Zukerman Trio

Pinchas Zukerman, violin
Amanda Forsyth, cello
Shai Wosner, piano

SONATA FOR CELLO AND PIANO, L. 135 (1915)
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Prologue: Lent
Sérénade: Modérément animé –
Finale: Animé

PIANO TRIO NO. 3, IN C MINOR, OP. 101 (1886)
Johannes Brahms (1833-97)
Allegro energico
Presto non assai
Andante grazioso
Allegro molto

:: INTERMISSION ::

PIANO TRIO IN B-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 97 [ARCHDUKE] (1810-11)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Allegro moderato
Scherzo. (Allegro)
Andante cantabile, ma però con moto –
Allegro moderato - Presto

FRIDAY, JUNE 17 :: 7:30 PM

This concert is made possible by contributing sponsors Kathe and Allan Cohen.
The Opening movement of the C minor trio is one of Brahms’s most intense sonata form movements; even his normally mellow second theme is here ardent and forward-driving in a way that offers little relief in the tension. The movement, in common with much of his later chamber music, is also one of his tautest structures and, as in the second Piano Trio, Brahms omits the traditional repeat of its first section (the exposition). “Laconic” is how his close friend and frequent correspondent Elisabeth von Herzogenberg described the movement. “Smaller men,” she wrote, “will hardly trust themselves to precede so laconically without forfeiting some of what they want to say.”

The scherzo is understated, almost aphoristic, inhabiting a shadowy world of allusion and half-lights. The strings are muted throughout, and the music rarely rises above a piano. “I am happier tonight than I have been for a long time,” Clara Schumann wrote after hearing this movement. The slow movement is a brief, wistful dialogue between the two strings and the piano, with the three instruments only infrequently playing together. Originally drafted with a 7/4 time-signature, the music effortlessly slips from two to three beats to the bar and the textures of the unaccompanied string duo again offer a preview of the Double Concerto, the work Brahms was to compose the following year. The determined finale, with its unpredictable cross-rhythms, remains shrouded in the minor key until sunlight warms the coda to a triumphant conclusion.

PIANO TRIO IN B-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 97 [ARCHDUKE]
Ludwig van Beethoven (b. Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; d. Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827)
Composed 1810-11, 44 minutes

The Archduke marks the peak of Beethoven’s writing for piano trio. It is virtuoso music written for virtuoso musicians. In the previous two decades he had been known to view the medium of the piano trio – three instruments that were among the most widely taught – as a potential cash crop, when it suited him. That’s why we have pieces like the Kakadu Variations and the piano trio arrangements of the Septet and even of the Second Symphony – all either made by Beethoven himself, or sanctioned by him. The market amongst amateur musicians was considerable and Beethoven knew it. Still, his first three published trios, his Op. 1, would have given pause for thought amongst amateurs used to reading through music at sight. His next trio, the two of Op. 70, of which the first, the Ghost, is the better known, make no concession to anything less than professional ability. Then, in the four movements of the Archduke, Beethoven writes a monumental piece, some 40 minutes in length, which crowns his work in the medium. In it, the traditionally intimate medium of the piano trio bursts at the seams and strives for a concerto-like scale.

From the beginning, Beethoven rethinks the sonority of the medium. The piano writing is thicker, the chords more resonant. The cello carries more of the melodies. The overall sonority is richer. The music looks back towards such expansive, lyrical works of Beethoven’s maturity as the Fourth Piano Concerto, while anticipating some of the key developments in his later works. Although the scale of the opening, we do not encounter Beethoven at his most rhetorical when he first presents his themes. The spacious opening is marked dolce [sweetly]; the movement expresses emotions that can only come through maturity and through having undergone deep personal experiences.

As in the Hammerklavier Sonata, Beethoven reverses the middle two movements. The scherzo is full of dry wit and its idiom recalls Beethoven’s First Razumovsky quartet. Many of its repetitions, simmering piano writing and darkly mysterious moments also include the loveliest of Viennese waltzes. The ethereal slow movement is one of Beethoven’s most majestic statements. It contains a noble theme with five variations, and, as in the late string quartets, it forms the emotional heart of the piece. Its profundities are brusquely interrupted by the rustic tones of the finale, a driving movement which has its feet planted firmly on the ground. The abrupt switch of mood mirrors Beethoven’s improvisations on the piano – just when his audience would become caught up in the music, the mood would be shattered when Beethoven would suddenly slam his fist on the keys and burst into laughter. The exuberant music of the finale — broad and expansive like the rest of the work — brings a decisive conclusion.
The Archduke of the title was Rudolph, Archduke of Austria (1788-1831). He was the youngest son of Emperor Leopold II and brother of Emperor Franz. A loyal supporter of the composer, Rudolph was an accomplished pianist and had studied both piano and composition with Beethoven (he was Beethoven’s only composition pupil). Rudolph was already a leading patron when, in 1809, he joined the Princes Kinisky and Lobkowitz in providing Beethoven with an annuity of 4,000 florins to ensure the composer remained a citizen of Vienna.

Beethoven dedicated an impressive number of works to Rudolph – more than to anyone else – including the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, three piano sonatas (Les Adieux, the Hammerklavier and Op. 111), the G major Violin Sonata, Op. 96, the ‘Grosse Fuge’ and the great trio that the Archduke himself nicknamed Archduke. Beethoven also wrote and dedicated the Missa Solemnis to Rudolph for his enthronement as Archbishop and Cardinal of Olmütz in March 1820.

ZUKERMAN TRIO

Pinchas Zukerman, violin | Amanda Forsyth, cello | Shai Wosner, piano

Formed in 2013, the Pinchas Zukerman Trio developed out of violinist Zukerman’s acclaimed Zukerman ChamberPlayers, and has since graced the world’s greatest stages and many of the globe’s major festivals. For his lauded Trio, Zukerman is joined by cellist Amanda Forsyth and pianist Shai Wosner. Equally respected as a violinist, violist, conductor, pedagogue and chamber musician, Pinchas Zukerman is the Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London and his extensive discography of over 100 titles has earned him two Grammy awards and 21 nominations. He has been awarded a Medal of Arts, the Isaac Stern Award for Artistic Excellence, and has served as chair of the Pinchas Zukerman Performance Program at the Manhattan School of Music for over 25 years. Canadian Juno Award-winning Amanda Forsyth was principal cellist of the National Arts Centre Orchestra, where she appeared regularly as soloist and in chamber ensembles. As a recording artist she appears on the Fanfare, Marquis, Pro Arte and CBC labels. Pianist Shai Wosner is a recipient of Lincoln Center’s Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant and a Bortetti-Buitoni Trust Award. He is on the faculty at the Longy School of Music in Boston.