

January 2024

by Derek Katz

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 49 (1839)

By the time that Felix Mendelssohn composed his first trio for piano, violin and cello in 1839, the piano trio as a genre was in the midst of a shift from domestic *Hausmusik* intended for the private enjoyment of amateur musicians to a form of chamber music suitable for public performance by professionals. In Haydn and Mozart's day, piano trios were essentially keyboard sonatas, aimed at accomplished keyboard players (mostly female), who would be accompanied by less adept string players (generally male). This encouraged composers to write pieces that were suited to the technical abilities of amateur players leading to trios in which the string parts were subsidiary, with the cello part, in particular, often merely doubling the left hand of the keyboard part. For Mendelssohn, however, a piano trio was a piece of chamber music for his own use as a performer, not something primarily intended to be sold to amateurs. In an 1832 letter to his sister Fanny, Felix suggests that he would like to compose "a few good trios" instead of giving in to publishers' demands for salable piano music (Mendelssohn here compares publishers to "Satan"). Significantly, Mendelssohn had some trouble finding foreign publishers for the D Minor Piano Trio, with Alfred Novello in London responding that, "such a work would command a very small sale amongst our ignorant public," and Breitkopf & Härtel's Parisian agent describing Mendelssohn as, "too learned to be popular."

Mendelssohn had moved to Leipzig in 1835 to become Music Director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, and his first public performance of the D minor Trio in early 1840 was in collaboration with Ferdinand David and Franz Carl Wittmann, the orchestra's concertmaster and principal cellist. Regular chamber music concerts in Leipzig had only begun in 1835, when David instituted a series of string quartet concerts, and the 1840 series on which the Mendelssohn Trio was premiered was the first to be expanded to include works with piano and renamed "Evening Entertainments." The trio was a very successful part of this nascent culture of public chamber music performance. Mendelssohn performed it himself five times in Leipzig between 1840 and 1845, and he reported playing it ten to twelve times in Berlin with members of the royal orchestra in 1841.

It is absolutely obligatory when writing about the Mendelssohn trio to quote Robert Schumann's description of it as, "the master trio of today...a wholly fine composition that, when years have passed away, will yet delight grandchildren and great-grandchildren," and his dubbing of Mendelssohn as, "the Mozart of the nineteenth century." This apparently wholehearted tribute from one notable composer to another actually constituted something of a back-handed compliment. Schumann goes on to write that while Mendelssohn may be the Mozart of his time, the century is still waiting for its Beethoven. (Thirteen years later, Schumann would nominate a young Johannes Brahms for that position.) In other writings, Schumann criticized Mendelssohn for being too beholden to older musical models, and for lacking the "pathos and massive breadth" of Beethoven. Schumann's view is part of a recognizable and persistent strand of Mendelssohn reception that finds Mendelssohn's works light, polished and well-crafted, at the expense of the conflict and emotional depth found in the works of, well, Beethoven. The D minor Trio is an excellent corrective to that critical tradition. For one thing, it is every bit as much the product of revision and compositional struggle as anything by Beethoven. A manuscript survives of an early version of the trio that is quite different from the final version that we know today, filled with crossed-out passages and insertions. Far from demonstrating an atavistic attachment to Bach and Handel, it is a work filled with Romantic passion expressed through thoroughly up-to-date piano technique.

Mendelssohn does not merely give important parts to all three instrumentalists, but devises musical textures that are idiomatic for both piano and strings and sonically compelling. His primary solution was to combine lyrical, melodic lines in the violin and cello with piano figuration that is virtuosic, but accompanimental. The piano part in this trio (especially in the fast movements) is brilliant and almost constantly active, but usually acting in support of melodic string lines. This would turn out to provide a model for the later 19th century piano trio in general, including those of Schumann himself.

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In the first movement, both themes are first stated by the cello, the very instrument so consistently underserved by Haydn and Mozart's keyboard trios. The movement is in a fast triple meter, which allows Mendelssohn to project different senses of pulse. The opening theme moves measure by measure, creating a contrast between the relatively stately string lines and the agitated piano chords beneath them. This piano texture is soon followed by swift flourishes and cascades of triplets. The contrasting second theme has a more gently swinging quality (and is usually played at a slightly relaxed tempo). Much of the movement is devoted to repeating these very attractive themes, privileging the presentation of melody over development of motives.

