

audite

Complete Works for Piano Trio Vol. IV



SWISS
PIANO TRIO

BEETHOVEN

Piano Trio No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 11 'Gassenhauer'*

- I. Allegro con brio 9:02
- II. Adagio 4:53
- III. Tema. Pria ch'io l'impegno. Allegretto – Var. I–IX – Allegro 7:01

Allegretto in E-flat major for Piano Trio, Hess 48 2:51**Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 38 (adapted from the Septet, Op. 20)**

- I. Adagio – Allegro con brio 10:05
- II. Adagio cantabile 7:44
- III. Tempo di Menuetto 3:14
- IV. Tema. Andante con Variazioni 7:26
- V. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace 3:17
- VI. Andante con moto alla Marcia – Presto 7:33

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SWISS
PIANO TRIO

Angela Golubeva, violin • Sébastien Singer, cello* • Sasha Neustroev, cello • Martin Lucas Staub, piano

The Complete Works for Piano Trio by Beethoven

Following great critical acclaim – as well as numerous awards for their complete recordings of the Piano Trios by Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky and Robert and Clara Schumann for the audite label – the Swiss Piano Trio have, since January 2015, been working on their most significant recording project to date: that of the complete Beethoven Piano Trios. After the successful release of the first three volumes, they now present the fourth instalment of their five-part series, revealing fascinating insights across the entire development of Beethoven's musical language, from the astonishing three Trios Op. 1 from his early, Classical period, through his middle period, to which the Trios Op. 70 can be attributed, to the *Archduke* Trio Op. 97, marking the beginning of his late oeuvre.

Alongside the famous works, the Swiss Piano Trio are also recording the Trio Op. 38, an original arrangement for piano trio of Beethoven's Septet Op. 20 which has been left out of many complete recordings. The Triple Concerto for Piano Trio and Orchestra Op. 56 is also not to be missed: here, Beethoven ingeniously employs the chamber formation of the piano trio as an ensemble of soloists in dialogue with the orchestra.

Rather than issuing the works in chronological order, as is the case with most complete recordings, it is our philosophy to present each of the five CDs as a diverse programme, combining early and later works as well as the variations, creating five exciting concert programmes which allow the listener directly to compare Beethoven's different creative periods.

Beethoven's trios make up their own musical cosmos whose stylistic spectrum represents an enormous challenge to their interpreters. The early trios in the Classical style demand a much slimmer and more transparent tone than the almost symphonic *Archduke* Trio Op. 97, or the Trio Op. 70 No 2, whose musical language already anticipates the Romantic style.

Carl Czerny's *Reminiscences of Beethoven* (Vienna, 1842) has proved to be an inspiring treasure trove with regard to interpretation – in the chapter “Über den richtigen Vortrag der sämtlichen Beethoven'schen Werke für das Piano mit Begleitung” (On the correct performance of Beethoven's complete works for piano with accompaniment), he comments on all the piano trios and adds suggestions for interpretation. As Beethoven's pupil, and later also friend, Czerny had studied nearly all works for, and with, piano under the guidance of the composer and was thus also intimately familiar with the chamber works. His tempo markings, however, are surprising at times, in some slow movements revealing themselves to be more flowing, whilst others are more held back than expected. For the first and third movements of the Op. 11 Trio, Czerny proposes a lively *alla breve*, whilst the tempo of the *Adagio* is very calm. Of particular interest for this slow movement are Czerny's detailed instructions regarding the use of the pedal, at times resulting in surprisingly expansive sound effects. Unfortunately the Op. 38 Trio is not included in Czerny's commentary, but thanks to similarly crafted movements from other trios and our own experience with these works, suitable tempi and playing styles emerged almost by themselves.

