



resonus

# Beethoven

## Piano Trios

Op. 1 No. 3, Op. 11 & Op. 44

RAUTIO PIANO TRIO

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

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Rautio Piano Trio

Jane Gordon *violin*  
Victoria Simonsen *cello*  
Jan Rautio *fortepiano*

Instruments used in this recording:

Violin: Giovanni Battista Rogeri (Brescia, c. 1630)  
Generously loaned by Simon Smewing

Cello: Francesco Rugeri (Ruggieri), 1695, Cremona  
Generously loaned for this recording by Justin Pearson

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

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

**Piano Trio in B-flat major, Op. 11 ‘Gassenhauer’**

- |                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| 1. Allegro con brio    | [9:01] |
| 2. Adagio              | [4:29] |
| 3. Tema con Variazioni | [6:39] |

**Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 1, No. 3**

- |                                     |        |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 4. Allegro con brio                 | [9:58] |
| 5. Andante cantabile con Variazioni | [7:04] |
| 6. Menuetto: Quasi Allegro          | [4:01] |
| 7. Finale: Prestissimo              | [8:25] |

**8. Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 44  
‘Variations on an Original Theme’** [12:52]

Total playing time [62:33]



## Beethoven Piano Trios Op. 1 No. 3, Op. 11 & Op. 44

Beethoven's **Piano Trio Op. 1 No. 3** showcases the young composer's early mastery of the genre. Written in 1793–1794 it is part of a set of three piano trios marking Beethoven's debut as a published composer. It was premiered in 1795 in the house of Prince Lichnowsky, the dedicatee of the first opus. The C minor trio was Beethoven's favourite from the set. However, Haydn, (who was among Prince Lichnowsky's guests) was left bewildered by the third trio.

Like the first two trios from the opus, the C minor is in four movements, rather than the traditionally customary two or three. Beethoven was moving away from conventional chamber formats and writing on a symphonic scale for three instruments. The first and last movements are turbulent and emotionally unsettled. The quiet musical phrase which opens the composition is mirrored by a hushed coda of the finale creating an emotional arc. Using a cliché, the trio takes the listener on a 'journey' along a very jagged path: there we find vehemence, angst, lyricism and a lack of a comforting positive resolution. Perhaps it was this drama in a chamber work that caused maestro Haydn to feel perplexed?

The first movement, marked 'Allegro con brio', is a sonata form that showcases Beethoven's skill in creating and developing tension. The music oscillates between nervousness, lyricism (however brief) and tempestuousness, and the score is littered with wild dynamic contrasts which are magnified in their intensity by the pervasiveness of minor tonality.

The second movement, marked 'Andante cantabile con variazioni', is a set of variations on a lyrical and uncomplicated theme. This provides a respite from the uncompromising drama of the first movement. Not everything is placid: the third variation features virtuosic writing for the piano and there is a brief diversion into E-flat minor in the fourth variation. However, levity is restored and a hushed coda brings the movement to a close.

The third movement is a minuet ('Quasi allegro'), in contrast to the other piano trios in this opus which featured scherzi. The two outer sections are in the key of C minor, and the trio in the middle is in C major. This minuet, however, has been alloyed with scherzo elements: explosive dynamic contrasts, sudden pauses and irregular phrase lengths make this a dance that would be very challenging to choreograph!

The 'Prestissimo' finale returns to the drama of the first movement with a vengeance. Turbulence and angst are back, and even though the second theme provides some lyrical warmth, this oasis of kindness is besieged by violence. The coda is remarkable: held down to a piano or a pianissimo for eighty-seven bars (apart for an occasional anguished *sforzando*) it deprives the listener of an optimistic resolution. Beethoven offers a morsel of kindness in the closing bars, releasing the music from the confines of C minor and allowing the composition to end, exhausted, on a hushed C major chord.

The **Piano Trio in B-flat major, Op. 11 'Gassenhauer'** was composed by in 1797 and published in Vienna the following year. The work's nickname 'Gassenhauer' originates from the theme of the finale, with the latter taken from the popular *dramma giocoso L'amor marinaro ossia Il corsaro* by Joseph Weigl. The melody, *Pria ch'io l'impegno* ('Before I go to work'), was incredibly popular and could be heard whistled, hummed or sung in Vienna's many 'Gasse', or 'lanes'. The piece offers flexible scoring, written as it is for piano, clarinet or violin, and cello, sometimes replaced by bassoon. This flexibility of instrumentation and the inclusion of woodwind instruments (because of their

popularity and novelty) is indicative of Beethoven's desire to cater to contemporary fashions.

This trio is in a more conventional format of three movements. The first movement ('Allegro con brio') in sonata form begins with a bold unison statement and proceeds to gallop through musical scapes with joy, frivolity and humour. There are brief diversions into somewhat piquant keys (such as at the beginning of the second subject, or at the start of the development section), but lightheartedness is never far away.

The second movement 'Adagio' in E-flat major starts with a gorgeous cello melody, its graceful and stately character generating a contrasting mood to the humour of the preceding movement. There is a startling modulation from major to minor at the centre of the movement which provides an emotional counterpoint to the nobility of the first section; however, order is soon restored and the main theme returns, embellished by sparkling arpeggiated ornamentations in the piano part.

According to Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny, the maestro contemplated writing a different finale, finding the original idea

too lightweight. However, the nine variations that follow the theme are superbly inventive. There is a solo piano variation immediately after the theme; variation number three features only violin and cello (or clarinet and/or bassoon); and there is a quick detour into G major in the final 'Allegro' which leads to a raucous final statement in the original key to close the piece.

