

Beaux Arts Trio

Sunday, October 7, 2001, 3 pm
Hertz Hall

Menahem Pressler, piano
Young Uck Kim, violin
Antonio Meneses, cello

PROGRAM

Aaron Copland Vitebsk (1928)

Ludwig van Beethoven Trio in E-flat major, Op. 1, No. 1
Allegro
Adagio cantabile
Scherzo: Allegro assai
Finale: Presto

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms Trio in B major, Op. 8
(revised version, 1889)
Allegro con brio
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro

Steinway Piano

Philips and Mercury Records

Deutsche Grammophon and Angel/EMI recordings

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Vitebsk (1928)

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Vitebsk is Aaron Copland's first notable piece of chamber music. It is dedicated to another American composer, Roy Harris, and is subtitled "Study on a Jewish Theme." The composer first heard this theme in the Yiddish play *The Dybbuk*. The playwright, Ansky, had remembered the tune from his native town of Vitebsk, in Russia.

The piece is in a slow-fast-slow structure. It opens with the piano striking major and minor triads simultaneously, and being answered by the strings playing in quarter-tones (this is the only time Copland experimented with quarter-tones). The sound of the piano playing in a tempered scale alongside the violin and cello playing the notes "between the piano keys" could lead listeners to believe the musicians are playing out of tune. The strings serve up a rhapsodic melody with interjections by the piano, until the major-minor theme is repeated. The solo cello then presents the Jewish theme, and a series of transitions leads to the Allegro vivace section, which, the composer has written, is meant

to be a “Chagall-like grotesquerie.” In this section, short motifs derived from the first three notes of the theme are varied in polytonal juxtaposition in a highly syncopated style.

Eventually, following a grand pause, the principal theme returns in the strings, playing two octaves apart. A quiet coda brings the piece to an ethereal close.

—Ileen Zovluck

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Trio in E-flat major, Op. 1, No. 1

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

As a young man, Beethoven witnessed the sweeping social, political, and economic changes that shook Europe’s foundations and culminated in the French Revolution. The composer’s passionate belief in the individual’s right to live in freedom and dignity informed not only his social views, but his artistic process as well. As the focus of music shifted from the courts of the aristocracy

to the concert halls of the bourgeoisie, Beethoven liberated the role of the composer from that of the craftsman, bound to the dictates of his noble employer, to that of the creative artist, an individual free to respond to inner inspiration.

In November 1792, Beethoven journeyed to Vienna, where he immediately took up studies with “Papa” Haydn, who oversaw Beethoven’s first publication, the three piano trios of Op. 1. Already pushing the envelope of Classical rigidity, Beethoven surprised his audience with the third of the set, the Trio in C minor, and disregarded Haydn’s advice that he withhold that work—less conventional than the other two—from publication.

It is fitting that Beethoven, who had already finished dozens of pieces before designating those above as “Opus 1,” would choose to announce his arrival on the musical scene with a set of piano trios. Chamber music plays a central role in Beethoven’s body of work, extending through all three periods of his musical development and concluding with the transcendent “Late Quartets” of his final years. The chamber compositions of Beethoven’s First Period, which stretched into the early 1800s, are drawn in the Classical tradition and style, but also introduce a distinctively personal element—and often a quirky sense of humor, as well. A prime example is the Scherzo of the Trio in E-flat major, which defies the traditional inclusion of a stately minuet, tailored to please the court. Beethoven’s movement is much more animated, alternately turbulent and lyrical, tapering off to a wisp of a coda.

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Trio in B major, Op. 8 (revised 1889)

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

While most of the great composers progressed from small forms to larger ones, Brahms seems to have grown in the opposite direction. The chamber music of Brahms is comprised of 24 works, which probably represent barely a quarter of the number of compositions that he devoted to that branch of his art. It is said that he destroyed 20 quartets before he permitted the first to be published. Robert Schumann, who met the young composer when Brahms was 20 years old, wrote in high praise of the many piano and chamber works by Brahms that are unknown to us. There is no mystery as to their disappearance; they did not meet with Brahms’ own relentless standards and he burned the manuscripts.