In these recordings the Swiss Piano Trio deliberately steer away from the encyclopaedic approach and instead concentrate on the pleasure and delight in Beethoven's inexhaustible creativeness and his ever-fresh music.

audite



Angela Golubeva, violin • Sasha Neustroev, cello • Martin Lucas Staub, piano

Works for Piano Trio by Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Trios Op. 11, Op. 38 & Allegretto in E-flat major

Changes in trio instrumentation directly reflect the radical transition in 18th century musical history that led from the Baroque to the so-called Classical period. While the Baroque trio sonata is based on basso continuo and usually requires more than three instruments to be performed, the Classical trio is scored for only three instruments with soloistic functions, naturally in various combinations. Of them, the so-called “piano trio” for violin, cello, and piano remains the most popular to this day. When we consider Joseph Haydn’s extraordinary chamber music output, however, we note that though he wrote 46 (!) piano trios, these are far exceeded by his baryton trios, which number no fewer than 123. (The baryton, which joins here with the violin and cello, is a kind of gamba that includes resonance strings along with its playing strings and produces a particularly warm, overtone-rich sound). It is true that Mozart composed only six piano trios and three string trios, but among them is the String Trio in E-flat major, K. 563, one of the pinnacles of classical chamber music. The seven numbered piano trios are the central works of Beethoven’s trio output, though he also made very important contributions for string trio with the early opuses 3 and 9 (the latter, like the Op. 1 piano trios, consisting of three works). The trios scored for piano are in the majority for a simple reason: Beethoven wrote them for his own use, since after moving from Bonn to Vienna in 1792, he was initially planning a double career as a composer and piano virtuoso (not to mention his skills as a gifted improviser). His first solo appearance, performing the Second Piano Concerto, Op. 19 in April 1795, and the tour (financed by Prince Lichnowsky) that followed of Prague, Dresden, and Berlin promised a brilliant future. We find this aspect in all of Beethoven’s works that include the piano, and particularly after the onset of his deafness, which evidently motivated him further to compose highly demanding piano music. The distinction between concertante, chamber music, and soloistic passages is hardly present in his piano writing; in Beethoven’s chamber music, the pianist is thus a “primus inter pares” who has to ensure that the delicate sound balance is maintained. Only in the Triple Concerto are the technical demands of the piano part significantly reduced, owing to the fact that Beethoven did not write it for himself, but for his pupil Archduke Rudolf, who was not a trained pianist.

Independently of the role of the piano, the trio works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven all share something in common that Beethoven himself remarked on. His words are (indirectly) related to the main work on this recording, the Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 38. Though sometimes referred to as Beethoven’s “eighth” piano trio, it was not counted among his other trios (if it had, it would have actually been the fifth). It owes its special status to being an arrangement of one of Beethoven’s earlier chamber music works, the Septet for Strings and Winds in E-flat major from 1799-1800. The Septet was premiered together with the First Symphony, Op. 21 on April 2, 1800 at Vienna’s Imperial Court Theater, as part of a “musical academy” financed by Beethoven, and in contrast to the symphony with its provocative opening, was well received by the audience. At the end of the year, Beethoven offered the two works, along with other compositions, to the Leipzig publisher Hoffmeister, writing in his accompanying letter: “I will now set

forth in brief what Mr. Brother can have from me: I. a Septet *per il Violino, Viola, Violoncello, Contrabasso, Clarinetto, Corno, Fagotto – tutti obbligati*. (I cannot write anything not obbligato for I came into this world with an obbligato accompaniment).” The sentence in parentheses, offered by way of explanation, is revelatory: with the paradoxical phrase “obbligato accompaniment,” Beethoven has given a name to what is perhaps the most important achievement of Viennese Classicism: composing with self-sufficient voices that are not necessarily related to one another contrapuntally – as in Baroque figured bass practice – and that do not have the sole purpose of providing a supporting accompaniment. Instead, each voice is now equally important, and even the accompanying figures have a meaningful role that is precisely defined thematically or figuratively. Though Baroque performance practice persisted throughout Viennese Classicism (like in Mozart’s piano concertos, where the piano fulfils figured bass duties!), this new vision of musical structure is truly a watershed moment. It drastically changes the way music is composed and listened to, something we would only be aware of today if Baroque and Classical compositions were presented alongside each other on concert programs.