The second movement has frequently been compared to one of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, the short solo piano pieces that were a fixture of the 19th century domestic keyboard repertoire. Indeed, the slower tempo and simpler textures provide a strong contrast to the virtuoso fireworks that surround it. The movement falls into three parts. The opening phrase, whose three clauses each start with a two-note pickup, is first played by the solo piano, and then echoed by the strings in harmony. A second phrase (again beginning with the two-note pick-up) is also played first by the piano, and then by the strings. The middle section moves to the minor and shifts the accompaniment to repeated triplets, but is linked to the outer sections with yet more two-note pickups. The third section is a repeat of the opening, but with new accompaniment textures, including a pizzicato bass line in the cello, and flowing sixteenth notes that pass from piano to strings.

The playful scherzo is one of the most distinctive movement types in Mendelssohn's output, with some, like the scherzo from his incidental music for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, evoking specific fairies, and others, like this one, more generically elfin. Just as typical of Mendelssohn is his departure from the expected form for these movements. Instead of a scherzo that betrays its heritage in dance music through closed, repeated phrases and an organization in three distinct parts (Scherzo-Trio-Scherzo), this movement is more like a continuous musical thought constructed from the ideas stated at the very opening.

The final movement starts off quietly and somewhat reserved, but quickly becomes impassioned, as promised by the tempo marking. This passion is first generated by the kind of bravura piano writing familiar from the first movement, albeit possibly even more virtuoso, with extensive use of figuration in which the two hands rapidly alternate. As was the case in the first movement, this exciting passage work is again used to accompany motivic and melodic material from the violin and cello. There are also two contrasting sections in the major. The first (piano, then violin) retains the same rhythmic profile as the main theme, while the second (cello, then both string players in octaves) is more unabashedly lyrical. Both contrasting sections are repeated, and Mendelssohn remains in the major mode for a brilliant conclusion.

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Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2 (1894)

The second of the two sonatas for clarinet and piano by Johannes Brahms is his last major instrumental work, and very near the end of the list of his compositions, followed only by a collection of chorale preludes for organ and the *Four Serious Songs*. While the *Serious Songs* were most likely composed in anticipation of Clara Schumann's death, and the organ preludes with his own end in mind, the E-flat Major Clarinet Sonata bears not the slightest trace of morbid thoughts. Instead, it is a sunny and genial gesture of friendship and appreciation. The sonata is from the group of four works that Brahms composed for the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, whose playing inspired Brahms to come out of a self-imposed retirement and make an unusual move away from keyboard, strings and voice (the Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano, Op. 40 is Brahms's only other major chamber work to feature a wind instrument).

When Brahms first encountered Mühlfeld at the Court of Meiningen in 1891, he heard him as an orchestral principal, as a concerto soloist (Carl Maria von Weber, Concerto No. 1 in F Minor) and as a chamber musician with strings (Mozart, Clarinet Quintet). Brahms's immediate response was to compose pieces that mixed Mühlfeld's clarinet with string instruments, in short order producing a Quintet for Clarinet and Strings (presented by Camerata Pacifica last February) and a Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano (presented by Camerata Pacifica in November). Reportedly, however, Brahms preferred the combination of clarinet and piano, and when he turned again to Mühlfeld in 1894, it was with two sonatas for clarinet and piano, that is, pieces specifically designed for Mühlfeld to play with Brahms, without the need for other collaborators. Brahms told Clara Schumann that by this point he was composing only for himself, and these sonatas seem to have been especially meaningful to him as a performer-composer. Brahms first invited Mühlfeld to Vienna for an extended visit to try out the sonatas at home, and later gave private performances for his former patron, the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen and for Clara Schumann. Brahms and Mühlfeld also presented the sonatas on a kind of valedictory concert tour of German cities in 1895.