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The year 1853 was a triumphant one for 20-year-old Johannes Brahms, the second child of a local Hamburg musician and a kindhearted woman 17 years her husband’s senior. Despite the Brahms family’s meager means during Johannes’ childhood, his musical gifts were developed at a young age; a piano prodigy, the young Brahms had also honed his creative talents as composer and arranger for his father’s ensembles. A concert tour with Hungarian violin virtuoso Eduard Reményi in 1853 familiarized Brahms with the “alla zingarese” style and csárdás dance, elements of Hungarian folk music that would inspire the composer’s propensity for triplet figures and irregular rhythms. Brahms parted from Reményi in Dusseldorf in order to meet Robert Schumann, revered as his artistic ideal, and Schumann’s wife Clara, herself an eminent musician. Struck by Brahms’ talents at both composition and the keyboard, Schumann trumpeted the arrival of this “young eagle” with a rhapsodic article entitled *Neue Bahnen* (“New Paths”), published in Schumann’s own journal, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Buoyed by this career-boosting publicity and his enriching friendship with the Schumanns, Brahms began sketches for the Trio in B major, Op. 8, as his hallmark year of 1853 drew to a close.

In 1854, Schumann was institutionalized, suffering from severe mental illness. During this two-year period of extreme difficulty, Brahms and Clara Schumann (14 years his senior) developed a passionate affection for one another. Brahms wrote in a letter to her, “Would to God that I were allowed this day . . . to repeat to you with my own lips that

I am dying for love of you.” Clara, however, was the wife of his friend and clung to her beloved husband with unwavering loyalty. Brahms remained with her only until Schumann died in July 1856.

Schumann introduced his publishers at Breitkopf & Härtel to his young protégé, and in 1854, the Trio in B major, Op. 8, became the first of Brahms’ chamber works to be published. This particular work, which Brahms rewrote in 1889, stands as a musical “Rosetta Stone”—a means of deciphering the composer’s musical growth. Both editions are published, although the 1854 edition is rarely performed. The original work received its premiere in New York on November 27, 1855, played by pianist William Mason, violinist Theodore Thomas, and cellist Carl Bergmann.

“Do you happen to recall a Trio in B major from our younger days?” Brahms wrote in typically understated fashion to his friend, musician Julius Otto Grimm, in March 1890. “And wouldn’t you be keen to hear it now, after I’ve—well, not stuck a wig on it, but at least combed its hair a little!” In 1889, the Trio in B major got quite a trim, emerging one-third shorter after Brahms’ revision. He regularly sought the opinions of friends and colleagues, most trusted among them Clara Schumann, and this case was no exception: “. . . It will not be so muddled up as it was,” he confided to Clara, “but will it be better?”

Undoubtedly, it was better. In 1889, Brahms devoted himself to refining his body of work, discarding what he considered worthless and finishing what was incomplete. The copy Brahms used in revising the Trio in B major has been preserved by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, and the heavy-handed pencil marks that cover the pages stand as graphic proof of the work’s transformation. The youthful Brahms, unable to contain himself, indulged in five separate themes in the first movement alone. Only the Scherzo remained essentially untouched. At the age of 57, Brahms was able to capture and identify the creative essence of a composition: he rid the piece of everything that did not contribute to its momentum, but also enhanced sparks of genius that had been lost in the Romantic excesses of his youth. The revised work received its premiere in Budapest on January 10, 1890, with violinist Jenoe Hubay, cellist David Popper, and Brahms himself at the piano.

The total of 1,628 measures makes the original version of the Trio in B major Brahms’ longest instrumental composition. In his 1889 reworking, the composer transferred the main theme intact, one of his best-loved diatonic tunes. Two other themes have been condensed into one, signified by three descending steps of a third. As in the main theme, the second is introduced by the piano, but quickly expands to include the strings, building to a grand climax. Almost unperceived, the music gently slips to a recapitulation of the main theme. Brahms chose to add a charming new coda with triplet figures in the piano, ending with his favorite plagal cadence.

The playful Scherzo was hardly altered from the 1854 original, displaying the major/minor dichotomy and left intact except for the coda. Light and airy, with forward momentum, the Scherzo trades passages between strings and piano. A slower waltz figure guides in the folk-inspired Trio, warm and sentimental at first, but becoming increasingly lively toward the end. A repetition of the Scherzo leads to a brief coda. The Adagio in B major was greatly condensed following the removal of an allegro section, but the intensely rich texture and tender lyricism remain throughout.

