

## Beethoven's Arrangements for Piano Trio – Liner Notes

“Having music daily here works the miracle which is generally attributed only to love: it levels all ranks - aristocracy and bourgeoisie, landowners and their tenants, employers and their employees - they sit together at a single desk and in the harmony of sound forget the disharmony of their social positions.”

This description of the extent and function of domestic music in Vienna around 1800 was written by Inaz von Mosel, a man who was reported to be at the center of a wealth of musical activity. He gives us a picture of the life of German speaking communities during those years when music first became a cultural possession of the people as a whole. For centuries secular music had been an exclusive prerogative of princely courts and the homes of the nobility, but gradually the so-called third estate came under its spell. Like the ruling classes and aristocratic patrons before them, middleclass music lovers desired to take part in making music themselves. They were not content merely with listening. They wanted to be heard singing or playing as instrument. This led to an immense increase in the demand for music, which was satisfied by both original works and arrangements of various kinds.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) wrote his Septet, Op. 20 from 1799-1800. The original instrumentation is for violin, viola, cello, bass, clarinet, horn and bassoon. Sometime in 1802-3 he made the piano trio arrangement and gave it the new opus number of Op. 38. The Second Symphony, Op. 36 was written in 1801. It was completed in 1802 and the arrangement for piano trio appeared in print along with the symphony in March 1804.

The E-flat Trio, Op. 38, as it was re-named, appeared in print in January 1805. It was dedicated to Johann Adam Schmidt (1759-1808) who was a distinguished doctor and professor of medicine at the Josephinum, the Medical School for army doctors in Vienna. He and his family were avid music lovers and amateur performers in the best sense of the word, and it was for their family's use especially that Beethoven initially prepared the trio arrangement. Beethoven had been in consultation with Dr. Schmidt on personal issues. It was Dr. Schmidt who recommended seclusion into the countryside as a shield against the vexations of ordinary life. There is no doubt that Beethoven's encroaching deafness was a prime factor in his overall discontent. He moved to the quiet village of Heiligenstadt in April 1802 and remained there for a good half year, an unusually extended vacation for him. Obviously, Beethoven felt very indebted to Dr. Schmidt, as witnessed not only by the offering of this trio but more significantly by the special reference to him in the famous Heiligenstadt Testament written in October 1802. Musical dedications in Beethoven's time had a real substance that they do not have today. They

gave the recipient exclusive possession of the music for one year-- a mini copyright of sorts.

There is less known about the arrangement of the Second Symphony and even some speculation about whether the arrangement was done entirely by Beethoven. One source suggests that Ferdinand Ries, his friend and student, may have had a hand in the matter. Ferdinand visited Beethoven in Vienna and then again in Heiligenstadt. He described his mood swings from melancholic to manic, perhaps reflecting the depths of pain Beethoven endured regarding his impending deafness. The most important musical point is that Beethoven was totally behind both these arrangements and their respective publications. They were made public through the force of his spirit and with his complete approval.

“The making of transcriptions is on the whole a thing against which nowadays, in our prolific age of transcriptions, a composer would merely struggle in vain. At least he is entitled to demand that the publisher shall mention the fact on the title page, so that his honor as a composer may not be infringed nor the public deceived.”

This appeared in the *Weiner Zeitung* on October 20, 1802 as part of a public reply by Beethoven to the appearance of his two string quintets in C and E. By this time both the Symphony no.1 and the Septet, Op. 20 had already gained widespread popularity. On another occasion Beethoven writes to the publisher Hoffmeister, regarding the Septet, Op. 20, “about which I have already told you, and which could be arranged for the pianoforte also, with a view to its wider distribution and to our greater profit...” Beethoven was not against transcriptions. He made and/or authorized many himself. His complaints above are pointedly concerned with publishers’ failure to clearly identify the works as arrangements rather than trying to present them as new original works.

