Franz Joseph Haydn: *String Trio in G Major,* Hb. 25 (1795)

Haydn may be most renowned for his seminal work in the genres of the string quartet and the symphony, but he was a master practitioner and composer of chamber music in all its guises. Not unlike the migratory *Romany* for whom this piano trio is named, Haydn himself lived a peripatetic lifestyle, moving between Austrian villages, Vienna, (what is now) the Czech Republic, Esterháza in Hungary, and London, where he achieved fame as a public composer and secured a number of publishing contracts.

According to Haydn's biographers, he was greatly interested in the collection and archiving of "ancient and original airs" – i.e. the musical practices of non-Western European societies. Among these groups who attracted the attention of Classical-era ethnographer-composers were the *Romany*, whose virtuosic use of the violin and non-contrapuntal melodies made them a ripe source for imitation by Western neighbors. For Haydn, the (folk) music of Hungary was encapsulated within the cultural practices of the *Romany* (despite the actual heterogeneity of the region's musical styles). Therefore his piano trio's final movement *Rondo all'ungarese* should be taken to mean "Rondo in the *Romany* style," despite its literal translation to *Hungarian Rondo*.

This piano trio forms a stark contrast to the contemporaneous Salomon string quartets, which were written with a public concert hall and large audience in mind. His piano trios were instead written as true chamber music, to be performed in an intimate *salon* setting between accomplished *amateurs*. His G Major trio was dedicated to a piano student of whom he was quite fond, Ms. Rebecca Schroeter, a wealthy widow with whom Haydn maintained intimate epistolary communication through his second London visit in 1794.

The G Major Piano Trio is a far cry from the string quartets he wrote in London, which often opened with loud "crowd-silencer" chords to direct audience attention to the stage. By contrast, the trio opens with a delicate mordant in the violin, doubled by the piano and joined by the cello on the downbeat. In fact, publishers first marketed this trio as a piano sonata with violin and violoncello accompaniment! The first *Andante* movement is a theme and variations, where major and minor modalities play a game of tug of war. The quasi-improvisatory nature of the melodic writing hearkens back to the musical practices of the *Romany*. In the second movement, *Poco Adagio*, the violin takes center stage, trading soaring melodic lines with the piano, while the cello mostly plays harmonic accompaniment. The final movement, the *Presto: Rondo all'ungarese* is perhaps the most stylistically emulative of *Romany* music. The piano begins in *moto perpetuo*, joined by the violin which then breaks off to state the first *rondo* theme. Meanwhile, the cello takes up the role of *basso continuo* with the piano left hand. As you listen, you may notice that each of the variations of the *rondo* theme are taken directly from *Romany* airs – many bearing a strong resemblance to the *Hungarian Dances* written by Johannes Brahms about 80 years afterwards. Nonetheless, Haydn's trio retains its charm not as a robust ethnographic archive, but rather as a product of the Western European gaze upon the *Other*, a window into Haydn's perception of his neighbors during his stint as court composer in Esterháza.

Franz Schubert: *Piano Trio in B-flat Major*, D. 898 (1827)

Composed in 1827, about a year before Schubert's untimely demise, his B-flat Major Trio, D. 898 is a work of precision and grace. Unlike his expansive E-flat Major trio, which demands an astonishing level of virtuosity from its performers, the B-flat trio revels in its self-containment. Likely written immediately before the E-flat trio, his B-flat trio is in an intimate work, the *yin* to complement the magisterial *yang* of the E-flat trio. The two works cannot be considered in isolation, and the most compelling analyses place these two consecutive works in comparison; the ways in which they differ from each other lend each trio a stronger *raison d'être*. There is no lack of dramatic intent in the B-flat trio, contrary to some critics, but rather it serves, in its gleefulness, as the perfect foil to the drama that permeates the E-flat trio.