With the reworking of the successful Septet, published in 1807, into a piano trio (where the violin part can also be replaced by a clarinet), Beethoven was filling a middle-class and aristocratic need for uncomplicated music (i.e. playable in the context of a salon or house concert), but without renouncing the virtuoso aspect; it was no accident that opus 38 was announced as a “Grand Trio.” Here the piano really is obliged to play a central role, since it has to evoke the almost symphonically-conceived sound of the Septet, which consists of a string quartet plus wind trio. The cello offers support, its role considerably expanded from the cello/bass part of the Septet. The Septet, Op. 20 owes its great success and popularity to the fact that it combines a totally clear structure based on even-numbered periods (groups of measures) with a highly original and lively thematic design – it was the expression of a “classical” unity of form and content that Beethoven would later increasingly call into question, broadening it to include other principles of metric organization. In the opus 38 arrangement, the musical structure in this sense remains intact, since the basic principle of obbligato accompaniment is not changed. It is notable, however, that the juxtaposition of the two original sound groups (strings and winds) is replaced by a triple configuration. Comparing the pieces directly, we hear new and changing perspectives, with the same basic substance appearing in a different light.

The so-called “Gassenhauer” Trio, op. 11, which Beethoven began composing in autumn 1797, was published one year later by Mollo in Vienna. The front page specifies the work’s instrumentation as “Grand Trio pour le Pianoforte avec un Clarinette ou Violon, et Violoncelle,” in other words, the clarinet and violin were intended from the outset to be interchangeable. The piece, however, was originally written for B-flat clarinet – an instrument perhaps better suited to the joyful, naive character of the theme of the finale – and according to Czerny, Beethoven was somewhat reluctant to rearrange the part for violin. Considering the popularity enjoyed by the classic piano trio formation (with violin), the reasons in favor of doing so are evident, given that this would allow Beethoven to reach a greater number of buyers. His decision – unique in Beethoven’s oeuvre – to borrow the theme of the variation finale from another composer may have also reflected his hopes to ride a wave of success. The “Gassenhauer” (popular

tune) in question, which is said to have been sung and whistled in the streets (“Gassen”) of Vienna, is the concluding Allegretto of the Trio No. 12 “Pria ch’io l’impegno” (“Before I go to work”) from the opera *L’amor marinaro ossia Il corsaro* (*The Corsair or Love Among Sailors*); this was written by the highly successful Viennese opera composer and conductor Joseph Weigl (1766-1846) and was premiered on October 15, 1797 at the Vienna Court Theater. The same theme was also set by other composers and competitors of Beethoven, including Hummel, Eybler, Wölf, Steibelt, and Jelinek. The work was dedicated to the Countess Maria Wilhelmine von Thun und Hohenstein (1744-1800), who was one of the great patrons of Viennese musical life. An outstanding musician herself and pupil of Haydn, she supported Mozart, and certainly the young Beethoven as well, having probably attended his Vienna debut with the op. 1 piano trios. (She was also a relative of the Count Waldstein). Beethoven’s dedication to her was thus a signal that in composing this trio, he was once again writing for “connoisseurs and enthusiasts.” Indeed, op. 11 is full of compositional subtleties that have often been praised. The first movement includes harmonic irregularities that are almost experimental, leaving the listener uncertain about the tonal center and appearing to ironically counterbalance the piece’s formal clarity. The same harmonic daring lends the following Adagio, in which Beethoven chooses to modulate from E-flat minor to E major, a deeply Romantic dimension. The nine variations on Weigl’s theme in the next movement are a masterpiece of musical humor, featuring strong contrasts and unexpected dramatic turns. In place of the principle of “durchbrochene Arbeit” (in which fragments of the melody alternate between different instruments), we have an abstract structure that resembles a kaleidoscope of moods and sound patterns. The first variation, for example, is entrusted to the piano alone, as if it were beginning a variation cycle of its own, and (as with Jelinek) the minor variation appears twice. Not unlike the finale of the Second Piano Concerto, the Coda begins in a dance-like $\frac{6}{8}$ meter, and in the third-related mediant key of G major, presents an ingenious metamorphosis of the theme that can no longer be considered a variation. Weigl has now been completely transformed into Beethoven!

