

South Bay Chamber Music Society

October 25 & 27, 2019

Hollywood Piano Trio

Inna Faliks, piano

Roberto Cani, violin

Robert deMaine, cello

Program Notes by Boglárka Kiss, D.M.A.



Piano Trio

oil painting by Teresa Benjamin

As a standard chamber formation that features violin, cello and piano, the piano trio emerged in the mid-1700s. Its predecessors include duo and trio sonatas as well as the solo keyboard sonata. The keyboard part of chamber sonatas gained more prominence gradually, first carrying two parts simultaneously and soon abandoning the use of figured bass, giving the instrument more freedom and prominence in the musical fabric. As the role of the keyboard increased during this time, the string parts became less important: The cello was often found doubling the bass line of the keyboard, and the violin part was reduced to an accompanying or optional role.

During the Classical era, the violin and cello became more independent and necessary. Beethoven and Schubert further expanded the concept of the piano trio by adopting the four-movement outline for the genre, previously mostly associated with symphonies. By the early 19th century, the piano trio was so popular that many symphonic and other larger works were arranged for it. In another later development, perhaps due to advances in piano technique and construction, the piano again received a more substantial and prominent role, as exemplified by the trios of Brahms and other piano virtuosos of the era.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, composers have continued to write piano trios, greatly expanding the standard repertoire for the ensemble. New approaches have included the occasional expansion of the group with an added wind instrument or experimentation with different compositional techniques, which may include curtailing the dominant role of the piano or giving each instrument lengthy solos, often calling upon novel playing techniques.

Piano Trio No. 39 in G Major, Hob. XV/25 “Gypsy” (1795)

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Austrian composer, friend of Mozart, briefly a teacher of Beethoven, Franz Joseph Haydn is one of the giants of the Classical period of music. He has been nicknamed the “Father of the Symphony” and the “Father of the String Quartet” for his contributions to both genres, and he was also very important in standardizing the piano trio.

Haydn spent much of his professional career as court composer of the Esterházy family at their country estate in Western Hungary, isolating him from his colleagues and musical trends of other parts of Europe, prompting him to say, “[it] forced [me] to become original.” In fact, during the nearly three decades he spent on the Esterházy estate, he was exposed to Hungarian folk music and gypsy string bands, and he incorporated what he thought were their elements in some of his own compositions. Thanks to printed music publishing, his works were popular throughout Europe, allowing him to go on celebrity tours to several Western European cities later in life.

Haydn did in fact incorporate some stylized Hungarian folk elements in the *Piano Trio No. 39*. The work is in three movements, with the opening movements, one in theme and variation, the other in ABA form, contrasting with the finale, which incorporates so-called recruiting dances into its rondo structure: Austrian army officials used to hire gypsy string bands and had them play a particular type of Hungarian dance music to attract peasants to recruiting posts.

Since the establishment of ethnomusicology, the interdisciplinary study of folk musics, it has become clear that “gypsy style” and “Hungarian music” are different from each other, and neither is similar to what composers from Haydn to Brahms and Liszt have labeled as such.

Gypsy style is an idiomatic and improvisatory approach to string playing, characterized by using major and minor scales, and not the “gypsy scale” invented by classical composers. What makes gypsy playing unique is its style of improvisation, which includes more harmonic than melodic alteration, rhythmic variation, and unique melodic embellishments. Gypsy violists also tend to rest their instrument not on their shoulders, but in the middle of their chests. These elements are not present in Haydn’s work, however.



A gypsy string orchestra

Growing up in villages and singing Hungarian folk songs, composer Béla Bartók was surprised to hear “Hungarian” music played in urban centers as a young adult, which did not resemble at all what he was familiar with. Due partially to this discrepancy, he and friend Zoltán Kodály collected and systematized Hungarian folk music, revealing its true nature. Some of its elements include the use of the pentatonic scale, influences as diverse as Gregorian chant and the music of the Balkans, and ornamentation not used in classical music. Haydn did incorporate the characteristic rhythmic figuration of Hungarian recruiting dances in a few moments of the finale.

However, to this day, many still think “gypsy” and “Hungarian” music are the same, associating both with the classical works from the 18th and 19th centuries with these words in their titles.

To hear an example of Hungarian folk dance music played by a string band, please click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2W5Pnama2c>

To hear a performance of Haydn’s piano trio, please click: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj5eleg94DM>

Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32 (1894)

Anton Arensky (1861-1906)



Even though the Arensky Glacier on Antarctica is named after him, Russian composer Anton Arensky is the lesser known member of the Rimsky-Korsakov—Arensky—Rachmaninoff lineage. Arensky's affluent and music-loving parents recognized early their son's musical talents. He was educated at the St. Petersburg Conservatory where he was Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's pupil. Soon after he graduated, Arensky took a post at the Moscow Conservatory as a professor of composition, teaching the likes of Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff. Arensky's greatest musical influence was Tchaikovsky, and for a long while, his music was thought to lack a personal style. In recent years however, his compositions have received more attention on the concert stage as well as on recordings. Although he wrote pieces for orchestra, he is best known for his chamber music, which includes a piano quintet, string quartets, and piano trios. Arensky died at the young age of 44 from tuberculosis, leaving little behind about his private life.

