

The Red Bank  
Chamber Music Society

*presents*

The Peabody Trio

Beethoven • Schnittke • Mozart • Ravel

Violaine Melançon, violin

Natasha Brofsky, cello

Seth Knopp, piano

Sunday Afternoon

September 20, 2015 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

PROGRAM NOTES

# PROGRAM

## Sonata for Cello & Piano No.5 in D Major, Op.102, No.2

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto
- III. Allegro - Allegro fugato

## Piano Trio

Alfred Schnittke

- I. Moderato
- II. Adagio

# INTERMISSION

## Sonata for Violin & Piano No.21 in E Minor, K.304

Wolfgang A. Mozart

- I. Allegro
- II. Tempo di menuetto

## Piano Trio in A Minor

Maurice Ravel

- I. Modéré
- II. Pantoum: Assez vif
- III. Passacaille: Très large
- IV. Final: Animé

# Notes on the Program

## Foreword

Your program annotator begs your indulgence. With an impending house move and other pressing obligations he isn't able to devote sufficient time to the research, analysis, and writeup of composers and works on this concert. Fortunately there are other more qualified musicologists whose notes are included in today's program brochure along with my own on Mozart: John Palmer (Sonoma State University) on Beethoven, Seth Brodsky (University of Chicago) on Schnittke, and Blair Johnston (Indiana University) on Ravel. I know you will find their commentary illuminating.

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

### Sonata for Cello & Piano No.5 in D Major, Op.102, No.2 (1815)

(~20 minutes)

Beethoven's composition of sonatas for cello and piano was unprecedented; he had no models in the works of Haydn or Mozart. Only recently had the instrument begun to liberate itself from its role in the traditional basso continuo. Also, Beethoven was the first to completely write out the keyboard parts for large-scale cello and keyboard works.

Large temporal gaps appear in Beethoven's composition of sonatas for cello and piano. The first two, Opus 5, were composed in 1796, while Beethoven was in Berlin. He would not embark on another such project until 1807, when he composed the Sonata, Op. 69. Eight years later he would return to the idiom to write a pair of sonatas that appeared as Op. 102.

Published in March 1817 by Simrock in Bonn, the Sonatas for Cello and Piano, Op. 102, were dedicated to the Countess Marie von Erdödy (1779-1837), although only in a later, Vienna publication. The Countess had been friends with the composer since about 1803. Beethoven actually lived with her and her husband, Count Peter Erdödy, for a time in 1808. The Countess, who after leaving Vienna in 1815 continued to correspond with Beethoven, also received the dedication of the Trios, Op. 70. During the last year of the Erdödys' residence in Vienna, they spent the summer at Jedlersee with Beethoven. Because Count Razumovsky's palace had burned down earlier in the year, his resident cellist, Joseph Linke, also spent the summer at Jedlersee with the Erdödy family. Beethoven's close contact with the cellist provided the inspiration for the composition of the Opus 102 cello sonatas. The sonatas of Opus 102 developed during the period of Beethoven's withdrawal from society, perhaps explaining the intimacy of the works. His self-imposed distance from his fellow Viennese was probably in large part due to an increasing deterioration in his hearing – the *Conversation Books* date from 1818 onward.

The final work written by the composer for solo instrument and piano, Beethoven's Sonata for cello and piano No. 5 traverses the terrain covered by the composer in his late string quartets. The overall construction of the sonata, Opus 102/2, reveals Beethoven's continuing quest to create a fluid, "total sonata," that was more than a sum of its movements. Except for Bach's solo suites, this sonata is regarded as the most technically and spiritually taxing major work for cello before the twentieth

century.

Opening without a slow introduction, the first movement of Opus 102/2, marked *Allegro con brio*, is a diminutive sonata-form structure with a harmonically adventurous development section and a modified recapitulation. Unlike all other of Beethoven's cello sonatas, 102/2 contains a fully fledged slow movement. Nevertheless, it is joined to the finale through a harmonic device: the final chord of the *Adagio* is a dominant seventh chord that tends to resolve toward the tonic; the finale, in D major, begins immediately. The most interesting feature of the sonata is the fugue in the last movement. Its harsh-sounding, relentless counterpoint looks ahead to the "Hammerklavier" Sonata and the *Grosse Fuge*. The subject of the cello sonata fugue is obviously derived from Baroque models; this is especially evident in the large leap downward from B natural to C sharp. The return of first-movement themes in the finale seems to function more as reminiscence than as recapitulation.

