BEETHOVEN
TRIO IN E♭ MAJOR OP.70 NO.2
TRIO IN B♭ MAJOR OP.97 "ARCHDUKE"

PHOENIX
PIANO TRIO

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Recorded live at the Holywell Music Room

BEETHOVEN PIANO TRIOS

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

	TRIO IN E♭ MAJOR OP.70 NO.2		
1	*i*	*Poco sostenuto – Allegro ma non troppo*	11’38
2	*ii*	*Allegretto*	5’46
3	*iii*	*Allegretto ma non troppo*	8’35
4	*iv*	*Finale: Allegro*	8’27
	TRIO IN B♭ MAJOR OP.97 “ARCHDUKE”		
5	*i*	*Allegro moderato*	13’35
6	*ii*	*Allegro*	7’10
7	*iii*	*Andante cantabile, ma però con moto*	14’41
8	*iv*	*Allegro moderato*	7’22
			77’50

PHOENIX PIANO TRIO

Jonathan Stone *violin*

Marie Macleod *cello*

Sholto Kynoch *piano*

TRIOS IN E♭ MAJOR OP.70 NO.2 & B♭ MAJOR OP.97 “ARCHDUKE”

The **Trio in E♭ major, Op.70 No.2**, written at the end of 1808 and published early the following year, is often overlooked when placed alongside its companion publication, the famed *Ghost* trio, but it is one of Beethoven’s most imaginative and captivating works in the genre. It bears a dedication to the Countess Marie Erdöry, with whom Beethoven was lodging whilst he composed the trio, although by the time of its publication they had quarrelled, not untypically, and he had moved out.

In 1795 Beethoven chose a set of three trios as his Opus 1 and thereafter revolutionised the form. In the traditional, pre-Beethoven trio form, the piano was the dominant instrument of the ensemble, with the strings playing a largely accompanying role. Already in Op.1 No.1 (also in E♭) this balance has been largely evened out, though the piano still tends to lead the texture. In the *Ghost* trio (Op.70 No.1), the unison opening establishes straight away that all three instruments are to be equal, but if there was any lingering doubt, in this E♭ trio Beethoven does something previously unheard of and gives the opening theme first to the cello – previously ranked third in the trio hierarchy – then to the violin and finally, after two long bars, to the piano. This established equality sets the standard for the whole trio. Time and again in the first movement entries of the themes are canonic and more often than not it is the cello that leads the way.

The introspective introduction to the trio unfolds a melody that is at once settled and searching; although the harmonies of these first 19 bars seem simple, they never seem quite expected and indeed even the resolution into E♭

for the start of the *Allegro ma non troppo* falls onto a first-inversion chord rather than a more grounded root position. The falling motif of the very opening makes two other crucial appearances. The first is in the distant key of G♭ and effects the transition into the second subject. There is no new tempo marking and although the gentle lilt of the *Allegro* (in 6/8) is still felt in the background, we realise at this point that the introduction and the rest of the movement are in fact tightly linked; the *Allegro ma non troppo* marking takes on added significance. This theme also returns at the very end to provide a unifying coda.

In the following two movements, Beethoven plays with expectations of slow movements and the traditional Scherzo. The expected slow (second) movement – a set of variations on two alternating themes, one in C major and one in C minor – is marked *Allegretto* and has a playful theme, not dissimilar to a Scherzo or its predecessor the Minuet. One assumes that the order has been reversed and the next movement will be the slow one, but in fact it too is marked *Allegretto ma non troppo* and structurally is much more akin to a Scherzo and Trio form. The material of this third movement, however, is in a beautifully warm and melodic A♭ major and provides the part of the trio that is settled and content, even if it is not slow and is apparently in the "wrong" place. The middle (Trio) section of this movement is an extraordinary study in texture, even by Beethoven's standards, and suddenly sounds more like a renaissance viol consort than a romantic piano trio.

