

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)  
Piano Trio No. 43 in C, H. XV, 27 (1794-95)  
Allegro  
Andante  
Finale (Presto)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)  
Trio No 1 in d minor, Op 63 (1847)

Mit Energie und Leidenschaft  
Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch  
Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung  
Mit Feuer

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)  
Piano Trio in A Minor (1914)

Modéré  
Pantoum: Assez vif  
Passacaille: Très large  
Final: Animé

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)                      Piano Trio No. 43 in C, H. XV, 27 (1794-95)

This Trio, composed 1794-95 and first published in 1797, is the 43<sup>rd</sup> of Haydn's 45 surviving Trios for piano, violin and cello. A pioneer of this genre, Haydn never quite achieved the equal partnership of the three instruments that would come with later composers, yet his wit and inexhaustible inventiveness never cease to charm.

The opening *Allegro* is in classic sonata form. The opening phrase, an eighth note, a rest, and three eighth notes, can be readily identified as it passes through the movement, and the second theme, with its characteristic four sixteenth notes and two eighth notes, likewise jumps out at you each time it is returned and varied. What could have been plodding in another composer's hands is pure elegance as Haydn adds grace notes, triplets, rests and unexpected twists and turns. The piano is very much in charge.

The slow movement, an *Andante* in 6/8 time, is in theme-and-variations format. Here Haydn moves to the unexpected and radiant harmonies of A Major. The middle of the movement, full of sharp dynamic contrasts, is in A Minor (the relative minor of our home key, C Major), and then we are back in A Major to the end. A little cadenza for solo piano comes just before the end of the movement, and although it ends on an emphatic A Major chord, the last bars are littered with ambiguous accidentals that pry open the ear to accept the Finale's return to C Major.

It's a *Presto* in 2/4 time, a burst of joy. Haydn, even in his old age, continued to deliver these movements of pure joie de vivre. All the more astonishing since he had one of the unhappiest marriages in the whole Austro-Hungarian Empire. In our jaded century, we have to envy the 18<sup>th</sup> century's inexhaustible well of optimism.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)  
Trio No 1 in d minor, Op 63 (1847)

Mit Energie und Leidenschaft  
Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch  
Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung  
Mit Feuer

Schumann's great D Minor Trio, his first work in that medium, was composed in 1847 in Dresden and performed the following year in that city — that calamitous 1848 that saw most of Europe in revolutionary upheaval. A young composer named Richard Wagner was on the barricades, throwing hand grenades, and Schumann and his family had to flee the city. The opera house was burned to the ground.

The opening movement of this masterful Trio is marked by a first theme that writhes chromatically, and neither the harmonies nor rhythms can pin it down. It is the kind of seamless, wandering, endless melody that Schumann made his mark with, a kind of music that would reach its apogee in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The dotted rhythms of the second subject, the thickness of canonic imitation of voices, and the odd, softly-voiced coda that refuses to resolve what came before, mark this as an unapologetically romantic movement. Listen for the amazing passage in the development section in which the strings play *ponticello* while the piano plays *staccato* in the high register.

Schumann's scherzo movement, marked *Lebhaft*, is set in F Major, the key that shares the same scale as the "home" key of D Minor. It does indeed convey the sense of "joking" implicit in the scherzo form. The phrases given out by the piano and then the strings seem to be chasing one another. This is not fox-and-hound music, though, for listening to it I seem to hear two lovers, one chasing, the other running but really wishing to be caught. The middle Trio section supports this idea, for the "breathless" instruments, in this slowed-down respite, are actually playing much the same material, with the note values lengthened, before they again resume the chase. Schumann's psychological bipolarity is built into the harmonic uncertainty throughout this movement, as the minor key keeps trying to re-assert itself, but all ends on a widely-spaced, fat, F Major chord that says, "Caught you!"

The longing music of Schumann's *Langsam* movement hearkens to his vocal music. Yearning of a domestic sort characterizes this tender, but not desperate, theme. It is in A Minor, a key suitable for the hearthside. It returns to the "home" key of D minor for a while, giving the cello a chance to express itself, before sliding back into A Minor. This is comforting, wistful, yearning music, resolving on a transitional A major chord that leads without a break into the finale.

If the last movement is to be performed "with fire" or force as Schumann indicates, the dynamic markings in the score tell another story. This rapid D Major finale, more complex than the first movement, has an air of subdued menace despite its major tonality, excited music played often at low steam, the growl of a caged lion, the scurrying about of conspirators who fear that the police are at every window and peephole. Although he had written this music in 1847 when politics were ominous, the performances in 1848 must have been eerie. Schumann's finale, even in the passages that rise to forte, might have been played in a salon where the audience had one ear cocked for the sound of gunfire or the call to the barricades. But this is only mood and impression — the music is impeccably crafted and employs every harmonic and rhythmic device in Schumann's toolbox. But doesn't it help to know what was in the air when it was written?

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)  
Piano Trio in A Minor (1914)

Modéré

Pantoum: Assez vif

Passacaille: Très large

Final: Animé

Ravel, doubtless the greatest orchestrator who ever lived, was, like his contemporary Debussy, more concerned with color than with architecture. For such a composer, writing chamber music was an extreme test. How could a composer not inherently interested in counterpoint and canon fill out a full-length work that would stand next to the works of Beethoven or Brahms? Ravel's Trio amply demonstrates that there are *other* ways to write for a small ensemble.

The opening movement, Modéré, turns to the rhythms of Basque music, an odd 3-2-3 division of eight beats. This uneven pulse drives the entire movement forward, with a broad, unbroken line of melody. The music has an ethereal quality, self-evidently lacking any of what be called the "rhetoric" of Germanic music. It just is what it is, music existing for its moment in time, driven by its strange pulse, until nothing remains but the rhythm, fading into silence.

Search in vain for a musical form called "Pantoum," which is what Ravel calls his second movement. It is a verse form, in which two different poems have been embedded one inside another in alternating lines. Ravel alternates and combines two different musical motives to show how a composer would imitate this literary form.

The next movement is a *Passacaille*, but Ravel does not follow the rigorous rule of a bass line that repeats underneath (or inside) every variation. He changes the bass line, too, across ten variations. The dramatic arc of the movement climaxes at the fifth variation, after which it winds down. Listen to how far we have come since Haydn's Trios, as the violin and cello employ all the colors and effects in their palettes, now equal voices with the piano.

More Basque influences appear in the last movement, marked *Animé*. Sometimes there are five beats to a measure, sometimes seven. Stravinsky would have enjoyed this unpredictable, quirky music. This really is Ravel at his peak, in Paris, in 1914, the very year in which the musical and artistic world in which he lived would be changed forever.