John Palmer



## **Alfred Schnittke (1934 – 1998)**

### **Piano Trio (1992)**

(~24 minutes)

Alfred Schnittke arranged the *Trio for violin, cello, and piano* in 1992 from his *String Trio* of 1985. The arrangement carries a personal note, dedicated as it was to Schnittke's doctor, Alexander Potapov, who twice saved the composer's life from near-fatal strokes.

The original work was itself quite a personal statement. Commissioned by the Alban Berg Foundation, the Trio inhabits the sound-world of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, including Alban Berg's own music, which Schnittke loved "above all others." The music also moves further back in time, to the classical Vienna of Mozart and Schubert; for Schnittke, that "certain Mozart-Schubert sound" seemed to stem from the composer's early adolescent stay in post-World War II Vienna.

This "Mozart-Schubert sound" that Schnittke used again and again in his works with a compassionate irony is the subject of the String Trio. In addition, the composer's arrangement for piano trio seems to intensify this allusiveness. The thick, almost choral, texture of the String Trio become lighter, more golden and refined by the piano's reserved weight and contrasting color; likewise, the new scoring allows Schnittke to rearrange the intensive motivic activity of the piece – its technical elements carry an even more "classical" attitude.

In two large movements the entire work flows from a simple six-note figure straight out of a Schubert piano sonata. The first movement makes this figure into an obsession. It starts, halts, starts again; it stammers itself out in spaces tonal and atonal, fast and slow, confessional and clamorous. New, derivative themes splinter off; old ones become crushed under the attempted recovery of an illusory repose. Twice, a fantastical Valkyrie-like gallop explodes the movement's fabric, taking off into never-never land. Freud remarks that the individual constantly returns to a traumatic scene in an imaginary space, constantly replaying the trauma, trying out ever-new if ineffectual solutions. In this wandering, pathologically restless *Moderato*, Schnittke seems to enact such a scenario. The movement resolves through exhaustion, spinning out from the opening figure a hobbled four-part

minuet.

The following Adagio offers a peculiar response to the first movement's failed scenes. In reality, it offers no new material, but rather an alienated, reconfigured view of the opening, as if from afar in space and time. Things are sparser, more reflective; Russian dirge-like chorales follow late-Romantic lyricism; the strings sing out longer lines, supported by the crystalline piano writing. At the moment of utmost interiority, the wild gallop returns with a fury previously unheard. After this last cathartic seizure, Schnittke again returns to the opening cadential figure, this time in canon above an oscillating bass. The Moderato's concluding minuet also returns, but with a new clarity; it has moved in nature from wound to replica, to museum-model, and holds a new poignancy. However, the imagination, even at its limits, still houses only images, and so even this last vision sublimates into thin air.

*Seth Brodsky*



**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791)**  
**Piano/Violin Sonata No.21 in E Minor, K.304 (1778)**

*(~12 minutes)*

Mozart was an internationally celebrated piano virtuoso from the age of six, so most of his instrumental compositions prominently feature the piano, which he was expected to play himself in both public and courtly performance. Accordingly, all 36 of his violin sonatas are titled “Sonata for Piano and Violin”. By the age of ten he had written sixteen piano/violin sonatas with the violin in a mostly secondary role, but his mature sonatas, including this one from age 22, display a more balanced collaboration between the two disparate instruments.

Keep in mind that anyone writing music for the piano and any other instrument must be sensitive to the widely different sounds produced by the two players. The piano's striking sound is percussive and potentially much louder but quickly dies away, while the other instrument is generally less capable of such a big initial sound but is able to sustain any note indefinitely, indeed to swell the volume of a long sustained note at will. In Mozart's day the piano was much quieter than today's typical concert piano, and its sound died away much faster as well, but the problem of balance was intrinsic to the compositional challenge even then.

In the summer and fall of 1778, having resigned his salaried position in the Salzburg court a year earlier, Mozart was enjoying popular and critical success in Paris as composer and performer and looking for a steady job. But the sudden illness and death of his mother living with him in Paris cast a dark shadow over his young life and is reflected in the somber E-minor key of this sonata.

While typical sonatas have three or four movements, most of Mozart's seven violin sonatas written in 1778 have only two. The first movement of this one is in sonata form, and the second is in the form of a minuet.

The first-movement *allegro* (briskly) presents two themes in its exposition, one somewhat agitated and bristling in a minor key, the other contrasting in a more soothing major key. The development section gives equal attention to both themes. But the recapitulation offers just a brief restatement

of the dark first theme, and only fragmented echoes of the brighter second theme, reinforcing a feeling of unresolved conflict. It might be overreaching to suggest that the bright major-key second theme stands in for Mozart's mother, and that its absence from the recapitulation signifies her final departure from his world.

