

EROICA TRIO

ERIKA NICKRENZ, PIANO

SUSIE PARK, VIOLIN

SARA SANT'AMBROGIO, CELLO

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

~ PROGRAM ~

Trio in c minor, Op. 7

Allegro moderato

Romance: Andante

Scherzo: Allegretto

Finale

EDOUARD LALO

(1823 - 1892)

*Trio Sinfonia**

Overture: Risoluto

Scherzo: Presto enigmatico

Lento: Meditativo

Finale: Allegro molto; Energico

**written for and premiered by the Eroica Trio.*

KEVIN PUTS

(b. 1972)

~ INTERMISSION ~

Piano Trio No. 1 in d minor, Op. 49

Molto allegro agitato

Andante con moto tranquillo

Scherzo: Leggiero e vivace

Finale: Allegro assai

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809 - 1847)

The Eroica Trio appears by arrangement with IMG Artists.

On the World Wide Web: imgartists.com

EDOUARD LALO (1823 - 1892)
Piano Trio No. 1 in c minor, Op. 7 (1850)

Lalo is best known for his violin concerto, the *Symphonie Espagnole*. However, his first love, and a center of his musical life, was chamber music. It was his misfortune that there was no audience for such music in the Paris of his day, its citizens preferring light opera, so he supported himself as a violinist, violist and teacher. On the side, he became a founding member of an important string quartet whose aim was to create a public for the music he loved by performing the quartets of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Schumann. In this he may have been encouraged by Berlioz, with whom he worked and who was a staunch defender of Beethoven's compositions. What revival there was of chamber music in Paris of the 1850's was in great part due to Lalo's efforts.

This lovely trio, written around 1850 when the composer was in his twenties, was one of his first published works. It offers no surprises to our ears, but, amazingly, was considered difficult and too advanced for the publishers to whom it was first introduced. Structurally it is crafted in the traditional, classic forms of his predecessors; musically, its sweeping lyricism brings to mind the glowing richness of the early Romantics, Mendelssohn and Schumann. The work is in the standard four movements. Ought one make anything of the fact that for his chamber music debut he should have chosen c minor, the key which Beethoven reserved for some of his most dramatic works?

A cello solo opens the *Allegro moderato* as it will for all but one of the movements. We hear at once the fine writing for each instrument individually and in rich combination. We hear, too, the anticipated shift to a major key for the second theme as dictated by traditional sonata form – but not the expected major key. And, in fact, although the formal structure of the movement is as expected, the key relationships—the color changes—are not.

The beautiful *Romance* which follows is initially in that same somewhat untraditional major key. It is a set of variations on a lyrical aria, rotating through a series of skillful modulations negotiated by various combinations of the instruments.

A well-proportioned scherzo follows in the tradition set by Beethoven.

Again led by the cello in an opening solo recitative, the *Finale* sweeps along in a sometimes darkly mounted drama in waltz time. Although one can discern signposts of traditional form, the movement has a less structured contour than those of his Germanic predecessors, leaving the final impression

of an harmonious, free-flowing invention – mildly innovative, tasteful and satisfying.

Program note © by Nora Avins Klein, January 2009

KEVIN PUTS (b. 1972)

Trio-Sinfonia (2007)

Commissioned by Music Accord

Premiere: Eroica Trio, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, 2007

A couple of music critics have recently asked me whether I believe there is cultural relevancy in using old forms like the symphony and the concerto, and why do I employ these tired old forms in my work? I tried to explain that these are just titles, whereas the form of the music itself is completely original (I hope!). In this piece, though, I decided to actually use a form which closely resembles that of classical and early romantic symphonies.

I have indeed spent most of my time over the past five or so years writing several concertos and four symphonies, so when I began this piano trio I found myself once again thinking rather symphonically. I also found I was “orchestrating”—if this is a term that can be applied to a work for only three instruments—in much the same way I have done in my symphonic works. That is, I was often combining two or even all three instruments to create one sound or texture rather than allowing all three to operate independently of one another, though the latter happens as well. So I decided to call the piece *Trio-Sinfonia* (Trio-Symphony).