The finale to the trio takes a rising scale motif which passes through B♭ to G; an interval that is fundamental to the material of the first movement. While it is an upbeat finale, it explores some unusual key relationships, notable in particular

for introducing the second subject not in B♭, the dominant, but in G major. Amongst all the bustling activity and virtuosity, there are also some extraordinary moments of stasis; although there is always movement bubbling under the surface, there are some passages over a pedal note (E♭ or B♭) that are almost minimalistic in their sense of suspended time. In the end, the trio is brought to a joyous close derived from the uplifting scale passages.

The **Archduke trio, Op.97**, is probably Beethoven's best-known piano trio, and with good cause. Notwithstanding the B♭ *Allegretto*, written as a study piece for the daughter of one of Beethoven's patrons, and the *Kakadu* variations which were probably composed some years earlier and only published/revised in 1814, it is Beethoven's last trio and by some way his most substantial. Begun in 1810, it was dedicated to the Archduke Rudolph, the younger brother of the Austrian Emperor and a student of Beethoven's. Rudolph was also the dedicatee of the 4th and 5th piano concertos, the *Grosse Fuge* and various other core works. The first performance was given by Beethoven himself – one of the very last times the composer played in public before his deafness made this impossible (arguably thus rendering the piano trio form redundant for Beethoven, having been a vehicle for his skills as a pianist as well as composer).

Although the opening movement does not begin with the slow introduction one might expect of a large-scale trio such as this, the warm, stately feel of the opening *Allegro moderato* hints that there is going to be a grand scope to the work. Unexpectedly, given the historical precedent of keyboard dominance in trios, this is the only one of Beethoven's trios to begin with a piano solo, though

in fact the strings then give a complete second statement of the theme and from then on are fully integrated into the work. Beethoven unfolds a grand sonata form with various unexpected (as we by now expect!) twists and turns. The second subject appears not in F, as might previously have been assumed, but in the more remote key of G, a key relationship that Beethoven frequently explored around this time. The development, after a short virtuosic outburst, is centred around a long, subdued passage of pizzicato strings and playful trills in the piano. It finally reaches a climactic piano fanfare in B♭, but is not permitted to stay there for long, being followed by a curious set of quasi-trills in all three instruments (like a more elaborate version of the much earlier *Spring* sonata, Op.24), out of which the theme emerges almost imperceptibly. Only at the very end of the movement is the grandeur of the main subject allowed to fully open up, drawing the movement to a triumphant close.

The second movement reverses the introduction of instruments from the first, with the strings stating the theme first, then the piano. This fleeting, *scherzando* melody suggests a light-weight movement, which makes the extraordinary trio section even more arresting. After the *scherzo* reaches its playful end, the cello enters *pianissimo* with a quite bizarrely chromatic subject, which unfolds at first as a fugue before growing to a wildly extravagant explosion in the piano, suddenly transformed to a manic waltz. This process takes place three times, the waltz appearing in the keys of D♭, E and lastly B♭ major. This whole section is repeated and the movement takes on a weight that was not even hinted at when it began.

The set of variations that follows this movement begins with a sublime, chorale-like theme in D major, anticipating the splendour of the late piano sonatas Op.109 and Op.111. Although it is rich and expansive, the movement in fact develops only in texture and motifs; the variations never stray from D major or the core structure of the theme. This, however, serves to make the extended coda even more remarkable. The theme returns in its original guise (piano solo), only to be drawn into D minor by the cello, with a hint at other more distant keys, before mellifluous rising chords in the piano accompany a sparse yet noble string duet. The music finally arrives back in D major, seemingly a final resting place.

Just as this movement appears to end, the romantic wanderer, about to close his eyes for the last time, finds hope, tentatively at first (with the shift, still in the *pianissimo cantabile*, to a B♭ harmony), then bursting forth. A joyful dance follows, full of foot-stomping off-beats and playful interaction between instruments. The movement concludes with a whirling tarantella in 6/8 (reminiscent of the finale of the *Kreutzer* sonata, Op.47), with the markings *presto* then *più presto* driving the music to a virtuosic and fiery close.

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