

Joseph Haydn

Piano Trio in C major, XV:27

Seventeen ninety was a watershed year for Joseph Haydn (1732-1809). In that one year Haydn's life and fortune were turned upside down. Emperor Joseph II died on February 20, 1790, an event that threw Austria and its empire into a period of prolonged mourning. Less than a week later, the wife of his patron and employer Nicolaus Esterházy died; Haydn spent a good deal of his time trying to console the desolate Nicolaus, but Nicolaus himself succumbed by the end of September, to be succeeded by his brother, Anton. Anton, seeking to save on expenses at an uncertain time, released nearly all of the court musicians, and relegated Haydn to a part-time position with commiserate pay. Anton, to Haydn's delight, had little use for his services and permitted Haydn to travel as he saw fit. Haydn wasted little time in using his new-found semi-independence and rented an apartment in Vienna. At long last he was away from his isolated existence at Esterházy and free to mingle in an appreciative society and to engage in commerce with his Viennese counterparts.

Haydn was the most famous and most sought after composer in Europe in his time; thus when London impresario Johann Peter Salomon, in Germany searching for music talent to import to England, heard that Haydn might be available, he pounced, only to find a surprisingly responsive Haydn. The composer had entertained an English tour for more than a decade, but his duties as kapellmeister at Esterházy had prevented him from such an undertaking. Now, he could undertake a tour without fear of antagonizing his new patron. And Salomon assured him that the English public revered his music above all others, and, more important, that he would be richly rewarded.

Salomon's contract with Haydn covered one year, but the demand for Haydn's presence in London and the desire for more of his compositions brought about a one-year extension and eventually to another residence during the 1894-95 music seasons. Haydn made enough money during these two tours to finally give him the peace of mind in his final years that only financial security can bring.

Haydn was a short man, unhandsome, with a large aquiline nose disfigured by polypus, a condition he suffered much of his adult life. A

survivor of smallpox, his face was pitted with the marks of that disease. Consequently, Haydn himself was amazed that so many pretty women seem to find him attractive. “They couldn’t have been led to it by my beauty,” he confessed to one early biographer.

Not long after arriving in London in 1791, Haydn received a letter from Mrs. Schroeter; she invited him to give her a music lesson “whenever it is convenient.” Haydn accepted the offer, and, thus, began a relationship that lasted beyond his second visit in 1794-95. At least twenty-two letters passed between the two during Haydn’s sojourns in the English capital. Letters from Mrs. Schroeter to Haydn clearly indicate that their relationship passed beyond the platonic to the intimate. The copies of the letters are in Haydn’s handwriting and were discovered by his biographer Albert Christoph Dies in Haydn’s “second London notebook.” Dies further reported in his 1810 biography of the musical giant, that Haydn had admitted his affection for a widow in London “who loved me...a beautiful and charming woman and I would have married her very easily if I had been free at the time.”

On most evenings that he was not otherwise engaged in concerts or meetings, Haydn dined with Mrs. Schroeter at her residence. Surprisingly, the two carried on their romance beyond the prying eyes and ears of London gossips; friends may have been aware, but no broad reports ever surfaced about the “old man and the young widow.” After Haydn’s departure in 1795, Mrs. Schroeter looked after some of his business affairs and was an initial subscriber to his self-published oratorio *The Creation*. Although they never met again, some scholars conjecture that they kept in touch with each other, possibly up to the time of Haydn’s death in 1809.

The **Piano Trio in C major, Hob XV:27** is from a set of three such trios, written not for Lady Schroeter, but for another lady of Haydn’s acquaintance, Therese Jansen. Haydn had met the accomplished amateur pianist during his London visits. She was a favorite student of composer Muzio Clementi and was considered a piano teacher of note in her own right. She did not perform publicly, but did participate in private music-making among friends. Haydn dedicated two of his piano sonatas to her, as well. This trio signals that she must have been quite a fine performer.

Johannes Brahms

Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op. 115

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) came late to the clarinet as a chamber music instrument. It was not that he did not relish the clarinet for its sound and weight within a combination of other instruments; his orchestral compositions, particularly the symphonies and serenades, clearly demonstrate otherwise. Rather Brahms had a low opinion of clarinetists as chamber players; based on his experiences, the art of clarinet playing had deteriorated since Mozart and Weber. In an exchange of letters between himself and his confidante Clara Schumann, the composer expressed, on the one hand, his admiration for the clarinetists in the Vienna orchestras who performed well in large ensembles; on the other hand, Brahms dismissed these same instrumentalists for their lack of ability to excel in solo work.