The first and second symphonies are like siblings and considered along with Septet excellent examples and wonderful products of the classical style. Beethoven is satisfied to compose inside the lines drawn by his predecessors. In the Second Symphony imaginative subjects are unmistakably differentiated from one another and the development and recapitulation are carried out according to rule. The gorgeous slow movement is content to operate within formal limits of the classical period. It expresses a distinctly beautiful but stylized emotion. Yet everywhere in this symphony the result is not Haydn or Mozart. New spirit and content infuse old forms and structures. The music has a stronger musculature as well as a greater fund of light and sheer energy. As with most of his works, Beethoven foreshadows his later development especially in climatic fast passages.

The Septet, like so much of Beethoven’s music of this period, stands between two eras. On the one hand it is derived from a long and

wonderful tradition of 18<sup>th</sup> century entertainment works such as serenades, divertimenti, and cassations. On the other hand, it looks ahead to large chamber compositions of the Romantic era intended for real concert use, such as Schubert's Octet and the Nonet of Ludwig Spohr. Because of its great charm and immediate appeal, the Septet quickly became Beethoven's most popular work. This really annoyed Beethoven and he later referred to the Septet as that "dammed stuff." His own style and musical language had gone forward in many new directions. Apparently, it was not so easy for audiences to follow him; they preferred the pleasantness and less demanding manner of the Op. 20 Septet.

Throughout history musical attitudes regarding arrangements by original composers or professional arrangers has gone in and out of acceptability. The widespread use of arrangements such as Beethoven's which may have seemed deplorable at one time are no longer viewed as a violation to the fidelity of the composer's original intentions. When Beethoven made his arrangements there was no real shortage of original works. Composers were extremely prolific, and any work considered likely to sell was published. Arrangements, however, were necessary in order to supply the wide demand to be able to reproduce music heard elsewhere inside one's own home with whatever resources available. The legitimacy of this practice is emphasized by the fact that composers themselves often produced arrangements of their own works. What the music lover wanted was a chance to hear favorite works over and over again. Before the invention of the radio, suitable arrangements of music for home use was the only way possible, as Inaz von Mosel put it, "to re-create the complete enjoyment of such works, like a silhouette which can be viewed whenever we so desire." It was the responsibility of the composer or arranger "to be wholly familiar with the construction of the work, to penetrate to its innermost secrets, to capture its essence in a nutshell." Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the principal medium for music making of this kind became the piano duet, a medium that is still highly popular today, but during the classical period various kinds of chamber ensembles were used.

Beethoven's two arrangements for piano trio, the Second Symphony and the Septet are successful, challenging and highly enjoyable in their new venues. The Septet arrangement follows the original literally, the clarinet/violin and cello absorbing into their own parts elements from the violin/viola and horn/bassoon. The piano takes up the rest and is therefore highly soloistic in nature. It happily dances along with the wide variety of material needed for successful adaptation. As a result, new colors and textures abound. Beethoven's incredible genius is overwhelmingly apparent not only as composer but also as arranger. History has made a special place for this lovely six-movement piece. This special fondness will probably always remain whether one prefers it as a Trio or Septet.

The Symphony arrangement is a real tour de force. As with the Septet the Symphony in trio form is a literal but not rigid arrangement. One might suppose that the two strings would generally play the same parts as in the symphony, with the piano part replacing the rest of the orchestra. This is not the case. Often the piano takes over the string parts for long stretches, the violin that of the wind instruments while the cello plays either the bass line as in the orchestra or other wind parts. Sometimes the pianist plays the original first violin part while the violinist plays the second violin part an octave higher in order to create a brighter sound reminiscent of the winds in the original orchestration. Repetitions of material that occur in the Symphony with no change of instrumentation are here often divided between violin and piano. The choice of instrumentation depends largely on the sound and musical structure of each particular section. Beethoven was careful and clever about this. Even though many predominant parts fall to the piano, the other two instruments are definitely not reduced to the status of dispensable extras, which was often the case in piano trios of the period. Here, the opposite is true. The writing in general is often extremely ungrateful and taxing especially for the piano, a trademark of all Beethoven's late works. This arrangement, by reducing the overall weight and sound of the Symphony, transforms this classic into a stunning masterpiece for three virtuosi full of incredible beauty, detail and precision. Beethoven is extraordinarily successful in keeping the salient characteristics and demands of piano trio writing.

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