

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF FORT WORTH PRESENTS
CMSFW Ensemble with Anton Nel, Piano: "Carrying the Torch"
Saturday 4 January, 2025 - Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2024

Trio in E-flat for Violin, Viola & Piano, K.498 ("Kegelstatt")
Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)

The E-flat Trio holds a unique place in Mozart's *oeuvre*, as well as in the chamber music literature. In its original version, it was for clarinet, viola, and piano. Mozart almost certainly wrote it for himself, but as violist rather than pianist. The keyboard part was likely intended for his student and friend Franziska von Jacquin, the daughter of Viennese intellectuals whom Wolfgang and Constanze Mozart numbered among their close friends. Anton Stadler, for whom Mozart later wrote both the Clarinet Quintet, K.581 and the Clarinet Concerto, K.622, was the probable clarinetist.

The circumstances of the trio's composition are thus both intimate and congenial: music-making with and among friends in the comfortable, unpressured surroundings of a civilized and refined private residence. Surely music such as this reveals a tranquil side of Mozart's character, giving us a clue as to the channels in which his genius flowed when he composed for leisure rather than on commission. The score is dated 5 August, 1786, a time when he was preoccupied with work on *The Marriage of Figaro*. This trio must have provided a welcome change of pace from the opera.

And indeed the music does have a very special character. Its three movements share a liquid serenity that has made the piece a favorite of chamber musicians for two centuries.

Curiously, there is no slow movement, nor is there a sonata-allegro. While the first movement is in sonata form, it proceeds at a leisurely pace, making it very clear to us as listeners that it will not be rushed. The central movement is a minuet, and the finale a flowing rondo whose tempo is marked *Allegretto*. No extremes interfere with the overall calm of the music, yet its rich supply of melodies and pleasing grace succeed in holding our interest. The sole exception is an outburst [in c-minor] from the viola in the middle trio section of the minuet, but it is a well-mannered, if impassioned outburst that is countered by the mollifying responses of the piano and violin.

Artistic Director Gary Levinson observes that there is a rich tradition of substituting instruments in Western classical music. “One simply needs to look at Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* or many of his other keyboard works where he doesn’t indicate much beyond ‘keyboard’ instrument, which could have meant clavichord, harpsichord, or organ,” he says. “The *Kegelstatt* Trio most often performed in the clarinet/viola/piano version sounds quite different when violin takes the place of clarinet. The nature of the string instrument, the infinite variety of vibrato as well as the timbre of the violin, lends a different character to the group. I believe Mozart liked the overtones he could achieve with two string instruments and the *fortepiano* in this arrangement.”

An assertive turned ornament opens the trio, stated in unison by all three players. Its decisive rhythmic profile defines the entire movement, opens the trio. Subtle interrelationships among the three movements' themes further unify the work.

No one before Mozart had written for clarinet, viola, and piano; the combination was

bold and unique. Clarinet was still a relatively new instrument, and neither clarinet nor viola had yet acquired a literature of duo-sonatas with keyboard. Thus when the Viennese house of Artaria issued this trio in September 1788, they published it with an alternate part for violin (as we hear it) instead of clarinet. Such substitutions were common in the 18th century. They made the work available to more instrumentalists – and yielded higher sales for the publisher and composer.

The trio takes its unusual nickname from *Kegelstatt*, a game of skittles similar to bowling that Mozart and the clarinetist Anton Stadler are said to have enjoyed playing together.

3 Madrigals for Violin and Viola

Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959)

Martinů was one of the twentieth century's most prolific composers. He wrote rapidly and rarely revised his work, relying on spontaneity of expression. Though educated in Prague, he was an expatriate for much of his adult life, spending seventeen years in Paris (1923-1940) and twelve in the United States (1941-1953).

During the summer of 1946, Martinů was teaching at the Berkshire Music School at Tanglewood. Late one July evening he had a freak accident, falling from a second story balcony. He sustained serious head injuries, including a cracked skull that resulted in balance and hearing problems. Obviously his composing suffered, and a comparatively unproductive year ensued. The 3 Madrigals for Violin and Viola are one of only three major works he composed during the

following year. He began work on them in February 1947 after hearing the legendary violinist Joseph Fuchs and his sister, violist and pedagogue Lillian Fuchs, play the Mozart B-flat Duo, K.424. Martinů completed the Madrigals on 19 July, 1947. The Fuchs siblings premiered the new work in New York that December; Martinů dedicated it to them.