The first movement, *Allegro Moderato*, beings *in medias res*, with the cello and violin presenting the primary theme in rhythmic and melodic unison, immediately breaking off into statements of their own at the end of the phrase. Yet another theme and variations movement, each of the variations bears a salon-like intimacy, in stark contrast to the bombastic character of the E-flat trio's exposition. While the E-flat trio was premiered at one of the final *Schubertiade* concerts during the composer's lifetime, the B-flat trio remained a work for the *salon*, chamber music to be played amongst friends. This movement is best described as dialogic, as it much more convincingly imitates the dynamics of a friendly conversation, in which extended rhythmic unison passages give way to moments of back-and-forth dialogue and even *stretto fuga* between the violin and violoncello. The piano provides a contrapuntal backdrop to both strings, tying the voices together.

The second movement, *Andante un poco mosso*, is a *barcarolle*, i.e. a boat song. The undulating triple meter of the piano is intended to mimic the ebb and flow of waves, as a boat bobs up and down. Originally, Schubert intended a very different slow movement to round out this trio. His (now stand-alone) *Notturno in E-flat Major*, D. 897, was first composed as the second movement of this B-flat trio, but its proportions were too large and its dynamism likely a little too overstated to fit in well stylistically with the rest of this trio. Instead, the *Notturno* was published separately and Schubert wrote this watery *Andante* to take its place. The B section of the movement is a rhapsody in the Hungarian style, providing a thread of continuity with Haydn's trio performed earlier this evening.

The third movement is a *Scherzo*, the formal musical joke written into nearly all compositions after being popularized by Haydn. In a serious nod to his musical predecessors, Schubert constantly reverts back to the fugal texture of the Baroque, bringing a then-archaic musical style into conversation with his delicate expressive touch. This lighthearted scherzo begins with a fugue statement passed from piano to violin to cello and the subsequent moments of complex counterpoint when all three instruments are working out the fugue subjects quickly give way to clarity and a return to the precision that characterizes Schubert's style. One can never discuss the music of Schubert without reference to Viennese dance – the *Scherzo* consistently follows the 3/4 meter of the Austrian folk dance: the *Ländler*.

The final movement is a *Rondo*: *Allegro vivace*, that plays with the defining features of its form: the various iterations of the first theme are never faithful to its initial statement. This lends the whole movement an *almost* improvised quality, as if every note were not actually written into the score. One might think of this work as a last breath of fresh air before the last few months of his life, when his debilitating illness finally took hold over his body. Indeed, Robert Schumann once praised the trio thus, "The troubles of our human existence disappear and all the world is fresh and bright again."

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Franz Schubert: Wikimedia Commons

Khachaturian: *Adagio* from *Spartacus and Phrygia* (1954)

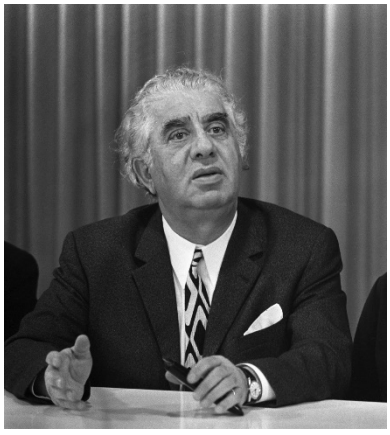
Aram Khachaturian was a well-known composer of Armenian descent living in the Soviet Union during the greater part of the twentieth century. His 1954 ballet, *Spartacus and Phrygia* tells the tale of the eponymous rebel leader during the *Third Servile War* (also known as the *Gladiator War*) in the Roman Republic of 73 BCE. Spartacus and a group of fellow gladiators and slaves escaped from a gladiator school, starting an active rebellion against their Roman overlords. Khachaturian ballet was lauded by his contemporaries and he went on to receive the Lenin Prize in music for his composition. During the 1950s, Khachaturian was a leading Soviet composer and a professor at the Moscow Conservatory. "I thought of Spartacus as a mounted fresco describing the mighty avalanche of the antique rebellion of the slaves on behalf of human rights." For Khachaturian, *Spartacus* was the perfect melding between the struggles of the oppressed of yore and those of his contemporaneous historical moment.

The *Adagio* is extracted from an especially rousing moment in the ballet. When choreographed, it is set to the reunion of Spartacus and his wife Phrygia following the events of the uprising. The original choreography had both husband and wife mimicking the graceful movements of a swan to the cello's tune. In this arrangement, the violin picks up the woodwind melodies and becomes an equal partner to grace the stage alongside the cello.

