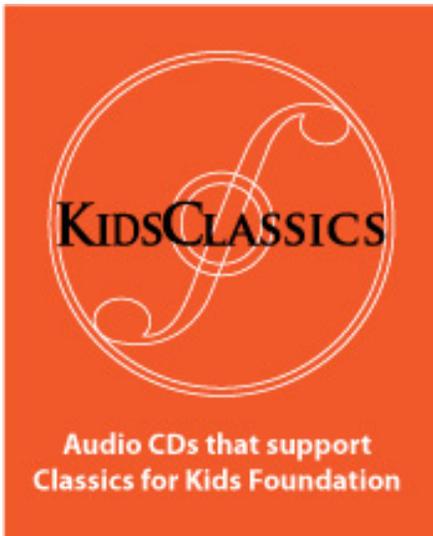




KidsClassics # 201302

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Viennese Gems: Beethoven • Zemlinsky • Trios for Piano, Clarinet, and Cello

Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello in E-flat Major, Op. 38 (after the Septet, Op. 20) by Ludwig van Beethoven
Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello in D Minor, Op. 3 by Alexander von Zemlinsky



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“Music is mediator between spiritual and sensual life.”
 —Beethoven

The Piano Trio

The trio for the instrumental combination of violin, cello and piano reached its pinnacle during the 19th century. Early in its development both the keyboard and cello were confined to providing an accompanying figure. With the obsolescence of the *basso continuo* or figured bass (a designated chordal structure from which 17th- and 18th-century keyboardists and bass string players performed to support the upper parts), the harpsichord and early *pianoforte* were assigned a more substantial role, temporarily overshadowing the stringed instruments. Compositions at this time were not entitled “piano trios” but rather “piano sonatas with the accompaniment of violin and cello.” Haydn’s keyboard trios, about 30 composed between 1784 and 1797, follow this structure and this is probably the reason for the comparative neglect on concert programs. With Mozart’s piano trios, eight composed between 1776 and 1788, a more equitable instrumental balance is attained for the first time. The piano trio, however, represents a minimal part of his immense oeuvre. Beethoven would elevate this genre to a level of deserved importance. Beethoven’s 11 piano trios, with a proportioned balance effect related directly to the increased tonal resources of the developing *pianoforte*, set the course for the blossoming of the 19th century trios of Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Dvořák, and others. Piano trios developed and would in time feature other instruments; on this CD, the clarinet takes on the traditional role of a violin.

Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello in E-flat Major, Op. 38 (1802-1803)
 (Beethoven’s arrangement of his Septet in E-flat Major, Op. 20, 1799-1800)
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
[1770-1827]

- [track 1] Adagio – Allegro con brio
- [track 2] Adagio cantabile
- [track 3] Tempo di Menuetto
- [track 4] Andante con Variazione
- [track 5] Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace
- [track 6] Andante con moto alla Marcia

“There is no greater pleasure for me than to practice and exhibit my art.”
 —Beethoven

I thought it would be interesting to first provide some information about the original Septet. Needless to say, it is not necessary to know the Septet to appreciate this Trio, but I think it does offer some valuable insight. Beethoven began sketches for the Septet in E-Flat Major (for clarinet, horn, bassoon, violin, viola, cello and double bass) in 1799 and completed it early in 1800. Although this was a period of personal anguish because of his hearing loss, the work is cheerful and optimistic. It reflects the 18th-century *style galant* (decorative, elegant style) of Haydn and Mozart. The Septet follows the Classical divertimento form (literally: amusement; it is a suite, light in character) with its many short, tuneful movements.

The first movement, the most symphonic in scope, has a slow introduction, followed by a section in traditional sonata form. The themes are first presented in the strings and then in the winds. The thematic exchange continues throughout the development and the less formal recapitulation is followed by a lengthy coda (a section added to the end of the piece, sometimes becoming a second development). The *Adagio* is adorned with lyrical melodies. Beethoven freely varies and develops the thematic material. The third movement is an effervescent minuet followed by a humorous trio. Beethoven borrows the theme from his Piano Sonata No. 20 in G, Op. 49, No. 2 (1795-1796), but the treatment is original. The fourth movement is a theme and variations; the five

