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**CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF FORT WORTH PRESENTS
“Perspectives”**

**Díaz Trio with Angela Cheng, piano
Saturday, September 17, 2022 - Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2022**

**String Trio No. 1 in B-flat, D.471
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

The Schubert family loved to play chamber music together in the home. On Sundays and feast days, they would congregate for music-making. So gifted were they that they had an in-house string quartet, without need for reinforcements from family friends. Franz was the family violist; Papa Schubert and brothers Ferdinand and Ignaz balanced out the ensemble. This extraordinary domestic environment explains the large number of youthful string quartets Franz Schubert composed, *eighteen* of which predate his 21st birthday.

Presumably the string trio interested him less. After all, if four players were available, why not include everyone? Perhaps there were a couple of nights when Papa Schubert was ill or otherwise unable to play, though, because two string trios survive. Both are in B-flat major, and were written within a year of one another; D.471 was composed in September 1816. Schubert was still in his 'teens, but already employed as a schoolmaster, and chafing at the restraints placed on him by his academic responsibilities.

The trio we hear this afternoon is incomplete. Not all its component movements have survived. A fragment of an *Andante* in E-flat major exists, but the "little" B-flat Trio is generally performed as this single, sprightly movement. In its original guise, it was probably for two violins and cello, as opposed to violin, viola, and cello, as it is performed today. His models were clearly Mozart and Haydn, and this B-flat *Allegro* has a decidedly 18th-century cast to it. Themes are simple, folk-like and melodic. Schubert sets them forth in clean, foursquare phrases. He uses triplets for rhythmic variety and occasional sextuplets for a dramatic flourish. Chromaticism appears discreetly, and modulations only hint at the daring journeys Schubert would make later in his career. Any clouds that appear in this landscape are the small fluffy variety, against a background of brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies.

**String Trio in G Major, Op.9, No.1
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

Beethoven composed for virtually every musical genre and a wide variety of ensembles. Three areas in which he is unsurpassed are the symphony, the piano sonata, and the string quartet. Piano sonatas came most naturally to young Beethoven, a keyboard virtuoso whose reputation initially developed more from his pianism than from his compositional talent. Symphonies were the accepted vessel of orchestral music in the late 18th-century. Beethoven's most important models, Haydn and Mozart, each made numerous and extraordinary contributions

to the repertoire.

The string quartet was another matter altogether. Wisely, Beethoven approached this ultimate form of chamber music with trepidation. He regarded the mature quartets of Mozart and his teacher Haydn with awe and respect, laboring for several years before he released his first set of quartets, published in 1801 as Opus 18. Quartets eventually became his primary chamber music interest; indeed, the late quartets (Opp.127-135) absorbed him during the last four years of his life, almost to the exclusion of everything else.

Beethoven eased his way gradually into writing for strings. The string trio, to some extent an outgrowth of the 18th-century divertimento or serenade, was an excellent proving ground. An early string trio in E-flat, probably written before 1794, appeared as his Op.3. A Serenade in D for string trio followed, published in 1797 as Op.8. The crowning glory of these pre-Op.18 efforts is the three trios of Op.9, written in 1797 and 1798 and published in 1798. In his dedication to Count Johann Georg von Browne, Beethoven called them "the best of his works," and most critics agree that they were the finest he had written up to that time.

As a genre, the string trio presents some challenges. By definition, the texture will be more spare than a string quartet, though it is possible to achieve four pitches sounding simultaneously from time to time by means of double-stopping. This means that each instrument is exposed and takes an aggressive role in terms of delivering material. The cello line is particularly lively in parts of the G-major Trio on this afternoon's program, but the viola surprises us as well with its strong personality.

Each of the three works in Opus 9 is a full, four movement sonata structure demonstrating Beethoven's firm command of form, even in his mid-20s. The G major trio has a stately, elegant *Adagio* slow introduction to the first movement that immediately lends a sense of importance to the music. Beethoven's finale is not the customary rondo, but another full-fledged sonata movement, somewhat unusual at the time. As the eminent German musicologist Paul Bekker has so aptly observed:

None of his previously published works equaled [these trios] in gravity, in logic, in mastery of form and matter. They bear all the characteristic marks of Beethoven's great works for strings, the absolute intellectual clarity, the firmness of structure, the sure poetic touch. There is, indeed, a strong symphonic element in these Trios.

Listeners who are hearing the G-major Trio for the first time will be pleasantly surprised by the freshness of the music and the fullness of the sound. Beethoven could not have achieved the sublime reaches of the late quartets had he not learned through well-crafted, substantive early works such as what we hear today.

Sonata in G for Violin and Piano, K.301 Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)

We think of Mozart primarily as a keyboard virtuoso, and with good reason. He also played both violin and viola exceedingly well. Leopold Mozart was a violinist and the author of

a famous violin method. He saw to it that his gifted son was instructed on harpsichord, organ, and violin. Wolfgang continued to play violin and viola as an adult, and often played viola at quartet *soirées* in the 1780s.

