

BEETHOVEN

RAUTIO PIANO TRIO

PIANO TRIOS, OP. 1, NOS. 1 & 2



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Piano Trios, Op. 1, Nos. 1 & 2

Rautio Piano Trio

Jane Gordon *violin*

Victoria Simonsen *cello*

Jan Rautio *fortepiano*

About Rautio Piano Trio

'Rarely does a disc come along that unexpectedly brings so much pleasure as this one [...] fabulous recordings, magical performances.'

Early Music Review

'That fortepiano is the key to one of the chief pleasures of this recording. The natural lightness & clarity of the sound and the effortless balance with the period strings, never overwhelming them.'

BBC Radio 3 Record Review

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

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

- | | |
|---------------------|---------|
| 1. Allegro | [10:07] |
| 2. Adagio cantabile | [6:52] |
| 3. Scherzo & Trio | [5:05] |
| 4. Finale | [7:55] |

Piano Trio in G major, Op. 1, No. 2

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------|
| 5. Adagio – Allegro vivace | [11:24] |
| 6. Largo con espressione | [7:49] |
| 7. Scherzo & Trio | [3:22] |
| 8. Finale | [7:56] |

Total playing time [60:36]



On a personal note

Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union my family emigrated to the UK, settling in London. We celebrated our first 'Western' Christmas in 1992 (something I hadn't experienced growing up in the USSR), and I received one of the most exciting gifts in my life: a small hi-fi system and a complete set of Beethoven's symphonies recorded by Deutsche Grammophon, with Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berliner Philharmoniker. I remember a feeling of my life changing as I spent countless hours listening, studying the scores and becoming obsessed with the power of Beethoven's language. My love for his music grew as I explored his symphonies, followed by concerti, sonatas and chamber music, and this love has never faltered.

To my young mind that aforementioned Deutsche Grammophon ouvre represented the ultimate expression of Beethoven's capacity to overwhelm the listener. Under Karajan's direction, Beethoven sounded robust, energetic, awesome. Back then I thought that this was how Beethoven should sound. Of course, perceptions change. Many years later, having graduated from the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), I began experimenting with performances on period instruments. I blame Jane Gordon for

this development! She had already spent years studying historically informed performance at the Royal College of Music and the RAM, and she persuaded me that an exploration of bygone practices could not only provide compelling employment opportunities, it could also reveal hidden truths when interpreting music by Baroque and Classical (et al) composers. I was hooked.

When I began playing chamber music I immediately noticed how difficult it was to achieve good balance in a group dominated by the modern piano. I wanted transparency without sounding feeble; variety of tone without resorting to melodramatic undulations of volume; greater clarity of articulation. All of this is achievable on a Steinway, of course. However, as I began exploring the delicate soundscapes generated by eighteenth-century keyboards, a new and pleasant reality revealed itself. A fortepiano makes light work of achieving transparency, clarity of tone and articulation. Whereas a twenty-first-century piano sounds homogenous across its ranges, a fortepiano delights with noticeable changes of gear as one navigates through its registers. Down in the depths you'll hear distinctive echoes of a harpsichord; in the middle you will find an uncomplicated lyricism; and at the very top everything sparkles like glittering gemstones. Everything becomes clear. This melody is here in the

middle because the singing quality is easily attainable. That bass line was meant to sound gruff! These semiquavers scatter effortlessly in the upper register.

When Beethoven was composing his first piano trios he'd have heard pretty much the sorts of noises you will hear on this recording. Imagine yourself transported back to the end of the eighteenth century, feel Beethoven's power of persuasion. Certainly, this is a subtler power than I experienced as a child – it is less robust yet more alluring. The energy of Beethoven's musical language is there, but it somehow feels poignant. The fragility of a fortepiano is palpable with its occasional creaks and groans, and the experience of both playing such an instrument – and listening to it – is rendered somewhat more human. These early works, symphonic in scale, reveal a young Beethoven who was humorous, capable of profundity and profanity, someone who was already scarred, physically and emotionally, by the harsh vicissitudes of eighteenth-century life. For me, playing Beethoven on a fortepiano makes these revelations easier to achieve. I feel how well he wrote for his instrument, and at the same time there exists a sense that this will not be enough – he will strain against the limitations, he will yearn for change, just as we all do.

I hope you will approach this recording with an open mind and a revitalised imagination. Perhaps this won't change your life, but it could make it more interesting.

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Instruments

Violin:
Giovanni Battista Rogeri (Brescia, c. 1630)

Cello:
Giovanni Grancino (Milan, 1687)

Fortepiano:
Paul McNulty, after Walter & Sohn (1805).
Five and a half octaves, with sustain,
moderator and una-corda knee levers.