variations are diverse in tonal color and have a rich harmonic structure. The French horn introduces a rustic, lusty *Scherzo*. The cello has a beautiful melody in the contrasting *Trio* section. A literal repeat of the *Scherzo* ends the movement. The introduction to the final *Andante* is in a minor key offering the first solemn feeling in the Septet. This passes quickly, followed by an ebullient bright melody. The concluding *Presto* returns to a major tonality. A rather substantial violin cadenza signals the beginning of the recapitulation with a return of all the various melodies -- a climactic conclusion. The Septet was first performed in Vienna on April 2, 1800, in the presence of the Empress Maria Theresa, to whom it is dedicated. It is Beethoven's last chamber music work with wind instruments.

The great popularity of this early Septet proved to be an obstacle for his later compositions. It appealed greatly both to connoisseurs and to music lovers alike. The attitude of both the critics and the public called for more music as readily comprehensible as the Septet. Its popularity can be estimated by the large numbers of copies printed, and from the numerous transcriptions which were made for the most contrasting forces, ranging from an ensemble of 11 wind instruments to a simple arrangement for guitar; the most unexpected of them was, perhaps, a version of the *Adagio* as a song to the words "Innocent as a violet." Beethoven was not averse to such arrangements when they helped his original compositions to become more widely known, but without distorting their basic musical content. The version of the Septet as a Trio for piano, violin or clarinet and cello is one of the few instances of an arrangement of an original work made by Beethoven himself. He dedicated this version to the Viennese professor of medicine, Johann Adam Schmidt, whom Beethoven had consulted about his increasing deafness. The violin part, which dominates the Septet, together with the accompanying string parts, is here taken over by the piano. This is contrasted by the clarinet part and by the cello, which replaces the lower wind instruments in the original (horn and bassoon), also sometimes taking over thematically important passages of the original cello and viola parts. This arrangement does not alter the structure of the work and its dialogues between string and wind groups. With the sharply contrasting

contours, it brings out the serenade-like character of the original version.

I think it is important to remember that at this point in time, Beethoven had not yet given up hope that his doctors might be able to do something about his hearing, however, he no doubt could anticipate incalculable troubles, both for his professional and personal life. In various letters he wrote: "I must confess that I am living a miserable life. For almost two years I have ceased to attend any social functions, just because I find it impossible to say to people: I am deaf. If I had any other profession it would be easier, but in my profession it is a terrible handicap. As for my enemies, of whom I have a fair number, what would they say? (And his financial situation would be a serious issue considering commission and publishing agreements.) My poor hearing haunted me everywhere like a ghost; and I avoided all human society. I was forced to seem a misanthrope, and yet I am far from being one." [Excerpts] Most fortunately, Beethoven's deafness didn't block his creative spirit.

Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello in D Minor, Op. 3 (1896) by ALEXANDER ZEMPLINSKY [1871-1942]

[track 7] *Allegro ma non troppo*

[track 8] *Andante*

[track 9] *Allegro*

"I've always firmly believed that Zemlinsky was a great composer, and I still do; I owe almost all of my knowledge of the technique of composing to him."

—Arnold Schoenberg

Zemlinsky and Schoenberg first met and became friends in 1895 when Zemlinsky was the conductor of an amateur orchestra (Polyhymnia), at whose rehearsals Schoenberg was attempting to conquer the "mysteries of music" by teaching himself to play the cello. Incredibly, Schoenberg's only formal music instruction was his studies with Zemlinsky. Their relationship blossomed when Schoenberg married Zemlinsky's sister, Mathilde, in 1901. The two budding composers also later founded the *Vereinigung Schaffender Tonkünstler* (Society for Creative Musicians). Zemlinsky would follow parallel careers as conductor and composer, Schoenberg focused on composition.