The **Variations for Piano Trio Op. 44** appeared in print in 1804; however, its origins date back to 1792 (according to a surviving sketch) when Beethoven still lived in Bonn.

The theme, such as it is, is as simple as can be: it is merely an arpeggio in E-flat major, ascending and descending, delineated in unison by the three instruments. Beethoven's genius is very much in evidence, as he builds fourteen variations employing basic building blocks, each variation increasing in complexity, yet never losing sight of the original structure. There is the virtuosic first variation for the piano; the lyrical second (entirely piano solo); the playful third starring the violin; the elegant fourth variation for the cello. Variations 7 and 13 are slow and in the key of E-flat minor. The galloping 6/8 final variation brings the

work to a glorious climax, even though Beethoven tries to fool the listener with a quick digression into the key of C minor and a brief recollection of the melancholy thirteenth variation. No matter: the last six bars of Presto conclude the composition with a cheeky slamming of the door.

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### On a Personal Note

If I had to choose, there is no question which composer I'd take to my desert island. My love for Beethoven's chamber music started when I first heard his string quartets as a teenager. Discovering the scope of expression and depth of emotion that Beethoven could create from four string parts was a revelation. His violin concerto, piano chamber music and symphonies were equally enthralling. As I return time after time to perform Beethoven, I feel the evolution of my relationship with his music and how it provides me with a never ending source of inspiration, excitement and contentment (after overcoming a good deal of satisfying struggle). It is an utter joy to be exploring his piano trios on fortepiano with the Rautio Trio.

My relationship with historical performance goes back to my formative student years at the Royal College (RCM) and later Royal Academy of Music (RAM). I had listened to period instrument recordings (John Eliot Gardiner, Trevor Pinnock, Roger Norrington) and jumped at the chance to try baroque violin as soon as taster sessions were on offer in my first term. Looking back, it was pivotal to be exposed at that stage to a new way of thinking about performance, and to be challenged about how to play music authentically. It has since shaped how I approach all performance, regardless of the whether or not it's on a modern or historical set-up violin. The UK has a thriving period instrument scene and the players I work with share the same curiosity and passion for exploring every possibility the score might suggest.

Despite performing on gut strings for nearly two decades, bringing the fortepiano into my work with Rautio Piano Trio has come a little later. This is partly because availability and access to high quality instruments is becoming easier, thanks especially to the replica fortepianos by leading maker Paul McNulty (used for this recording). Also, audiences are becoming more accustomed to the sound of historical pianos. We are now seeing concerts taking place outside early

music festivals and given by renowned pianists who have chosen not to play a typical modern grand piano. One such performer is András Schiff, who is leading the way to entice listeners into our historic sound worlds on keyboard. His sublime recording of the Brahms piano concertos is on an 1859 Blüthner. Other wonderful collaborations are being led by Isabelle Faust, Melnikov and Queyras who have recorded Schumann chamber music on an 1847 Streicher.

Together with cellist Victoria Simonsen, I found that adapting to the timbre of the fortepiano has become a catalyst for creating a more intimate quality to the music-making. Compared with the modern piano, a much more fragile, mercurial sonority is generated which, in my opinion, is an entirely appropriate and beautiful sound for Beethoven. As an ensemble, textures are far more transparent which allows for a greater range of articulation and phrasing nuances to shine through. The balance between strings and piano is quite the opposite to the modern set-up. This is reflected in the scoring: in the early opus numbers the cello often supports and reinforces the left hand of the fortepiano (with only an occasional solo permitted!) and the violin writing is sensitive to the

keyboard's sonic qualities. It was a revelation having to take care not to overwhelm the clarity of the melodic material in the right hand of the pianist. I loved having the scope to create greater dynamic contrast between melodic material and accompanying figures without having to be concerned with projecting over a modern piano.

Playing on gut strings allows me to draw out a more distinctive colour in each register across the violin. The earthy G string contrasts more with the clarity of the pure gut E string (which is less shrill than the metal E). Unlike modern violin technique, where players seamlessly blend from one register to the next and use shifting to keep melodies on one string, the fingering patterns I use on gut are often staying in lower positions and crossing strings. I enjoy the voicing and clarity of timbre that emerges from the distinctive gut string sound. The lighter classical bow fits the slur groupings and the phrasing becomes more intuitive. Interestingly it feels like a more effortless playing style for Beethoven compared with on my modern violin.

As the Trio grew accustomed to this 'new' sound world, playing with the fortepiano, we felt we developed a renewed clarity in

our understanding of Beethoven's writing style, of the voicing and the musical intent. The historical approach has enriched our playing; it has encouraged us to develop a distinctly individual soundscape for Beethoven.

The pioneers of the early music movement have undoubtedly made a profound impact on today's musical world. Current musicologists continue to pave the way for fascinating historical exploration, and their insights permeate beyond the early music world. For the Rautio Trio, we are looking forward to discover what will fuel our imaginations as we delve into Beethoven's middle period for our next album.

@2024 Jane Gordon

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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 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 three critically acclaimed albums with Resonus Classics and are frequently heard on BBC Radio 3. They have performed at the Wigmore Hall, Kings Place, South Bank, Bridgewater Hall, throughout the UK and in France, Austria and Germany.

In 2022 the Rautio Trio launched the first volume 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 JC Bach, CPE Bach, Mozart and Haydn, through to Beethoven's complex and mature realisation of the genre. 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.

The Rautio Piano Trio was originally formed at the Royal Academy of Music, London, and at the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove. They are grateful for the numerous awards received at the start of their careers from the Tillet Trust, Worshipful Company of Musicians, Park Lane Group, Musician's Benevolent Fund Ensemble Award and a Leverhulme Chamber Music Fellowship at the Royal Academy of Music.

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