Mimicking Tchaikovsky's piano trio in style and dedication, Arensky's *Piano Trio No. 1* is elegiac in tone and commemorates cellist Karl Davidoff. Davidoff was an important figure in the evolution of the Russian school of cello playing, and the work gives a prominent role to the instrument throughout its four movements.

The expansive first movement opens with a lyrical theme and features the violin, then the cello and later their duet, only to give way to the piano to take the lead. The second movement, a traditional scherzo, features virtuosic as well as humorous lines by each of the three instruments. The slow movement is the centerpiece of the work, with its elegiac mood, and tender, muted themes. The finale opens with a dramatic mood, later recalling melodies from previous movements.

The following link provides a live rendition of the work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5u2Cb4IwFI>

Piano Trio in B-flat Major, Op. 97 "Archduke" (1811)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Despite the contributions of composers before him, it remained for Beethoven to give the piano trio an importance it had not enjoyed before. His finest and last work in the genre, the Trio in B-flat Major, Op. 97, closes Beethoven's "heroic" decade, which witnessed the creation of works such as the "Eroica" Symphony, the Fifth Symphony, and the "Emperor" piano concerto.

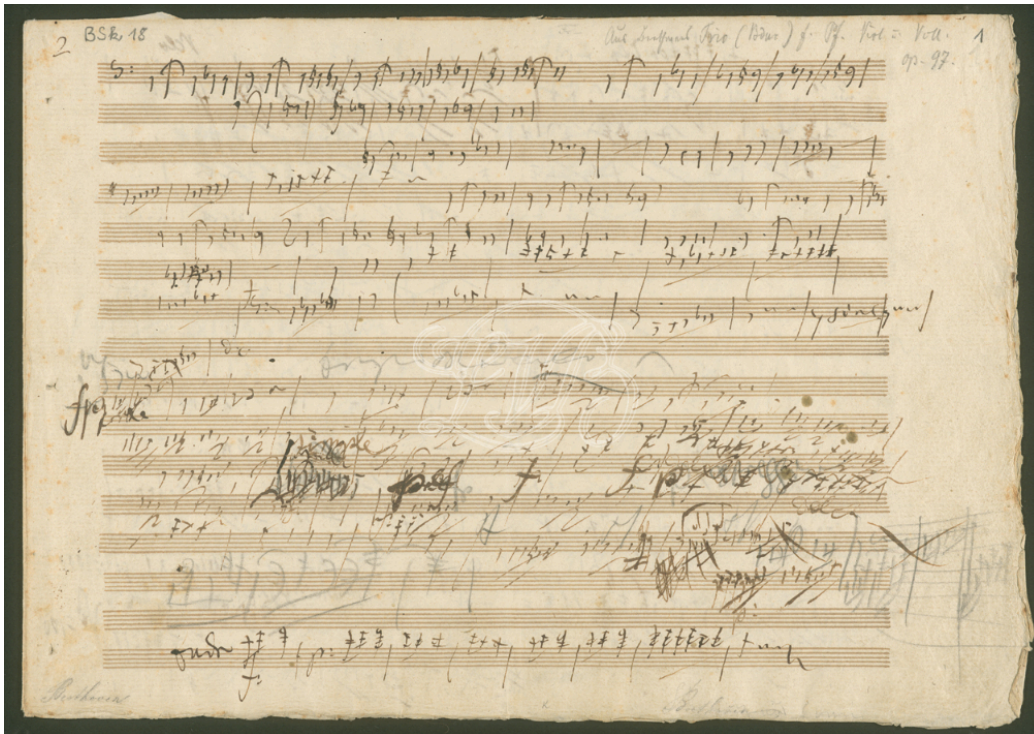
The youngest son of Emperor Leopold, Archduke Rudolph Johann Joseph Rainer Hapsburg dedicated a lot of his time to his favorite personal interest, music. He chose Beethoven to be his piano and composition teacher, eventually becoming the master's most devoted benefactor. Among the works Beethoven dedicated to his friend and patron are the *Missa solemnis*, the *Grosse Fuge*, the *Hammerklavier Sonata*, and the piano trio on today's program. Indeed, there is a nobleness, albeit often muted and understated, that pervades the entire "Archduke" trio.

The opening movement features rich string and keyboard writing within a traditional sonata form. The noble and serene first theme contrasts with a staccato second idea, but the entire movement is one of elegance and lyricism. The *Scherzo* opens with a bouncy figure on the cello and violin, with the *trio* section presenting a winding *fugato* and a waltz. The expansive third movement hints at Beethoven's later writing: After introducing a hymn-like theme,

a set of variations ensues with increasing complexity and tension, leading into the brisk *rondo* that alternates between heroic and lighter passages, featuring a fast *coda* to close the entire piece.

Beethoven's spirits were high at the time of the creation of this work. His hearing had improved temporarily, allowing him to perform and participate again in social gatherings. In fact, he bid farewell to the concert stage with a performance of the "Archduke" Trio in 1814. His growing deafness made further social and musical appearances increasingly difficult, and sent the composer on a profound inward journey for the remaining years of his life.

To listen to this work, please click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kOw6l02Ua0>



Page 1 of Beethoven's sketch of the "Archduke" Trio (Beethoven-Haus, Bonn)

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