The main idea is a resolute, rising figure played in straight quarter-notes by the violin at the very opening of the piece. It is ornamented by a simple four-note “turn” figure which appears in several guises throughout the piece and forms the basis of the work’s energetic finale movement. I decided to open the mercurial scherzo movement with the rising figure’s inversion (falling instead). Before reaching its dramatic climax, the lyrical third movement begins with the pianist playing both the main idea and its inversion simultaneously, creating a mirror-like effect. The final movement begins with a reprise of the work’s opening, but the music takes a different turn this time.

One final note: Beethoven’s music has been a major influence in all of my work since college, and the attentive listener will notice more than one reference to his symphonies.

Program note © by Kevin Puts, October 2007

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809 - 1847)
Piano Trio No. 1 in d minor, Op. 49 (1839)

Most listeners would not think of Felix Mendelssohn as a conductor, but at the time he composed his Piano Trio in d minor (1839), he was conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and was doing a very impressive job. He moved to Leipzig with a new wife and growing family and a resolve to improve the musical scene in Leipzig. Over the next few years he expanded the size of the orchestra, improved the working conditions of the musicians, overhauled the orchestra's programming and instituted several new concert series not only in the orchestral medium, but also through chamber music performances, quartet evenings, and performances of cantatas or oratorios, as well as added "historical concerts" which were overviews of music from the time of Bach up to his contemporaries Schumann and even Weber. Mendelssohn's orchestra introduced the Bach orchestral suites, premiered Schubert's great C Major Symphony, fostered interest in Mozart's and Beethoven's symphonies, and initiated concert versions of Weber's operas. Robert Schumann owed much of his musical development and early fame to Mendelssohn. Along with composers, Mendelssohn introduced a new breed of virtuosic pianists to Leipzig—Anton Rubinstein, Liszt, Chopin, Clara Schumann—along with the violinists Vieuxtemps and Joachim, and vocalists such as Jenny Lind. The musical life of Leipzig thrived during Mendelssohn's tenure.

Music for all instruments, the piano in particular, was becoming more virtuosic, and this is evident in Mendelssohn's own trio, regardless of his tendency to write with an eye more on the Classical past than toward the Romantic future. The keyboard part in tonight's trio is a tour de force and the entire trio is a source of memorable melodies. After a single hearing, one goes away humming any number of themes and it is easy to see why the work found immediate success when it was introduced.

The first movement starts with a soaring phrase in the cello, which is then passed to the first violin, while the piano accompanies both instruments in turn. A second theme is also introduced by the cello. The movement is in sonata form and when the two melodies return in the recapitulation, the cello melody is decorated by a violin countermelody high above it. The coda displays the piano in its virtuosic role.

The *Andante con moto* must be called "a song" and one that the listener will never forget. Begun as a piano solo, it resembles very much Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* and it unfolds in several stages in the piano, aided and answered by the two other instruments, and giving the

individual performers ample opportunity for self-expression (as was true for the Romantic composers). A contrasting melody in minor, not quite as carefree, follows first in the piano, then cello, and finally the violin, with triplet accompaniments. The last two chords of the movement remind one of an Amen.

The *Scherzo* could have been lifted directly from Mendelssohn's incidental music to "A Midsummer Night's Dream". It sounds so light and elfin, so deceptively simple to play. For those listeners who are familiar with the incidental music, the coda may sound as if it could easily have been written as an alternate accompaniment to Shakespeare's phrase, "Trip away: Make no stay: Meet me all by break of day."

The *Finale* is built almost entirely around a rhythmic figure—one accented note followed by two quicker unaccented notes—somewhat akin to, and almost a continuation of, the preceding scherzo. It seems surprisingly light for the final movement of such a long work. A legato cello solo near the end of the movement balances out the strong cello themes that began the trio. In this movement, as well, the piano has very difficult passages to execute.

Robert Schumann summed up his feeling for this trio when he made this commendation: "This is the master-trio of our time, even as Beethoven's in B flat and D and Schubert's in E flat were the masterpieces of their day; it is an exceedingly fine composition which will gladden our grandchildren and great-grandchildren for many years to come."