Beethoven Piano Trios, Op. 1, Nos. 1 & 2

Beethoven's Piano Trios Op. 1 were first performed in 1793 at one of the chamber music soirées held at the home of Prince Karl Lichnowsky (1756–1814) who had taken Beethoven under his wing when the young composer arrived from Bonn in 1792 and provided him with accommodation until May 1795 when Beethoven moved out, tired of the formality of his aristocratic hosts. The audience at the concert included Haydn, Beethoven's teacher, and it probably took place in late 1793, just before Haydn left Vienna for his second visit to London. In his biography of Beethoven (published in 1838), Ferdinand Ries wrote that:

Beethoven's three trios (Opus 1) were to be introduced to the musical world in a soirée at Prince Lichnowsky's. Most of Vienna's artists and music lovers had been invited, above all Haydn, whose opinion was anxiously awaited by everyone. The trios were played and caused a tremendous stir. Haydn, too, said many fine things about them but advised Beethoven not to publish the third one in C minor ... Haydn's remark of course made bad impression on Beethoven, leaving him with the feeling that Haydn was envious and jealous and did not wish him well ... I later asked Haydn himself about it. His answer

confirmed Beethoven's story in that he said he had not imagined that this trio would not be so quickly and easily understood as the other two, nor so favourably received by the public.

Though Beethoven was a frankly difficult pupil, Haydn had an extremely high opinion of him: on 23 November 1793 he wrote that 'Beethoven will in time become one of the greatest musical artists in Europe, and I shall be proud to call myself his teacher.' This generous praise came in a letter to Maximilian Franz, Elector of Cologne (and brother of Marie Antoinette) which was sent along with a selection of Beethoven's 'latest' music that he thought Beethoven had composed during the course of his lessons. In the same letter, Haydn also asked Maximilian Franz to consider giving Beethoven more financial support during this time in Vienna. The Elector wrote back breaking the news to Haydn that all but one of the pieces he sent had already been written and performed in Bonn and that Beethoven had evidently tried to pass them off as new. Worse still, Beethoven had not been truthful with Haydn about his financial state as the Elector pointed out, giving chapter and verse on the arrangements that had been made before Beethoven left Bonn. Haydn was understandably upset by these revelations and Beethoven's studies with him came to an end. Two years later, in December

1795, after returning from his second stay in London, Haydn – kindly and generous to a fault – invited Beethoven to play his three Piano Sonatas Op. 2 at a concert in Vienna and Beethoven duly dedicated them to his former teacher. This was rare tribute: dedications at the time were usually given to aristocratic patrons rather than fellow musicians (Haydn was a notable exception: Mozart also dedicated the six ‘Haydn’ Quartets to his older friend). Meanwhile, after the 1793 performance of the trios, Haydn gave Beethoven some suggestions about revisions to the trios, and whatever personal tensions there may have been between Beethoven and Haydn, there is no doubt that Haydn’s influence can clearly be heard, particularly in the first and second trios of the set. In later life, Beethoven recalled that Haydn’s recommendations led to extensive changes, as he told the flautist Louis Drouet:

My first three trios were not published in the form in which I originally wrote them. When I reread the manuscripts, I wondered at my folly into collecting into a single work enough material for twenty. What a beginner! I should have perpetrated the most egregious follies in composition if it hadn’t been for Papa Haydn’s advice.

Unfortunately, Beethoven’s manuscripts of

all three trios are lost, so the details of these revisions must remain a mystery, but the process was evidently complete by the spring of 1795: on 9 May 1795, the publisher Artaria placed an advertisement in the *Wiener Zeitung* announcing its intention to print Beethoven’s Opus 1, and inviting those interested to subscribe to the edition. Over two hundred copies were ordered and the trios were issued in July 1795. The printed list of subscribers reads like a directory of Beethoven’s patrons and dedicatees: Count Apponyi signed up for six copies and in the same year tried to persuade Beethoven to write some string quartets, without success. Prince Lobkowitz (who also took six copies of the trios) had better luck when he commissioned the Op. 18 quartets and was subsequently the dedicatee of several major works, including the *Eroica*, Fifth and *Pastoral* symphonies. The Princess von Liechtenstein was the dedicatee of the ‘Moonlight’ Sonata, while Countess Maria Elisabeth Thunn was married to Prince Razumovsky who commissioned the Op. 59 string quartets. Baron Gottfried von Swieten – one of Haydn and Mozart’s most generous patrons – took three copies and was later the dedicatee of Beethoven’s First Symphony. Other Viennese aristocrats represented in the list went on to have close connections with the composer including the Fries family and the Count and Countess



von Browne (dedicatees of the String Trios Op. 3 and Op. 9, and the Piano Sonatas Op. 10 and Op. 22).

The dedicatee of the whole set (who took twenty copies of the newly-printed Trios) was Prince Lichnowsky, who had not only arranged the first performance but also provided Beethoven with accommodation for several years. In 1800, Lichnowsky gave Beethoven an annuity of 600 florins and among the works Beethoven dedicated to him were the 'Pathétique' Sonata, Op. 13, the Sonata Op. 26 and the Second Symphony. Their relationship broke down in 1806 when Beethoven stormed out of a dinner party given by the prince after being asked to play for some French officers. Needless to say, the annuity stopped. Over the next few years, Lichnowsky attempted several times for a reconciliation with the irascible composer but this never came about. He never lost his admiration for Beethoven's music and would even visit Beethoven's home in order to hear him at work from behind a closed door. For whatever reasons, Beethoven had decided that Prince Lichnowsky was the worst kind of aristocrat and at the time of his walk-out, he left a blunt and self-important note for his erstwhile benefactor: 'Prince! What you are is due to your circumstances and birth.