A violinist himself, Martinů composed a vast amount of chamber music. Starting in 1937, the word "madrigal" occurred with some regularity in both his chamber and vocal works. Scholars have debated the reason for Martinů's preference for this title. Was he alluding directly to the Italian and English madrigals of the high renaissance? Or is his labeling more conceptual? His biographer Brian Large subscribes to the Fuchs connection: Martinů was paying tribute to Mozart and furnishing repertoire for his new American friends. Others cite the polyphonic texture of these three *Madrigals* as hearkening directly to their vocal ancestors. Then there is the camp that interprets "madrigal" as a *cache-pot* for Martinů's Czech spirit, perceiving the influence of his native folk music in works bearing that label.

Titles aside, the three movements are decidedly idiomatic, taking full advantage of the two string instruments. Viola strums like a guitar in the first, while the violin suggests irregular eastern European rhythms. Modal harmonic language characterizes the second Madrigal, with tremolos and trills providing an eerie atmosphere. The third Madrigal is dance-like and imitative, revealing Martinů's Czech roots and providing a brilliant showcase for the two players.

Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

We live in an era of Prozac and Cymbalta, Zoloft and Effexor. Depression is not only accepted as a legitimate medical disorder, but also can be treated successfully in all but extreme cases. Sadly, Robert Schumann was unable to benefit from modern psychiatry or pharmaceuticals. He suffered from what we now call acute manic/depressive disorder, experiencing severe attacks that led him to attempt suicide. His escalating mental illness forced his incarceration in an asylum in Endenich, near Bonn, where he died in 1856.

Schumann's work patterns were also manic. He was capable of intense periods of creativity frequently touched with genius. During the 1830s, he composed exclusively for solo piano. In 1840, the year he married the young virtuoso pianist Clara Wieck, he poured forth his love in a stream of glorious *Lieder* and song cycles. The following year he became obsessed with the orchestra, composing two symphonies and two other major orchestral compositions. Then, in 1842, he focused on chamber music. Intent in study of string quartets by Haydn and Mozart, Schumann penned three quartets of his own (Op. 41), followed within months by a Piano Quintet (Op.44), the piano quartet we hear this afternoon, and a work for piano trio called *Phantasiestücke* (published later as Op.88).

Few would dispute the supremacy of Schumann's Quintet among his chamber works. As a result, the Quartet, Op.47 has been somewhat neglected. It suffers by comparison to some extent because the two works share the tonality of E-flat major. While its phrasing tends to be foursquare and the piano part tends to dominate, it is still a lovely work, filled with characteristic

Schumannesque gestures and a glorious fount of lush romantic melodies.

Unlike the Quintet, the Quartet commences with a stately slow introduction that has been called Beethovenian; comparison to Beethoven's late Op.127 string quartet (also in E-flat) is plausible in light of our knowledge that Schumann was a great admirer of Beethoven and had been studying his string quartet scores. (Schumann reiterates the introductory material at the beginning of his development section, another Beethovenian touch.) The seeds of melodic material that dominate the ensuing *Allegro* are all present in these 12 opening measures. With the *Allegro ma non troppo*, the piano is off and running, with little letup for the balance of the movement. While the string parts are not without interest, the piano is almost completely in the limelight here, with the cello part almost inseparable from the pianist's left hand. Their union makes for a thicker, quasi-orchestral texture.

The Scherzo, which switches to G minor, is a standout movement: fleet, imaginative and far more equable in its distribution of parts. An unusual feature shared by the Quintet is two trio sections; Schumann's individual touch is the insertion of brief allusions to the opening staccato figure interspersed with the contrasting material in each trio. This movement, on a level with Mendelssohn's finest chamber music scherzos, is highly effective in performance.

The cello has its big moment to shine in the slow movement, a *Lied* that shows Schumann the melodist at his best. Midway through, a note in the score instructs the cellist to tune the C-string down a whole step (to B-flat). This abnormal tuning process (called *scordatura*) dates to early Baroque times. It permits a composer to achieve unusual harmonic

progressions. Schumann's idea was for the *scordatura* to enable such a progression via the cello's extended pedal point on that low B-flat. (Cellists have devised alternative solutions to this perilous instruction. Many players opt to retune the C string before the movement begins, then transpose the few other notes necessary on that string.)

With the Finale, Schumann recaptures the briskness of his opening movement, adding even more elaborate contrapuntal elements. Perhaps he was playing out the energy begotten by the splendid coda to his Piano Quintet. He succeeds brilliantly, bringing the quartet to a stylish and convincing close.