Despite Clara Schumann’s objections, Brahms changed the final movement most radically of all. In the interest of simplicity, he went so far as to strike two words from the section’s original tempo marking, reducing Allegro molto agitato to simply Allegro. Serving as a sharp contrast from the preceding Adagio, the final movement is introduced by a disquieting theme by the cello. A restless second theme bursts forth in the piano, with off-beats in the cello. The two themes are freely treated as the B-minor finale builds masterfully to the coda, asserting the principal theme and reaching a glorious conclusion.

—Ileen Zovluck

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The Beaux Arts Trio has been recognized for over 40 years as having set the standard for performance of piano trio literature, and today, the group continues to ignite overwhelming enthusiasm from audiences around the world. From the United States to Russia, from Japan to Germany, from Israel to Brazil, this renowned chamber ensemble’s extensive engagements have brought it the highest praise. The Trio has received ovations from all of the world’s major music centers, including New York, Boston, Chicago, London, Paris, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Amsterdam, Moscow, Tel Aviv, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Sydney, just to name a few. Chosen as Musical America’s Ensemble of the Year in 1997, the Trio has been invited and reinvited by these centers for over 100 concerts and master classes each year. The Beaux Arts Trio’s superb musicians, distinguished history, comprehensive repertoire, and expansive discography, contribute to its reputation as a hallmark of chamber music.

Comprised of pianist Menahem Pressler, violinist Young Uck Kim, and cellist Antonio Meneses, the Beaux Arts Trio continues the musical tradition that saw its official public debut at the 1955 Berkshire Music Festival, known

today as the Tanglewood Festival. Each member of the Trio brings a highly acclaimed and exemplary musical career to this ensemble, forming one of chamber music's most powerful collaborations.

Through the years, the Beaux Arts Trio has maintained its freshness, while preserving its distinctive musical heritage. Founded by Menahem Pressler, Daniel Guilet, and Bernard Greenhouse, the Trio has evolved from the replacement of Guilet in 1969 with violinist Isadore Cohen, and the replacement of Greenhouse with cellist Peter Wiley in 1987. In June 1992, the Trio made its debut with violinist Ida Kavafian in two extraordinary performances of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig under Maestro Kurt Masur.

The Beaux Arts Trio's mark in American culture is far-reaching. The ensemble has played a major and ongoing role in the programs of important cultural and educational centers throughout North America, with annual concert series at such revered institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Celebrity Series of Boston, and the Library of Congress, where the Trio is in residence. Its repeated annual engagements extend to numerous associations and chamber music series, including those of San Francisco, Berkeley, Vancouver, Denver, Portland, Kansas City, Louisville, Saint Paul, Detroit, Philadelphia, Toronto, Cambridge, and New York. The Trio's engagements at major North American music festivals include Mostly Mozart, Caramoor, Ravinia, and Tanglewood. The Trio's regular University performances include appearances at Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Johns Hopkins, the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The Trio's annual international engagements include appearances at the festivals of Edinburgh, Lucerne, Vienna, Helsinki, Warsaw, Hong Kong, and Israel, as well as performances in the chamber music series of the world's major foreign cities.

The Beaux Arts Trio's many landmark projects include its participation in the "December Evenings" Festival in Moscow, at the invitation of Maestro Sviatoslav Richter, and a performance at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. Several contemporary composers have written pieces for the Trio. Among the group's recent premieres are Ned Rorem's Spring Music, commissioned by Carnegie Hall as part of Carnegie's Centennial Celebration; George Rochberg's Summer, 1990, commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society; and David N. Baker's Roots II, commissioned by the McKim Foundation.

The Beaux Arts Trio tours extensively in the United States, Europe, and Asia each season. The 2001-02 season includes the current North American coast-to-coast tour, and an East coast tour of the United States in March. Recent engagements have included concerts at the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia, the "December Evenings" Festival in Moscow, and a month-long tour of the United States, performing Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Prague Chamber Orchestra, in spring of 2001.

The Beaux Arts Trio's extensive discography on Philips Records encompasses the entire piano trio literature. The Trio's recordings have brought several coveted awards, including the Prix Mondial du Disque, three Grand Prix du Disques, the Union de la Presse Musicale Belge Caecilia Award, Gramophone's Record of the Year, and the Stereo Review Record of the Year Award. The Beaux Arts Trio continues its exclusive relationship with Philips, and its last recording of music by Spanish composers was nominated for a Grammy in 1998.

Management

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