

ROBERT SCHUMANN**Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 63**

Schumann loved to devote himself at certain times to one branch of composition only. After writing 23 works for piano, he made 1840 a year of Lieder, followed by a phase in chamber music. His yearning to compose chamber music begins in the year 1838 when he published his reviews of contemporary string quartets in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. In the third of six articles he writes the following:

"If I think now of the highest kind of music, such as we find in individual works of Bach and Beethoven, if I speak of the rare spiritual experiences composer should open up for me, if I demand that with each of his works he lead me stage farther into the spiritual domain of art, if I ask for poetic depth, and innovation in the details as in the whole, I should have to search for a long time, and none of the works I have mentioned, none of the works being published now, would satisfy me."

These phrases afford an interesting view into his ideas of composition as his and others' views of chamber music in the mid-to-late 19th century. The striking phrase on innovation finds an obvious application to the music of today.

In approaching the Trios of op. 63 and op. 80 of 1847 Schumann had already composed three string quartets, the piano quintet and the piano quartet. In the intervening years he had come to terms with the music of J. S. Bach and the art of contrapuntal writing. This is unmistakably reflected in the polyphonic world of the trios. These two trios mark a new direction in chamber music.

Apart from the individuality of musical invention and the thematic material, apart from the mastery of form and detail, one can recognize a new kind of expressiveness. The use of progressive contrapuntal techniques and expressive rhythms had appeared before in the works of Beethoven and Schubert, but not in such a unique and different way.

Such original ideas were applauded by Clara when she wrote to Robert on her birthday, September 13, 1847, about the op. 63 Trio, "It sounds as if composed by one from whom there is still much to expect, it is so strong and full of youthful energy and at the same time worked out so masterfully. The first movement is to my mind one of the loveliest that I know."

The first movement is indeed lovely, whilst both contemplative and, at times, even brooding. The second movement, a lively Scherzo, is full and animated. The slow movement is full of poetic beauty and is some of his most elegant writing. The finale is jubilant and exultant; it fills the air with a triumphant conclusion.

FRANK MARTIN

Piano Trio on Irish Folktunes (1925)

Swiss composer Frank Martin, born in Geneva in 1890 to a long line of French Huguenots (his father was a Calvinist minister), won international recognition slowly. Following his father's wishes he studied mathematics and science, while his primary musical education was at the hands of a local composer. Finding music more fascinating than science, he did not earn a degree but instead launched into attempts at composition, writing music which is described as primarily German Romantic with overtones of Franck. Some of his songs were performed as early as 1911, and in 1915 he encountered Ernest Ansermet (the noted Swiss conductor who espoused the works of contemporary composers such as Martin's countryman Arthur Honegger), who introduced him to the music of Debussy and Ravel. Ansermet conducted the premiere of Martin's first major work, *Les Dithyrambes* for chorus and orchestra, in 1918. During the next several years Martin lived in Italy and France, working at incorporating different styles, including folk and ancient, into his music. He began teaching in 1926, and in 1933 became a founder and the director of Technicum Moderne de Musique, a private music school. In 1946 Martin moved to the Netherlands - first to Amsterdam, then to Naarden, which was his home until his death. To an increasing extent he travelled the world, and the growing regard for Martin at home and abroad was reflected in the many prizes and honors that were bestowed upon him.

The extremely prolonged development of his characteristic style makes it impossible to place Martin in any particular school or to compare him with any other composer. From an early age his favorite instrument was the piano, and all his life he considered harmony to be the most important musical element. He was greatly influenced by Bach, Schumann and Chopin - also Franck. This resulted in a complicated point of departure: a composer who was French in outlook was entrenched in a style essentially determined by German antecedents, and in a harmonic style to be conquered only by a radical upheaval.