Thus Brahms' friends were surprised when the composer took a sudden interest in the clarinet after he had unofficially retired from composing. But the transformation came not through any particular initiative of Brahms. Nor did it come about in association with his Vienna contacts. Rather it came about as a result of his friendship with the celebrated conductor Hans von Bülow who headed the orchestra in Meiningen. Bülow was the first important conductor who was not himself a composer by trade. He had assumed leadership of the Meiningen orchestra in 1880 following somewhat tempestuous conductorships at Berlin and Hanover. Eclectic in his musical tastes, he did not favor one school of music over another and served equally well as a champion both for Brahms the classicist and for Wagner the progressive.

From 1880 to 1885, Bülow built the Meiningen orchestra, never exceeding fifty members, into the finest in Europe. Members were expected to play scores from memory, and, at times, to play standing to show their commitment. The annual Meiningen music festivals founded by him attracted music lovers from all across Europe and the United States. Incidentally, it was Bülow who linked Brahms with Bach and Beethoven to form the 'three Bs' of music.

Bülow invited Brahms, 'the great lion,' to come to Meiningen to

premiere the composer's newly finished *Piano Concerto No 2 in B-flat major, Op 83*. There, Brahms came under the good graces of Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, the chief patron of the orchestra. The two got along famously, and, thereafter, Brahms' scores were featured regularly on the orchestra's programs, and, with an open invitation from the Duke, Brahms became a regular guest at the festivals. Strangely, it was not until a decade after he began his Meiningen visits that Brahms became fully aware of the orchestra's chief clarinetist, Richard Mühlfeld.

Mühlfeld joined the Meiningen orchestra as a violinist in 1873. He was seventeen at the time. By 1876 he was appointed first clarinet in the orchestra after having taught himself the instrument, and as the orchestra's reputation under Bülow's leadership rose, so did Mühlfeld's. Mühlfeld specialized in playing the clarinet concerti of Mozart and Weber, and it was the Mozart concerto that Brahms heard in a private concert for the composer arranged in March 1891 by Fritz Steinbach, the successor to Bülow as conductor at Meiningen. The spirit to compose arose again in the aging composer.

Brahms was so enthused by Mühlfeld's artistry that he immediately wrote to Clara Schumann, 'It is impossible to play the clarinet better than Herr Mühlfeld does here.' So moved was he that Brahms set at once to composing for the clarinetist as much as for the clarinet. In the course of the following summer, he composed two chamber works specifically for Mühlfeld: *Trio in A Minor, Opus 114, for piano, cello, and clarinet*, and *Clarinet Quintet in B minor; Op 115*. Both works were premiered at Meiningen in November 1891. The Trio was performed by Brahms, piano, Robert Hausmann, cello, and Mühlfeld, clarinet. For the Quintet, Brahms called on his old friend Joseph Joachim for whom he had written his *Violin Concerto* to lead his quartet with Mühlfeld as soloist again. It was the first time the Joachim Quartet had used an assisting artist other than a string player, prompting a contemporary of Brahms to joke: 'it was on this occasion that the Joachim Quartet lost its virginity.'

On Mühlfeld's playing of the *Clarinet Quintet*, an occasional substitute player with the Joachim Quartet reported that three qualities stood out.

He used two clarinets, A and B-flat, for the slow movement, to simplify the gypsy section; he had a fiery technique with a warm tone—and a big vibrato.

When asked if he meant ‘rubato’ rather than ‘vibrato’, the old man answered,

vibrato—much more than Joachim, and as much as the cellist.

In 1894, Brahms added two additional compositions to the clarinet repertoire with the *Clarinet Sonatas, Op 120*, both for Mühlfeld, ‘the best wind player I know.’ On the occasions that they were together, Brahms would introduce Mühlfeld as ‘Fraulein Klarinette’ and ‘prima donna’, placing the clarinetist in the class of ‘an operatic soprano.’

The Brass Quintet

The Brass Quintet as an independent ensemble arrived relatively late in the chamber music realm and relied to some degree on the development of brass instrument design and manufacture in the last decades of the nineteenth century. While Russian composer and engineer Victor Ewald (1860-1935) is considered the innovator of the modern brass quintet, a French violinist and composer Jean-François Bellon (1795-1869) wrote several brass quintets in the 1840s primarily to display the virtuosity possible with the improved designs in brass instruments. Bellon, however, used a variety of instrumental configurations for his quintets, and it was Ewald who arrived at the modern equivalent of the brass quintet.