The Clarinet Quintet and Clarinet Trio both call for the A clarinet, the slightly lower and darker-hued instrument of the two standard clarinets, but the Sonatas are both written for the somewhat brighter B-flat clarinet ("It would be splendid if you brought your B-flat clarinet," wrote Brahms to Mühlfeld when inviting him to Vienna). The choice of instrument may simply have been dictated by the keys of the sonatas (playing a piece in E-flat Major on the A clarinet would be an awkward and unnatural act), but the E-flat Major sonata does have generally lighter affect in comparison to the Quintet and the Trio.

The Sonata has three movements, none of which is either especially fast or especially slow. The first movement is an Allegro, but the tempo is modified with the adjective "amiable," and this is, indeed, a friendly and welcoming movement. Brahms makes particularly good use of the clarinet's ability to fluidly play wide leaps and gracefully spin out delicate passage work across its high and low registers (both considerably less idiomatic and requiring more effort in Brahms's parallel version for viola). The first theme is an excellent example, with the clarinet presenting a gentle idea that is then extended with increasingly wider leaps and intricate passage work. A contrasting idea showcases another clarinet specialty, asking the player to play with a subdued tone in the low register. The pianist sometimes seems to be encouraging the clarinetist into a more ardent mood, but the movement remains largely conversational.

The second movement has the appearance of a scherzo, being in triple meter and falling into a three-part A-B-A, but doesn't have the expected lively character (this is the opposite of the scherzo of the Mendelssohn Trio, which is appropriately vivacious, but formally atypical). The outer sections are in the unusual key of E-flat Minor, bristling with flats (friendly for the B-flat clarinet and for the piano, much less so for the viola). Once again, the tempo marking is Allegro, and again Brahms modifies the designation, here first with "passionate," and later with "expressive." The character of the section is assertive but singing, with the themes politely shared by clarinet and piano.

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The middle section, in the major mode (but a very distant B Major), is singing and noble, with the piano playing block chords in the lower register.

The third movement is a theme and variations in a moderate tempo, in some ways functioning as both slow movement and conclusion. The internal structure of the theme is AAB, with the first short phrase presented by the clarinet, the second begun by the piano and concluded by the clarinet. The slightly longer B section is already something of a variation of the first idea, and all three phrases end with the same assured gesture, which will feature prominently later in the movement. The pattern of interplay between the two players is maintained for the first three variations, which remain quiet but become more rhythmically active.

The fourth variation isn't actually in a slower tempo, but feels more deliberate as it moves in larger note values, and is even softer. The mood then is broken by an Allegro coda, the first genuinely fast and vigorous music in the Sonata, and a sort of mini-finale. This section begins in a stormy minor before relaxing into a final section based on the closing gesture from the original theme.

Vinko Globokar (b. 1934) *?Corporel* (1985)

The French-Slovenian composer and trombonist Vinko Globokar is one of the major figures of the post-World War II European avant-garde, having collaborated with and premiered works by Luciano Berio, Mauricio Kagel and Karl-Heinz Stockhausen. Globokar's prowess as a virtuoso trombonist and his background in jazz have been major factors in his career. In particular, his experiences with free jazz have led to strong ideas about the relationship between improvisation, composition and authorship. Although much of his performing career has been devoted to collective improvisation, he does not include improvisation in his compositions, on the grounds that improvised works are co-created, but that there is no mechanism for converting that collaborative process into shared intellectual property.

?Corporel, for solo performer, has become part of the international percussion repertoire, but could be performed by any human. There are no instruments (or any other objects) required to perform the piece, and all sounds are produced by the human body, whether caused by striking the body or by vocalizations (hence the title, "Of the Body"). Globokar carefully delineates between sounds produced by

striking soft or bony parts of the body. The hand-written score is precisely notated, specifying everything from the clothing worn by the performer to the presence of stage lighting and amplification. *?Corporel* is a highly theatrical work, in which sound is only one component of the embodied performance.

Much of *?Corporel* consists of the performer striking herself, both converting the human body into an instrument, and suggesting that the creation of art comes at a physical cost. The implications of a percussionist "hitting" an instrument are made uncomfortably literal when player and instrument are one and the same. The piece has a general trajectory from stillness to agitation, with a climax near the end when wordless vocalizations give way to the recitation of a fragment of a poem by René Char.