What I am is due to my own efforts. There are many princes and noblemen. There is only one Beethoven.'

The influence of Haydn is clearly apparent in the E-flat major Trio, Op. 1, No. 1, particularly in the first movement, a lively and well-crafted sonata form that opens with a rising arpeggio figure which is a nod to the 'Mannheim rocket', a favourite device of pioneering symphonists such as Johann Stamitz. For much of the time, the piano is the dominant instrument, but the violin and cello also have moments where they take the lead, such as the arrival of the more lyrical second subject. The 'Adagio' (in A-flat major) opens with a theme which has – whether by accident or design – thematic links to the first movement's second subject. The third movement is a *scherzo*: its unusual and unpredictable musical contours again echo Haydn's capacity to puzzle and surprise, but at the same time there is real originality in Beethoven's thematic material and his development of it. The 'Finale' is another sonata form movement, marked *Presto*. The main theme uses wide leaps to telling effect, and in the impressive coda (a kind of second development section), the young Beethoven seems to find his most confident and compelling creative voice.

More of that startling inventiveness can be

heard at the start of the G major Trio which begins with a slow introduction – something very rarely encountered in Classical piano trios – which gives this opening an almost symphonic breadth as well as a highly expressive dialogue between all three instruments. This leads to the main 'Allegro' which is launched with a capricious main theme; the second theme is full of charm as well as some unexpected silences (another device beloved of Haydn). The 'Largo con espressione' is in the rich, remote key of E major and while on paper it resembles a kind of slow siciliano, the result is profoundly serious and almost hymn-like in character, marked in places by some extremely bold modulations. In the 'Scherzo' (back in the home key of G major), the main themes are derived from fragments of rising and falling scales while the central Trio section plunges into the unexpected key of B minor. After the return of the main Scherzo theme Beethoven adds a little coda to end the movement quietly. The *presto* 'Finale' is notably energetic, full of the kind of rhythmic drive often found in Haydn's finales, but here enhanced with the formidable sense of drama that was to become one of the most distinctive characteristics of Beethoven's later chamber music.

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Rautio Piano Trio

Since releasing their debut album of Mozart Trios in 2016, the Rautio Trio has emerged as one of today's finest chamber ensembles known for their immaculately refined and powerfully expressive performances. With a passion for performing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century repertoire on both modern and period instruments, they have developed a fresh and engaging approach to their interpretations of historical masterworks.

The Trio has released two critically acclaimed albums with Resonus Classics and are frequently heard on BBC Radio 3. They have performed at the Wigmore Hall, Kings Place, London's Southbank Centre, Bridgewater Hall, throughout the UK, and in France, Austria and Germany.

In 2022 the Rautio Trio launches the first volume of the complete cycle of Beethoven Piano Trios, recorded on fortepiano. This is the culmination of a wider project charting the evolution of the piano trio from its emergence in the mid-eighteenth century, with the music of J.C. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, Mozart and Haydn, through to Beethoven's complex and mature realisation of the genre. Kindly supported by a Continuo Foundation grant, this project, 'The Dawn of the Piano

Trio: Beethoven's Building Blocks', refines their approach to performing on historical instruments by drawing inspiration from a variety of earlier works.

The Rautio Trio not only masters core repertoire but commissions new works and is active in working with contemporary composers. In 2021 the Trio gave the world premiere of a new work by Brian Elias at Kings Place, London.

In addition to performing piano trio repertoire, the Rautio Trio designs innovative programmes by transcribing larger scale works for the ensemble, often expanded with guest players. In 2021 they gave the premiere of Jan Rautio's transcription of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony for piano trio, viola and double bass at Hastings Early Music Festival. The London Bach Society commissioned Jan to transcribe Bach's Passacaglia & Fugue in C minor (BWV 582) for piano trio and it has since become a core part of their repertoire.



More titles from Resonus Classics



W.A. Mozart: Piano Trios, KV 502, 542 & 564
Rautio Piano Trio
RES10168

'This disc adds interest by being performed on period instruments, making it something of a rarity in this repertoire. The ear is immediately struck by the fortepiano, [...] it is evidently a joy to play, and Jan Rautio leads performances notable for their buoyancy and vivacity.'
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Beethoven, Hiller & Schubert Piano Trios
Rautio Piano Trio
RES10203

'In between fresh, brisk Beethoven and eloquent, confident Schubert they offer a substantial novelty: the premiere recording of the wonderfully buoyant Piano Trio No 6 by Ferdinand Hiller. Said to be an affable character, this dance-like music smiles right through.'
The Observer

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