Although closely linked to the Second Viennese School, Zemlinsky couldn't be described as a revolutionary. While undisputedly a conductor of the first rank and an interpreter of integrity, he supposedly lacked a certain charisma and was therefore overshadowed by more domineering personalities. His music is distinguished by an almost overpowering emotional intensity. It took several decades before it became known and appreciated, coming to the attention of an increasingly wide public. As with many of his contemporaries, chamber music features prominently in Zemlinsky's formative years. His works reveal a skillful confidence in the process of creating free of influences. Zemlinsky, steeped in the classical tradition of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and directly influenced by Brahms's famous Clarinet Trio, Op. 114 (1891), wrote his Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano for a competition sponsored by the Viennese Society of Musicians (it won third prize). It's a late Romantic work with lovely melodies (especially the bittersweet *Andante*) and notable counterpoint. Zemlinsky's lyrical Trio was written when he was young and still under the influence of Brahms and the great Austro-German tradition, displaying the romantic lyricism that is at the heart of his musical nature. While indebted to Brahms for the instrumentation, this Clarinet Trio is distinctly Zemlinsky in its formal and expressive approach; it remains one of his most popular works. Brahms was evidently impressed enough for him to recommend it to his publisher. Although darkly set in a minor key, it reveals the composer's youthful virility and passion with virtuosic writing for all instruments, offering ample opportunity for each of the players to shine. Few would argue that to this day, it remains uniquely fresh and breathtaking.

While the first movement of this Trio is in sonata form, consequently constructed with the development and recapitulation of themes, it also displays highly disciplined interrelationships on a smaller scale with the first three notes of the opening measures acting as a motive which generates much of the subsequent material. The clarinet line is low and brings out the instrument's woody resonant tones; the cello line compliments beautifully. The music is propulsive and its rhythms keep the tension constant. It has great romantic sweep, from the opening *Allegro non*

troppo to the colorful *Allegro* finale, whose main theme has a subtly Hungarian flavor. For the second movement, Zemlinsky specified the A clarinet (as opposed to the B-flat clarinet) for its richer, warmer sound. The expressive piano part is wonderfully collaborative, ever-present but never overwhelming.

Historical note: Alexander Zemlinsky no doubt struggled for his own identity as a composer during a time of such a fruitful compositional and transitional period; he is often mentioned in association with other composers, somewhat in their shadows — Zemlinsky was the brother-in-law, teacher and close friend of Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951); he taught and had a romantic liaison with the musically active and infamous socialite Alma Schindler (1879-1964), who became Gustav Mahler's (1860-1911) wife; he employed Anton Webern (1883-1945) and was admired by Alban Berg (1883-1945); in fact, Berg quoted Zemlinsky's Lyric Symphony in his own Lyric Suite which he dedicated to Zemlinsky. Zemlinsky's pupils, in addition to Schoenberg and Schindler, included later Hollywood guru Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957), who along with Max Steiner and Alfred Newman, is considered the co-founder of film music. Though indirectly related, this tragic historical note provides a sense of the time: Webern left Vienna near the end of the war and moved to Salzburg, believing he would be safer there. On September 15, 1945, during the Allied occupation of Austria, he was shot and killed by an American army soldier following the arrest of his son-in-law for black market activities. The irony...this incident occurred a short time before an imposed curfew; Webern stepped outside the house to enjoy a cigar given to him that evening by his son-in-law. The U.S. soldier responsible for his death was overcome by remorse; he died of alcoholism in 1955.

Regarding the clarinet repertoire, it is curious that a number of the most important works for this instrument were written by composers in the final years of their lives: Mozart's Clarinet Concerto was written in the year of his death; Poulenc's Clarinet Sonata was completed in his final months; Brahms too came to realize the chamber music potential of the clarinet very late in life and four years before his death, Zemlinsky began composing a Quartet

for Clarinet, Violin, Viola and Cello, but regrettably the work was left unfinished. It does however provide insight into his compositional development; the seeds of his style were planted in this youthful Trio, and, in an elegant parallel, Zemlinsky's mature technique of using the variation technique is clearly exemplified by the unfinished Clarinet Quartet; it no doubt would have been a wonderful contribution to the clarinet repertoire. Regarding this "later in life attention to the clarinet," a consideration worth noting is that the clarinet was slowly becoming a more acceptable and reliable instrument given the rise in performance standards for wind instruments (structural improvements); this is of course reflected in the increasing use by other composers in the early 20th century, and onward.

Zemlinsky, like many other composers of Jewish descent, was forced to make hurried plans to flee the Nazi regime; he immigrated to the U.S. in 1938. The following year, Zemlinsky suffered a debilitating stroke and his health declined steadily until he died in 1942, never having achieved the success he had experienced in Europe.

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