Photographic evidence from about 1912 shows that Ewald himself played in a brass quintet. It is seen to consist of two piston-valved cornets, rather than the modern choice of trumpets; a rotary-valved alto horn, rather than the French horn; a rotary-valved tenor horn, rather than the trombone; and a rotary-valved tuba (played by Ewald himself). Of these instruments, it is the alto and tenor horns that are most strikingly different from their modern quintet counterparts.

Ewald wrote four quintets specifically for brass quintet and transposed a string quartet into a fifth quintet. Wikipedia offers the

following summary since Ewald:

The contemporary brass quintet appeared in the late 1940s created by the Chicago Brass Quintet, followed in the 1950s by the American Brass Quintet and the 1960s by the Eastman Brass Quintet. However, it was 1970 with the founding of Canadian Brass that the brass quintet finally became a major hall (i.e. Carnegie Hall main stage) attraction and accepted as a legitimate member of the chamber music world... Canadian Brass established both the style and popularity of the quintet medium throughout the world...Notable contributions to the [brass quintet] literature include many commissions by modern ensembles such as the American Brass Quintet and transcriptions by other ensembles such as the Canadian Brass.

Arrival of The Queen of Sheba is the *Sinfonia* from George Frederick Handel's oratorio **Solomon**, composed in 1748. Solomon is based on the biblical texts concerning King Solomon of Israel. The music announces the beginning of the Queen of Sheba's state visit in Jerusalem. It is often used today as a processional piece for weddings, state visits, etc.

Exaltabo Te is based on a motet by Palestrina. The composer wrote primarily for vocal forces and very little for instrumental ensembles.

Tempting Davy's Grip from **Galleons and Cutlasses for Brass Quintet** is best described by the composer himself: I have always been a huge fan of pirates... For a while now I have been waiting for a good opportunity to channel some of this pirate love into a composition and...I have finally been able to do so. With 2 contrasting movements, *Phantom Ship* and *Tempting Davy's Grip*, this is my ode to pirates.

Moto Perpetuo from **Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge** is derived from incomplete work of Benjamin Britten, a set of variations. Britten took the sketches from 1932 and completed it in 1937 as a commission for the Salzburg Festival of that year. The *Moto Perpetuo* is the seventh variation of ten.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Serenade for Flute, Violin and Viola in D major, Op 25

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) arrived in Vienna in 1792, the year after Mozart's death. He began his studies with the notable composer Joseph Haydn, but finding his temperament at odds with the venerated Master, Beethoven sought out instruction with Antonio Salieri and Johann Albrechtsberger; but these teachers lasted a short time, as well. He then set out on his own. Increasingly, he discovered that his compositions had an audience. He composed piano sonatas and large ensemble works that were quickly accepted for publication, but sales were modest at first, and like any aspiring young composer, he wrote pieces for occasions for small groups of players and for various combinations of instruments to earn living expenses.

The bulk of his compositions during his early Viennese period focused on works for piano and the usual instrument groupings, but he did compose for non-traditional combinations. ***The Serenade for Flute, Violin and Viola, Op 25*** is one such work, unusual in that the piece has no bass line. The piece was offered for publication in 1801 and was an immediate success. It is not known whether the piece was written for a specific group or whether it was composed for general consumption. Whatever the case may be, the ***Serenade*** proved so popular that Beethoven authorized another composer, Franz X. Kleinheinz, to arrange the score for piano and flute/violin, and it was offered in 1803 as Opus 41.

The Serenade for Flute, Violin, and Viola in D major, Op 25, was written according to the standards established by Mozart in his great serenades with the full compliment of movements, but with pared down instrumentation. Serenades in Beethoven's time were not necessary works for lovers, but rather pieces for particular occasions, designed to entertain, and often performed outdoors. Such "Gebrauchsmusik" (music for a purpose or "use-music") does not seek to find deeper meaning in life or explore the soul of a nation, but does offer to entertain and audience for an evening in the park or at an afternoon social gathering. As one observer of this Serenade explained

The six movements find the young Beethoven at his most carefree and effervescent: even the Andante and variations (which would become a conduit for profound thoughts later in his career) is as light as air and bubbling with melody and witty repartee. Anyone who only knows Beethoven from the symphonies, sonatas and concertos has a very pleasant surprise in store

The Serenade is a most delightful breath of fresh air from the might composer of later years.