The little Allegretto in E-flat major dates back to Beethoven’s Bonn period; he probably wrote it around the year 1790 for the social enjoyment of the members of the so-called Zehrgarten club. The inn of the same name was a meeting place of sophisticated artists and intellectuals; Beethoven probably gained entry through his teacher Neefe. The club members and friends gave a guest book to Beethoven when he moved to Vienna in 1792, which contains the Count Waldstein’s famous words: “With the help of assiduous labor, you shall receive Mozart’s spirit from Haydn’s hands.” Even if this minuet-like work still displays highly conventional features, its rhythmic energy testifies to the determination that would lead to groundbreaking innovation in the revolutionary works of just a few years later.

Wolfgang Rathert

Translation: Aaron Epstein



Since its foundation in 1998 the Swiss Piano Trio has gained a remarkable reputation both among experts and audiences as an ensemble of extraordinary homogeneity, technical perfection and great expressiveness. Today, the Swiss Piano Trio is one of the most acclaimed chamber ensembles of its generation.

The Swiss Piano Trio won first prize at the International Chamber Music Competition in Caltanissetta (Italy) in 2003 and at the Johannes Brahms Competition (Austria) in 2005. In the same year, the Trio won the Swiss Ambassador's Award at Wigmore Hall. The Swiss Piano Trio has received important artistic impulses from Menahem Pressler (Beaux Arts Trio), Stephan Goerner (Carmina Quartet), Valentin Berlinsky (Borodin Quartet), the Vienna Altenberg Trio, the Trio di Milano and the Amadeus Quartet.

The ensemble has given many concerts in more than 40 countries on all continents. The concert venues include music centers such as the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the Zurich Tonhalle, Victoria Hall Geneva, London's Wigmore Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Teatro Teresa Carreño Caracas, the Teatro Coliseo Buenos Aires, the QPAC Brisbane or the National Centre for the Performing Arts Beijing.

In performances of triple concertos, the Swiss Piano Trio performs as a soloists' ensemble together with orchestras such as the Russian National Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège, the National Symphony Orchestra Ukraine, the Queensland Orchestra Brisbane, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and many more. The ensemble regularly follows invitations to renowned festivals such as the Menuhin Festival Gstaad, Ottawa Chamberfest, Canberra International Music Festival, Esbjerg International Chamber Music Festival and the Kammermusikfestival Schloss Laudon in Vienna. Moreover the Swiss Piano Trio gives master classes in many countries.

Numerous radio, television and CD recordings with works by Mozart, Mendelssohn, Robert and Clara Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák and Eduard Franck as well as piano trios by the Swiss composers Paul Juon, Frank Martin and Daniel Schnyder document the artistic activities of the ensemble. Since 2010, the Swiss Piano Trio issues its recordings on audite. All previously released recordings received several awards and distinctions. In summer 2016, long-time cellist Sébastien Singer had to pass on his position to Sasha Neustroev. The trio managed a change in harmony with its musical conceptions – a promise for future consistency.

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Swiss Piano Trio, the festival KAMMERMUSIK BODENSEE was created in 2008. Its artistic director is the pianist of the ensemble, Martin Lucas Staub.

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Dipl.-Tonmeister Bernhard Hanke

executive producer:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

piano technician: Martin Henn (op. 11)

Pascal Monti, m-fréquence (Op. 38 + Hess 48)

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**VIDEO on
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