As one would expect, he composed for violin from a very early age; however, most of the early pieces favor the keyboard, relegating violin to an accompaniment. In these juvenile pieces, violin may be omitted without seriously compromising the musical integrity.

The relationship between the two instruments changed completely in the set of six sonatas K.301-306, known collectively as the Mannheim Sonatas. Mozart's biographer Albert Einstein prefers the designation "Palatinate Sonatas," because the set was dedicated to Princess Maria Elisabeth, the consort of the Palatine Elector Karl Theodor. The six sonatas were composed in 1778, when the composer was 22. The provincial city of Mannheim, at the time a major political and cultural center, was the first major stop for Mozart and his mother *en route* to Paris. K. 301 in G is one of the four sonatas completed in Mannheim; the other two were written in Paris. The timing is significant, for Frau Mozart died during the Paris sojourn, and her son composed some of his most tragic works in the wake of her passing, notably the E minor violin sonata, K.304, and the A minor piano sonata, K.310.

No shadow of tragedy falls across the G major sonata. It is sprightly and cheerful, filled with lively dance rhythms. Violinist and pianist are equal partners in this work. The two communicate in true *concertante* style, sometimes sharing the melody, sometimes alternating. Each has its chance to be a soloist, and both are essential to the musical fabric. Mozart shows a startling maturity in this sonata, with considerable freedom in the violin part.

The two-movement structure is not unusual. Four of the six Mannheim sonatas are in two movements. By adopting the abbreviated form, Mozart showed respect for tradition, particularly for his mentor Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782), many of whose compositions were cast in two movements. In the G major sonata, the gentle, grave character of the rondo precludes the need for a slow movement.

Piano Quartet in E-flat major, K.493 **Wolfgang Amadè Mozart**

Considering Mozart's prolific output of chamber music, it may seem puzzling that he only composed two piano quartets. He wrote many violin sonatas, string quartets, viola quintets, divertimenti, piano trios, and dozens more works for other instrumental combinations. Why so few piano quartets?

The answer is that, in writing for keyboard, violin, viola, and violoncello, Mozart was something of a trailblazer. In the late 18th century, this combination of instruments was unusual. There are examples of earlier works for keyboard and three strings by Johann Schobert and Johann Christian Bach, but the specific grouping of what we call a piano quartet was a bold stroke on Mozart's part. His two – K.478 in G Minor (1785) and K.493 in E-flat Major (1786) – were the first of their kind to carve a permanent niche in the repertoire. Effectively, he invented the genre.

Mozart and his publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister hedged their bet. Originally, Hoffmeister commissioned three such quartets from Mozart. When the first of them – the G Minor work – was published in December 1785, the title page left the keyboard instrument to the player's choice: *Quatuor pour le Clavecin ou Forte Piano, Violin, Tallie* [a misprint for *taille*, French for tenor part, *i.e.*, viola] *et Basse* [bass, which in this context meant violoncello].

The fortepiano was gaining in popularity in the mid-1780s, but Mozart and Hoffmeister both knew that many households still owned harpsichords [*clavecin*]. By giving the players a choice, they hoped to increase sales; however, harpsichord was impractical for music of such turbulence and subtlety, particularly if combined with three string instruments.

Furthermore, Mozart's keyboard writing bears no relationship to Baroque continuo. Rather, it is a direct offshoot of his piano concerto style. He composed three splendid keyboard concerti in 1785: No.20 in D Minor, K.466; No.21 in C Major, K.467; and No.22 in E-flat Major, K.482. The following year, he repeated that astonishing productivity and quality, completing No. 23 in A Major, K.488, No.24 in C Minor, K.491, and No.25 in C Major, K.503. He conducted *all* of these superb works from the keyboard in performance during the Lenten seasons of 1785 and 1786. His command of the Viennese fortepiano's expressive and technical capabilities was unparalleled.

Similarly, he endowed this new genre – the piano quartet – with a profound and secure mastery of string writing. By 1785 he had also completed the six string quartets dedicated to Haydn, each one a masterpiece. He brought that skill and experience to the piano quartet, combining it with his marvelous facility and depth at the keyboard.

The E-flat piano quartet was completed in June, 1786. A richly balanced work, it is expansive and refined; a finely cut, polished jewel of classical architecture. Among its marvels are a roller coaster journey through a rapid series of modulations in the development section of the opening movement. Mozart passes through no fewer than nine keys before the recapitulation.

Both Haydn's and Mozart's piano trios permit the keyboard to dominate, relegating the violin to a largely *obbligato* status; the cello tends to duplicate the bass line. Mozart's piano quartets are markedly different from these piano trios in that the instruments share thematic material more judiciously. In K.493, the exchange and interchange of musical ideas is most evident in the *Larghetto*, where all four instruments explore Mozart's gentle lyric chromaticism. In the finale, Mozart favors the pianist, whose virtuosic runs link this movement closely to the piano concerti.