Program note © Margaret Bragg, January 2009

Eroica Trio

The Eroica Trio is on the vanguard of a new generation of artists who are changing the face of classical music. One of the first all-female chamber ensembles to reach the top echelon of its field, the Eroica Trio is helping to break an age-old gender barrier. As the Chicago Sun-Times remarked, "Our image of the piano trio is largely formed by groups like the celebrated [original] Beaux Arts, three middle-aged gentlemen who apply their wisdom and artistry to their chosen repertory. That image is about to change." The Trio took its name from Beethoven's passionate Third Symphony. Italian for "heroic," *eroica* is a word that aptly reflects the ensemble's approach to music. As critics have noted, "It's been decades since this country has produced a chamber music organization with this much passion." (The San Francisco Examiner)

The Trio has established a unique identity by creating innovative programs that span 300 years of music. The Eroica Trio is a strong champion of new composers; each season includes an American or world premiere of a new work.

In addition to its demanding concert and recording schedule, the Eroica Trio is committed to music education, giving concerts, master classes and special children's shows at schools and colleges throughout the country. Each summer, the Trio performs at music festivals throughout the world, including the Hollywood Bowl, Aspen, Mostly Mozart, Ravinia, and Spoleto, Italy.

The women who make up the Eroica Trio are all top-ranked, award-winning soloists and have performed on many of the world's great stages. Pianist Erika Nickrenz, who made her concerto debut at New York's Town Hall at the age of 11, was a featured soloist on the PBS series *Live from Lincoln Center*. A recipient of the Rockefeller Tanglewood Fellowship, she began her studies with German Diez and received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Juilliard School as a pupil of Abbey Simon. Nickrenz was a soloist with the Jupiter Symphony in Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and in the spring of 2003 gave a performance and rang the opening bell for the New York Stock Exchange as part of Steinway's 150th anniversary celebration. She has recorded several CDs on the MusicMaster and ASV London labels and now records exclusively for Angel/EMI Classics.

A native of Sydney, Australia, Susie Park's international awards include top prizes in the Indianapolis, Menuhin and Wieniawski International Violin Competitions. Concertizing around the world, her major solo appearances include collaborations with the Indianapolis Symphony, Orchestra of St. Luke's in New York, Memphis Symphony, Australian orchestras including those of Sydney and Melbourne, Korea's KBS orchestra, the Lille Orchestre National and in venues including Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the 92nd Street Y and Boston's Gardner Museum. She made her solo debut at the age of five and holds her Bachelor of Music degree from the Curtis Institute of Music where she studied under Jaime Laredo and her Artist Diploma from the New England Conservatory where she studied with Donald Weilerstein.

Cellist Sara Sant'Ambrogio's international successes include winning a medal at the prestigious International Tchaikovsky Violoncello Competition in Moscow, resulting in tours across North America, Europe, and the Middle East, culminating in a recital at Carnegie Hall which was broadcast on national television. She has performed with the Boston, Atlanta, St. Louis

and Dallas Symphonies among others. Sant'Ambrogio has won a Grammy® Award for her recording of Leonard Bernstein's "Arias and Barcarolles." In addition, she has enjoyed collaborating on rock, pop and jazz CDs and movie soundtracks. Her solo CD, "Dreaming" was released on Sebastian Records in September 2004, and her latest CD of the Bach Solo Cello Suites will be released in 2007.

The ladies of the Eroica Trio share many personal and musical connections; indeed, Nickrenz, Park and Sant'Ambrogio's paths have crossed at many artistic junctions. When they were just 12 years old, Erika and Sara studied both piano and chamber music with Isabelle Sant'Ambrogio, Sara's grandmother. As teenagers, Erika and Sara coached chamber music with Sara's father and first teacher, John Sant'Ambrogio, principal cellist of the St. Louis Symphony. In the early years of the Eroica Trio, coaches included Mr. Sant'Ambrogio as well as Erika's father, the noted violist Scott Nickrenz. Since the Trio signed with Angel/EMI Classics Records, five of its CDs were produced by Erika's mother, three-time Grammy® Award winner Joanna Nickrenz. Park and Sant'Ambrogio both attended the Curtis Institute of Music, and all three women performed at the Marlboro Music Festival and toured nationally with Music from Marlboro. Jaime Laredo, a teacher and mentor of Park's, was instrumental in bringing Sara to Curtis and presented the Eroica Trio's New York debut. Many years ago, Park's teacher, Donald Weilerstein, formed a piano quintet with Nickrenz's mother (pianist Joanna Nickrenz) and father (violist Scott Nickrenz) and two others, the New Chamber Quintet.

Visit the Eroica Trio on the World Wide Web at eroicatrio.com.