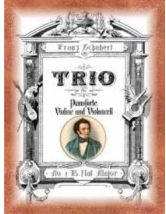


Schubert - Piano Trios D 898 & 929 (2013)

Written by bluesever

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Trio in B flat, op. posth. 99 (D 898) (01) *allegro moderato* [14'07"] (02) *andante un poco mosso* [10'57"] (03) *scherzo. allegro - trio* [06'33"] (04) *rondo. allegro vivace - presto* [08'50"]
Trio in E flat, op. 100 (D 929) (05) *allegro* [15'32"] (06) *andante con moto* [09'30"] (07) *scherzando. allegro moderato - trio* [06'29"]
(08) *allegro moderato* [13'16"]

Andreas Staier - piano Daniel Sepec - violin Roel Dieltiens – cello

The Piano Trio in B-flat is a large-scale work – over three-quarters of an hour in length – which doesn't feel like one; it feels intimate. Schubert began composing it in 1827, the year before his death, and worked on it simultaneously with the song cycle *Winterreise*. Perhaps Schubert needed a lighter project to divert his attention, and from the illness and melancholy that filled the composer's life in his last months; Op. 99 is a lively, buoyant work, with unrivaled lyricism throughout. It paraphrases Schubert's song, "Des Sängers Habe." ("Shatter all my happiness in pieces, take from me all my worldly wealth, yet leave me only my zither and I shall still be happy and rich!") The first movement, an *Allegro moderato*, is supremely balanced, perfectly orchestrated. The piano takes the first theme with strings providing staccato accompaniment. An upward scale on the piano leads to the second theme, first stated by the cello. Minor incarnations of the theme ensue with increasing longing. The movement is both vigorous and mellifluous, and is the longest of the four in the Trio.

The second movement, marked *Andante un poco mosso*, starts with a beautiful lullaby-like melody on cello that moves to the violin. After growing and increasing in tempo, passing the theme among the instruments, a more elegant section starts, then becomes more agitated, moving through minor keys, developing ideas. There is a return to the lilting melody from the beginning of the movement and the *Andante* ends sweetly.

The third movement is a Scherzo Allegro that borrows from the Ländler – a folk-dance in 3/4 time that features hopping, stomping, and, occasionally, yodeling. The Ländler was popular in Austria at the end of the 18th century, and is thought to have contributed to the evolution of the waltz. A mellower, more refined Trio section in the middle shows off violin and cello trading the melody, while piano plays staccato pairs of chords. The more rugged Scherzo returns with a piano call and twirls to the finish. The movement is vintage Schubert – just the sort of music he loved to improvise to accompany dancing at his regular soirees.

The finale is a rondo though it is closer to a developmental sonata form. It is also dance-like and the three instruments follow one another throughout, playing tripping dotted figures, arpeggios, and trills. The music continues to develop and vary, changing keys, making declarative pronouncements and adding to the picturesque flight – one of the most unique and beautiful in all Schubert. After whirlwinds of material, the finale settles, walks merrily along in a conversational way, then interrupts itself loudly and leaps to a cadence.

Robert Schumann said of it: “One glance at Schubert’s Trio (Op. 99) and the troubles of our human existence disappear and all the world is fresh and bright again.” The Trio is suggestive of things to come in the genre – composers such as Brahms and Dvorák would go on to write piano trios in a similar, intimate vein. And although the Op. 99 Trio is now one of the most revered chamber works in the classical repertoire, it was never performed publicly during Schubert’s lifetime; the only performance Schubert heard was in the context of one of his “Schubertiad” evenings. --- Jessie Rothwell, laphil.com

While the autograph score of the B flat major Trio has long since been lost, in the case of its companion in E flat, D. 929, we have not only Schubert's final manuscript, but also a working draft of the first three movements. The latter is a fascinating document, and it reveals how radically he altered some of the music's details as he worked. This is particularly true of the slow movement, whose entire shape was changed between the draft and the final version. In the opening movement, Schubert's most far-reaching modification was to alter the key in which the pianissimo second theme appears, from F sharp minor to B minor. The repeated-note rhythm of this theme casts its shadow over the entire work; and it is in the key of B minor that Schubert is later to introduce one of his most profound surprises, the re-appearance of the slow movement's theme during the course of the finale.

The recapitulation, which is approached with a forceful variant of the quiet bars that had concluded the exposition. The dramatic re-appearance of these bars, with their harmonic shape retained intact, will, later in the movement, generate the expectation of a further return of the main theme in the home key. Schubert, however, thwarts such an expectation with a side-stepping modulation, and effectively begins his recapitulation in the "foreign" key of G flat major, only returning to B flat for the main theme's delicate counter statement. The yearningly expressive slow movement provides a wonderful example of Schubert's ability to create seemingly endless melodies within a structure that evolves continuously. Behind the music's form lies the notion of a ternary design, with the contrasting middle section unfolding in a gently agitated C minor.

Following the Scherzo, with its touchingly simple trio in waltz style, Schubert rounds the work off with a finale of considerable complexity. His own heading for the piece is 'Rondo', though the failure of the opening theme to return before the central section lends it the appearance of a highly individual sonata form.

The final is an Allegro moderato, with the piano as the leading instrument. This movement has some glorious tunes, some with an eastern touch, others vaguely folk-tune-like. They all lead to a spirited and convincing conclusion. The start of the development coincides with a change in time-signature and an elaboration of the main theme's characteristic dactylic rhythm, now transformed into a kind of sublimated ecossaise.

The B flat Trio's opening movement was described as 'graceful and original' by Schumann in his review in the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik. Given the forceful march-like nature of the Trio's main theme, however, this seems a little surprising. No doubt, though, Schumann was thinking either of the counter statement, where the melody is given out in octaves by the piano, while the violin adds an accompaniment in gentle repeated quavers, and the cello interjects the march rhythm in a subdued pizzicato; or of the second subject, played initially by the cello over a flowing piano accompaniment. ---franzpeterschubert.com

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