The second movement *tempo di menuetto* is in the form of the traditional dance movement rather than the novel and still-emerging sonata form. It remains in the key of E minor, its quietly mournful quality reinforced by the slow stately tempo. A middle "trio" section provides relief with a contrasting theme, but the movement ends the sonata with a reprise of the minor-key minuet and an anguished *forte* conclusion.

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## **Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)**

### **Piano Trio in A Minor (1914)**

(~25 minutes)

The list of twentieth century piano trios may be short, but it contains several gems. One of the most precious is the brilliant specimen written by Maurice Ravel in 1914, shortly before he temporarily abandoned life as a musician to serve as a driver for the French army. The Piano Trio in A minor is a true sonata for three players, rich in the harmonic and textural innovations Ravel had accomplished in the prewar years, but ultimately composed around balanced, quintessentially Classical patterns.

The trio has four movements: *Modéré*, *Pantoum (assez vif)*, *Passacaille*, and *Final (animé)*. The first movement is a strikingly new variety of sonata-allegro form. The first theme, announced by the piano in pianissimo parallel chords at the very opening of the piece and then taken up by the strings in octaves, is like a shadowy recollection of something out of Basque folk music. Its unusual *ostinato* rhythm seems to echo in the mind's ear even after Ravel has moved on to the *Plus lent qu'au début* second theme, unusually set in the same key as the first. A brief development makes way to a truncated recapitulation which in retrospect seems but a preface to an extended coda in which the *ostinato*'s first idea lingers in the lowest bass of the piano until at last it becomes a faint, colorless drone that dies away into nothingness.

The second movement is a playful scherzo that will likely sound the most typically French to most listeners. The *Passacaille* is of course a passacaglia, taking a slow, winding eight-measure pattern as the material to be repeated; the repetition is not strict, and soon a second thematic notion worms its way into the movement, helping to build a massive climax.

Ravel's love of shifting meters is put on display in the quick-paced *Final*, with contrasts between 5/4 and 7/4. Again sonata-allegro form shapes the course of the music, seeping through the cracks of what might at first seem to be a more freely composed exhibition of instrumental passion – and the closing bars, filled with shimmering, never-ending trills from the strings and a wild whoosh or two from the piano, are certainly passionate.

Blair Johnston

## ARTISTS

Since winning the prestigious Naumburg Chamber Music Award in 1989, The Peabody Trio has established itself as an important presence in the chamber music world as vivid interpreters of the classics of the repertoire, advocates for new music, and dedicated teachers and mentors to a generation of young musicians. They bring to their music making what *The Washington Post* calls “the romantic fervor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century greats.”

The Peabody Trio gave its New York debut in 1990 at Alice Tully Hall and has since performed in the most important chamber music series in North America, including New York, Washington, Chicago, Denver, Vancouver, Montreal, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Internationally, they tour frequently in England, making repeat appearances at London’s Wigmore Hall, and in Japan and Israel. Their reputation as champions of new music garnered them an invitation to the first Biennale for contemporary music, *Tempus Fugit*, in Tel Aviv.

Festivals including Tanglewood, Skaneateles, Cape and Islands, and Rockport have played home to their summer performances. Their radio broadcasts include performances on Saint Paul Sunday Morning, Performance Today, Morning Pro Musica, CBC, Radio-Canada, WGBH in Boston, and WQXR in New York. The Peabody Trio collaborates frequently with such eminent artists as clarinetist Charles Neidich, violists Roger Tapping and Maria Lambros, soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson, baritone William Sharp, and actor Andre De Shields. Working with Walter van Dyk and Elizabeth Mansfield, The Peabody Trio is at the forefront of chamber music theater with a series of innovative, collaborative projects involving piano trio and actor.

The Peabody Trio currently serves as the resident faculty ensemble of the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, a position they have held since 1989. They are frequently asked to perform educational residencies for chamber music organizations and have served as visiting professors at universities and conservatories both in the United States and abroad. They spend summers as ensemble-in-residence at the Yellow Barn Music School and Festival in Putney, Vermont.

The Peabody Trio celebrated its twentieth season in 2007-08 with the release of the Beethoven Trios Opus 1, Nos. 1 and 3 on Artek Records, the second in their series of the complete piano trios of Beethoven. The recording was hailed by *Gramophone* as “bold, flexible and vibrant,” while *The Baltimore Sun* praised its “vibrancy and expressive flair.” In 2004 the trio released the Beethoven Opus 70 Trios, which won acclaim from *Strad Magazine* as “some of the most accomplished Beethoven Trio playing ...heard in many a year.” Previously they have recorded for New World Records and CRI.