Prokofiev: *Waltz* from *War and Peace* (1946)

Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was one of the longest novels ever written by a European author, and it was certainly not a work easily adapted to the exigencies of the stage, what with its countless chapters explicating philosophical musings of the author with little to persistent narrative rhythm. On a level with Proust's *A la recherche de temps perdu* and Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, *War and Peace* is just as much an exploration of the human mind and psyche as it is a novel about the world. To portray this nuance in a theatrical medium is a tall enough order, let alone as a full-fledged opera. Prokofiev, a man of ambition no lesser than Tolstoy's took up the challenge and composed a monumental version of *War and Peace* as an opera.

At the end of Act I, there lies a frenetic waltz whose triple meter is so infectious it prevents any sustained interruption. On-stage, we see a mise-en-abime of the musical stage, the actors enacting a performance of their own and in which they themselves are bystanders drawn into the magnetic energy of the waltz.



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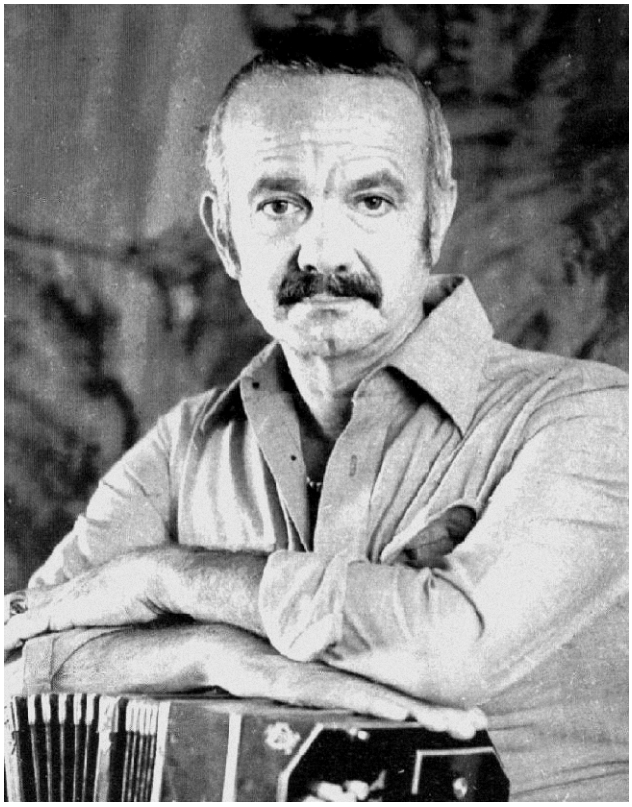
Sergei Prokofiev: Wikimedia Commons

Piazzolla: *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* (*The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires): Inverno Porteño* (Winter, 1970) and *Verano Porteño* (Summer, 1965)

Astor Piazzolla was known throughout his life as the master of the Argentinian tango, and the dance form finds its way into a good deal of his music. Today we present in an arrangement for piano trio two of his *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, *Winter* and *Summer*. *Inverno Porteño*, composed in 1970 follows a tango meter throughout, retaining a dance-like character even in the moments of utterly bleak solitude. The solo violin melody evokes the turgid light of the winter sun shining on the bustling city life of Buenos Aires as conjured by the busy piano line. The cello adds depth of vision in the chilly air, sometimes foreboding the coming of precipitation and other moments radiating the warmth of the hearth.

Verano Porteño (1965) is a completely different story, wherein Piazzolla draws from an extended palette of techniques that are traditionally associated with the iciness of winter (see Vivaldi's use of *sul ponticello* in *l'Inverno*) to evoke instead the brutal heat of summer. The violin takes us behind the bridge (*dietro il ponticello*) to a mystical world where water trickles down steep crags to end up in the cello's expansive pool of sound. The mist become denser as all three instruments play together, and the movement ends in a show of pyrotechnic virtuosity from all three players. Ending the concert on a bang, so to speak, Piazzolla's work is a definite full stop to the expansive narrative brought to life by the violin's first bowstroke in Haydn.

Program notes by Saagar Asnani, UC Berkeley



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