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Christos Hatzis (b. 1953)

Fertility Rites, for Five Octave Marimba and Tape (1997)

Christos Hatzis grew up in Volos, Greece, where he studied music at the local Hellenic Conservatory, receiving a diploma in accordion near the end of his high school years (Globokar's first instrument was also the accordion). He then came to the United States for undergraduate and graduate composition degrees from the Eastman School of Music and SUNY Buffalo, studying with (amongst others) Joseph Schwantner, whose *Velocities* for Solo Marimba was presented by Camerata Pacifica in November, 2022. Hatzis moved to Canada after completing his PhD and has been teaching at the University of Toronto since 1992. Much of his music reflects his own spiritual heritage in Byzantine Christianity, but *Fertility Rites* is a direct result of his Canadian experiences, and more specifically of his engagement with Inuit culture.

Hatzis's interests are both part of a broader inquiry into Inuit throat singing by Canadian ethnomusicologists that intensified in the 1970s and also of his own projects of the 1990s. In 1992, Hatzis was commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to provide a soundtrack for a radio documentary called *The Idea of Canada*. This program was an explicit response to Glenn Gould's 1967 "contrapuntal radio documentary" *The Idea of North*, in which the spoken accounts of five people of their experiences in the Canadian North were layered on top of each other in the manner of a musical fugue. *The Idea of Canada* extended Gould's techniques with current computer technology and combined speech, music and electronically manipulated sounds, including contributions from First Nation peoples. The Gould documentary is considered an important part of the history of electronic music in Canada, and Hatzis's response was part of his larger participation in the world of electro-acoustic composition. The experience also sparked a desire to engage more directly with Inuit culture, and Hatzis made a second "documentary composition" in 1996, travelling to the Arctic to record both natural sounds and *katajjaq*, or Inuit throat singing.

Pre-recorded *katajjaq* are also an important component of Hatzis's *Fertility Rites*, a concert work for marimba and pre-recorded tape. The historic social function of Inuit throat singing is still a matter of scholarly debate, but Hatzis's own research has led him to the conclusion that before contact with Christian missionaries *katajjaq* were a type of vocal game (as opposed to a "performance" for entertainment) rendered by women and used as "a shamanistic mating call" as part of a fertility ritual while men were off hunting. This conception of *katajjaq* as a gendered practice associated with sex and reproduction is at the heart of *Fertility Rites*. The piece combines live performance on a five-octave marimba (a larger instrument with an extended bass register) with pre-recorded sounds, some of which have been electronically manipulated. The pre-recorded sounds are either from the marimba or from Inuit throat singers. The selection of pre-recorded sounds and ways in which they have been altered are different in each of the three movements.

In the first movement, pre-recorded throat singing largely alternates with an "extended marimba" comprised of both live and taped sounds. The throat singing has been lowered in pitch and sounds like the kind of heavy breathing that concert audiences will find sexually suggestive. Here, Hatzis forces a confrontation between indigenous and non-native concepts of sexuality, or, (as the percussion Alec Joly Pavelich suggests in his master's thesis on this work) performs a kind of erasure of the original shamanistic function of the *katajjaq* in preparation for a different type of presentation in the final movement. The live marimba component largely consists of repeated notes and sonorities, providing a backdrop for a middle-register melodic line that moves at a slightly faster pace.

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The second movement is all marimba, allowing the live performer's expressive palate to be enhanced not just with additional sounds, but with sounds that have been electronically altered. These alterations include "bent" notes that change pitch, an effect impossible in live performance. One of the characteristic sonorities in this movement is the (pre-recorded) sound of a bowed marimba. This technique uses a bow for stringed instruments (usually a double bass bow) to stroke the end of a marimba bar and to produce a sustained, ethereal sound. The movement also uses tremolos in the upper register and rapid, delicate figuration. The overall effect is impressionistic, and quite distinct from the surrounding movements.

The final movement is the one most centered on the *katajjaq*. Here, not only is the pre-recorded throat singing used at its original pitch, but the initial material for live marimba is an attempt to convert the rhythms and pitch contours of the throat singing into instrumental music (the *katajjaq* samples have actually been slightly digitally modified to conform to the Western tempered scale). In addition to all of this material derived from Inuit practices, the live marimba also plays some jaunty tango music, no doubt suggesting different type of mating ritual.