

PROGRAM NOTES

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827): Piano Trio in E-Flat, Op. 1, No. 1 (pub. 1795)

1795 is the year of the armistice with France, the third partition of Poland, bread riots in Paris and of Haydn's Drumroll Symphony. Opus one, of course, does not mean Beethoven's first composition but rather the first he was willing to publish as a suitable representation of his work.

The American composer Charles Ives makes this surprising comparison of Thoreau and Beethoven. "...In their greatest moments, the inspiration of both Beethoven and Thoreau express profound truths and deep sentiment...They were equally imbued with [these things] but with different results. Difference in temperament had something to do with this, together with a difference in the quality of expression between the two arts. 'Who has heard a strain of music feared lest he would speak extravagantly forever,' says Thoreau."

This advertisement appeared in the Wiener Zeitung in 1795. "May 16. Advance notice. Three great Trios for the Piano Forte, Violin and Bass by Ludwig van Beethoven, which will appear within six weeks engraved by Artaria, can be reserved at the author's in exchange for a reservation certificate. The price of a complete copy is one ducat. The names of the subscribers will be published, and they enjoy the advantage of obtaining this work, which will be available to others only two months later and perhaps at a higher price. In Vienna subscribers may apply at the author's in the Ogylfischen House in the Kreuzgasse behind the Church of the Minorites, No. 35, first floor." There were 123 subscribers for 241 copies.

The influence of Haydn and Mozart is evident in this early work. There is, nevertheless, movement toward an individual style. For example, while the piano is still the predominant instrument, the violin and cello both have more important roles than in the Haydn and Mozart trios, and it is more venturesome in probing different keys. The first movement is an energetic allegro. The following adagio has a true development, unusual for a slow movement, and an impressive climax in C major. The traditional minuet is replaced by a mysterious-sounding scherzo that is also adventurous in its harmonic plan. The last movement is a high spirited and witty presto.

-Hoyle Carpenter

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10 (1893)

This quartet is a product of the time of his earlier masterpieces—e.g. Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune and the Nocturnes. It is not in the mainstream of his extensive series of works based on the cyclical plan of César Franck, that is, the use of the unifying device of a theme that occurs in all movements. Debussy turned from his usual impressionistic methods. This is his only work that has such a Beethoven-like title, Premier Quatuor en sol mineur, Op. 10. It is his only work with an opus number. Yet he did not completely abandon impressionism. There are numerous small touches of this style. Here, for once, Debussy inhabits two worlds—the academic one of César Franck and that of his own dream world of l'Après-midi d'un Faune.

The opening theme, with its lowered second degree of G minor, is equivalent to the Phrygian mode, one of those used in Gregorian chant. It is the recurring of this theme in all movements that makes it a "cyclical" work. The first movement is a sonata form. In the recapitulation, the second theme is omitted. The second movement is a scherzo with much use of pizzicato and meter changes. The third movement is slowly paced. It builds up to the high point of the whole work. The finale contains much contrapuntal writing and devices such as augmentation—thus proving that Debussy could do it. Why is it surprising that composers such as Debussy and Schubert can do what an A student in music theory can do?

This quartet, with its successful blend of classic quartet writing and impressionistic feeling, has come to be regarded as one of the high points in chamber music literature.

-Hoyle Carpenter

Giovanni Sgambati (1841-1914): Piano Quintet No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 4 (1866)

Born in Rome in 1841, Giovanni Sgambati was one of the very few nineteenth-century Italian composers who shunned opera and devoted themselves solely to instrumental music. This was a hard sell, for Sgambati's fellow Italians not only worshipped opera, but, at that time, rejected most serious instrumental music as "a German thing." One of the most brilliant pianists of his day, Sgambati was both a pupil and disciple of Franz Liszt, who introduced him to several German composers, including Richard Wagner. In a letter to his publisher, Wagner referred to Sgambati as "a truly great and original talent, which as it is somewhat out of place in Rome, I would gladly introduce to the greater musical world."

Despite his friendships with Liszt and Wagner (and notwithstanding the latter's rather dismissive remark about great talent being out of place in Rome), their influence is nowhere to be found in Sgambati's Piano Quintet No.1. It is a very original work which tonally bears little resemblance to any of the major German composers. The rather lengthy opening movement begins with a somber, tension-building introduction. The second movement is a modern Italian-sounding and very un-German scherzo. Brilliant and full of pulsing energy, the music races along breathlessly until it reaches the dreamy, slow middle section, a real tour de force. The main theme of the soft Andante has a spiritual feeling, almost suitable for a church service. The extraordinary finale has enough musical material for an entire work, let alone a single movement. It opens with two chords which vaguely recall the scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The music continues on a panoramic trip to an exciting climax.

-Steve Siegel

Musicians:

Cyrus Beroukhim, violin - Cyrus is Concertmaster of the American Symphony and plays as associate principal viola with the New York City Ballet Orchestra. He has performed at the Ravinia, Verbier, Norfolk, Sarasota and Keshet Eilon Festivals and with the Rose String Quartet and America's Dream Chamber Artists. And, he has toured to Taiwan, Germany, Luxembourg and Japan and has appeared at the Museum of Modern Art's Summergarden concert series. As a member of the Zukovsky Quartet, he explored the music of living composers. He has the doctorate from the Juilliard School and is Associate Professor of Violin at New York University

Katie Hyun, violin – Katie has performed as soloist with the Houston Symphony, Dallas Chamber Orchestra, the Columbia Festival Orchestra as well as the Busan Sinfonietta and Incheon Philharmonic Orchestra in South Korea. She is founder and director of the Quodlibet Ensemble and founding member of the award-winning Amphion String Quartet which was a member of Lincoln Center's CMS Two. On Baroque violin, she frequently appears with Trinity Baroque Orchestra, the Sebastians and New York Baroque. She holds degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music, SUNY Stonybrook and the Yale School of Music.

Dana Kelley, viola – Dana Kelley is an Artistic Director and member of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Praised for her rich and beautiful tone, she has been a top prizewinner in the Sphinx Music Competition, the Irving M. Klein International String Competition, the Concert Artists Guild Competition and the M-Prize Chamber Arts Competition. She holds the Artist Diploma from The Juilliard School as member of the Argus String Quartet. She is a graduate of Vanderbilt University and the New England Conservatory and is currently a member of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. This summer she will serve as principal violist of the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra.

Alberto Parrini, cello - Born in Italy, Alberto Parrini has been principal cellist of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic since 2007 and a member of the American Symphony since 2010; he also performs regularly with the New York Philharmonic and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. In 2008, 2010 and 2011 he toured Japan as principal cellist of the New York Symphonic Ensemble. He performed throughout the U.S. with the American Chamber Players and with the St. Lawrence String Quartet. He toured with the White Oak Dance Project and performed with Continuum, Proteus Ensemble, New Jersey Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra and Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra. He teaches at Princeton University and during the summer at Kinhaven Music School.

Marcantonio Barone, piano – Marcantonio Barone has performed with major orchestras on four continents and has given solo recitals at the Wigmore Hall in London, the Great Hall of the Saint Petersburg Filarmoniya, Weill Recital Hall in New York, and the National Gallery in Washington, and on the recital series of the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. He has been a member of the Lenape Chamber Ensemble since 1987, and he performs annually as a member of 1807 and Friends and the Craftsbury Chamber Players. He teaches at the Bryn Mawr Conservatory of Music and at Swarthmore College. His recordings are available on the Albany, Bridge, Centaur, and Innova labels. Mr. Barone is a Steinway Artist.

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