Some of Martin's songs were performed as early as 1911, and in 1915 he encountered Ernest Ansermet, who introduced him to the music of Debussy and Ravel. In the years 1920-1930 Martin experimented with ancient, Indian, and Bulgarian rhythms as well as with folk music. His *Piano Trio on Irish Folktunes* is a product of this experimentation. There is a story on the composition of this work. An American music-lover had requested Martin to write a piano trio for him and to use for it, some Irish popular melodies. The composer agreed and studied collections of Irish authentic folksongs at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, choosing for his trio, some little-known melodies, elaborating them artfully in his work. The American, however, did not appreciate the original way and style of Frank Martin's composition and withdrew his commission!

It was after that that Martin found what he was looking for in the 12-note technique of Schoenberg. His application of 12-note technique does not conform strictly to the rules, and Martin rejected Schoenberg's aesthetics. For in the future too, harmony remained the determining factor for Martin; harmony in an extended tonality, with a strong personal stamp.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Trio in B-flat Major, Opus 97 (“Archduke”)

In a critique of one of Beethoven’s early works, Franz Joseph Haydn observed, “You make upon me the impression of a man who has several heads, several hearts and several souls.” The challenges which faced Beethoven in his middle period - the deafness which threatened to isolate him from the world of sound, his inability to find happiness in a loving relationship, the dwindling power and wealth of his patrons - magnified the opposing forces at work within the composer. In a lesser man, such conflicting elements might have led to insanity. But Beethoven’s true gift was his capacity to synthesize contrasts into a greater whole, to find a point of union beyond the limits of expectation.

The *Trio in B-flat Major, Op. 97* reigns as one of Beethoven’s most exquisite compositions, and is an unrivalled crown jewel of the piano trio repertoire. Its nickname “Archduke” reflects not only the refinement and regality of its musical form, but also refers directly to Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven’s pupil and patron and the Trio’s dedicatee. Beethoven began sketches for this composition in 1810, enabling him to complete the work in only three weeks in March of 1811. A letter to his benefactor written toward the end of that month excuses the composer’s absence from his court post in a manner verging on the saccharine: “During the festivities for the Princess of Baden, and because of the sore finger of Your Imperial Highness, I began to work somewhat industriously, of which, among other things, a new Trio for the piano is a fruit.”

Nothing in Beethoven’s personal life indicates that March 1811 was a psychological upswing for the composer. Biographers have contrasted the joyous “Archduke” with the melancholy Quartet in F minor, Op. 95 (“*Quartetto serioso*”) composed in 1810 and have surmised that Beethoven simply overcame his gloom. This implication is naive pseudo-psychoanalysis and out of line with Beethoven’s own understanding of his creative process: “Every real creation of art is independent, more powerful than the artist himself and returns to the divine through its manifestation.” The *Quartetto serioso* foreshadows the otherworldly spirituality of the works of his Late Period. It is a work of discovery whose form was yet to evolve. As though progressing toward a mathematical limit, the Quartetto strives and searches, inward and upward. The “Archduke” represents the apotheosis, a perfection of form and content.

The *Allegro moderato* opens with a smooth, majestic theme presented by the solo piano. Expanding to include the strings, the opening theme continues in unison until it flows into the second subject, three elongated phrases in G Major. The development, divided into three distinct sections, is alternately sprightly and demure. The movement then glides nobly into the recapitulation which features a slightly embellished version of the opening theme. A brilliant coda crowns the movement.

Instead of the conventional slow movement, Beethoven introduces a charming *Scherzo* in the second position, as though he could hardly be expected to dampen the glow of the *Allegro moderato*. The buoyant B-flat *Scherzo* is repeated three times. Its trio introduces a striking chromatic passage which contrasts with bursts of a waltz melody. The movement subsides delicately, hovering almost motionless on the tonic.

The *Andante cantabile* is a set of five variations on a serene theme that is stated first by the piano and repeated by the entire ensemble. The second and third variations are more active, but they never disrupt the stately grace established in the beginning.

The *Allegro moderato* follows without pause and provides an energetic, good-humored contrast. The rhythmic pattern of the opening motif is developed until a sudden change of key and tempo brings the piece to an exciting close.