lives off its surprise accents and a laconic “Trio” à la Haydn. The folk-like *Rondo* theme is a veritable “earworm” over a drone whose stereotypical succession of ritornello and transition sections Beethoven varies by superimposing a sonata form upon the rondo structure.

The “breakthrough” towards the string quartet, already hinted at in the first trio of the Op. 9 set, becomes tangible in the C minor trio. The tendency towards greater sonority is as unmistakeable as is the intensification of the expressive content, with Beethoven masterfully making use of the minor key’s potential for harmonic suspense. Set within an expressive crescendo, the austere descending opening passage anticipates the finale of the late String Quartet Op. 131 in visionary fashion, at the same time indicating the new tone which is being acted out in swift contrasts, abrupt dynamics and passionate instrumental gestures (with a second subject reminiscent of Schubert).

This high-octane sonata form movement is followed by an *Adagio* whose heartfelt, simple melody initially draws on the tone of the Viennese Classics but then charges this up into a very personal *espressivo*. This begins after a Mozartian passage when the song-like C major theme is unexpectedly repeated in E flat major and then led into a harmonically and dynamically dramatic development. At the end of this, the home key of C major is re-established, and the main theme flows along in a new variant, leading into a wondrous dialogue between violin and cello. Once again, the coda pushes into almost romantic harmonic spheres, before the movement ends, as if exhausted.

The rhythmically electrified *Scherzo*, on the other hand, consolidates the curious intermediate position of the trio between late Haydn, middle Beethoven and early Romanticism, as it announces itself in a gently flowing “trio”, oscillating between Schubert and Brahms. The finale forms, for the first time in the set, a weighty antithesis to the first movement. Not only is it set in the technically demanding sonata form, but it also harks back to the short, concise motifs, abrupt outbursts and sudden contrasts of the opening movement. Even the concluding turn towards C major, in this dramatic context, seems not so much a conciliatory gesture, but rather an ambiguous tribute to the tradition of a genre whose divertimento-like innocence Beethoven had finally taken away.

Michael Struck-Schloen

Translation: Viola Scheffel

Prize-winners in the prestigious 1999 Bonn Chamber Music Competition (Deutscher Musikwettbewerb), the Jacques Thibaud String Trio was founded at the Hochschule der Künste Berlin (today: Universität der Künste) in 1994. In its early stages the ensemble was closely related to Laszlo Varga (solo cellist of the New York Philharmonic, cellist of the Borodin Trio) and the pianist Gyorgy Sebók. Later on important artistic impulses came from Adolphe Mandeau and Markus Nyikos. Today the trio consists of Burkhard Maiß (violin), Hannah Strijbos (viola) and Bogdan Jianu (cello).



Burkhard Maiß, violin • Hannah Strijbos, viola • Bogdan Jianu, cello

For 20 years now the Jacques Thibaud String Trio has received tremendous acclaim from audiences and critics alike through their charm, their youthful exuberance and their astounding virtuosity. Regularly the trio tours throughout Europe, Japan and North America. The musicians appeared at London's Wigmore Hall and New York's Lincoln Center, toured throughout Germany and major Japanese cities and followed invitations to some of Europe's most prestigious festivals including Belgium's Musica Mundi, Gidon Kremer's Echternach Festival in Luxembourg, and Denmark's Roskilde Schubert Festival.

Center piece of the trio's concert activities is North America where the ensemble has appeared at hundreds of concert venues during their career including e.g. New York City's Alice Tully Hall, Washington DC's National Gallery, Stanford University, the Caramoor Festival, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and cities such as Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, San Diego, Dallas, Indianapolis and Honolulu. As Ensemble-in-Residence at the 2001 Florida International Festival, they drew an audience of over two thousand to their final concert. They have also given successful residencies in settings ranging from conservatories to music camps to an Indian reservation in Arizona.

Alongside the chamber music activities the Jacques Thibaud String Trio also performs as solo ensemble with Mozart's rare, unfinished *Sinfonia Concertante* for Violin, Viola, Cello and Orchestra.

The trio was named after the French violinist Jacques Thibaud who enjoyed a global reputation not only as solo violinist but also as a chamber musician. The existing recordings of Jacques Thibaud have been a constant source of inspiration for the Thibaud Trio, particularly in regard to nativeness and spiritedness of music playing.

*"There is nothing that is so enjoyable for the true artist as ensemble-playing with his peers.
Solo playing seems quite unimportant beside it."* (J. Thibaud).



VIDEO auf
AUDITE.DE

audite

e-mail: info@audite.de <http://www.audite.de>

© 2015 + © 2015 Ludger Böckenhoff

*We want to express our sincere thanks to
Brewer Science for supporting this project.*



Jacques Thibaud String Trio

brewer science

recording: April 24 - 29, 2015

recording location:

Funkhaus Nalepastraße, Studio P4, Saal 3

equipment:

Sennheiser MKH 20, MKH 8040

Schoeps MK 2S, MK 4 • Neumann U 87

Dynaudio Air 6

recording format: pcm, 44,1 kHz / 24bit

recording / executive producer:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

editing: Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer

photos: Neda Navae

art direction and design: AB-Design

Thank you for your interest in this audite recording.

*Please note that this free PDF version of the booklet is for your personal
use only! We kindly ask you to respect our copyright and the intellec-
tual property of our artists and writers – do not upload or otherwise
make available for sharing our booklets or recordings.*



HD-DOWNLOADS



stereo & surround
available at audite.de

audite

