

NAXOS

HUMMEL

Piano Trios • 1

Nos. 2, 3, 6 and 7

Gould Piano Trio



Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837)

Piano Trios • 1: Nos. 2, 3, 6 and 7

Largely neglected by posterity, Johann Nepomuk Hummel in his own time enjoyed the highest reputation both as a composer and as a virtuoso performer. The increasing availability of his music, whether in print or in recordings, is evidence of the unjustified nature of the posthumous neglect of his work, although neither the bicentenary of his birth nor the 150th anniversary of his death in 1987 aroused the interest that his compositions clearly deserve.

Hummel was born in 1778 in Pressburg, the modern Slovak capital Bratislava, the son of a musician. At the age of four he could read music, at five play the violin and at six the piano. Two years later he became a pupil of Mozart in Vienna, lodging, as was the custom, in his master's house. At Mozart's suggestion the boy and his father embarked in 1788 on an extended concert tour. For four years they travelled through Germany and Denmark and by the spring of 1790 they were in Edinburgh, where they spent three months. There followed visits to Durham and to Cambridge before they arrived, in the autumn, in London. Plans in 1792 to tour France and Spain seemed inopportune at a time of revolution, so that father and son made their way back through Holland to Vienna.

The next ten years of Hummel's career found him occupied in study, in composition and in teaching in Vienna. When Beethoven had settled in Vienna in 1792, the year after Mozart's death, he had sought lessons from Haydn, from Albrechtsberger and from the Court Composer Antonio Salieri. Hummel was to study with the same teachers, the most distinguished Vienna had to offer. Albrechtsberger provided a sound technical basis for his composition, while Salieri gave instruction in writing for the voice and in the philosophy of aesthetics. Haydn, after his second visit to London, gave him some organ lessons, but warned him of the possible effect on his touch as a pianist. It was through Haydn that Hummel in 1804 became *Konzertmeister* to the second Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, effectively doing the work of *Kapellmeister*, a title that Haydn held nominally until his

death in 1809. He had Haydn to thank, too, for his retention of his position with the Esterházy family when, in 1808, neglect of his duties had brought dismissal. His connection with the family came to an end in 1811 but his period of service had given him experience as a composer of church and theatre music, while his father, as director of music at the Theater auf der Wieden and later of the famous Apollo Saal, provided other opportunities.

Hummel had impressed audiences as a child by his virtuosity as a pianist. He returned to the concert platform in 1814, at the time of the Congress of Vienna, a year after his marriage, but it was the Grand Duchy of Weimar, home of Goethe, that was able to provide him, in 1818, with a basis for his career. By the terms of his employment he was allowed leave of absence for three months each spring, a period spent in concert tours. In Protestant Weimar he was relieved of responsibilities for church music but presided at the opera and was, with Goethe, one of the tourist attractions of the place, although in speech his homely Viennese accent sorted ill with the purer speech of the resident literati.

In 1828 Hummel published his study of pianoforte performance technique, a work that enjoyed immediate success and has proved a valuable source for our knowledge of contemporary performance practice. Towards the end of his life his brilliance as a player diminished. This was the age of Liszt and a new school of virtuosity, while Hummel represented a continuation of the classical style of playing of his teacher, Mozart, now carried into the age of Chopin, Liszt, Kalkbrenner and Thalberg.

Hummel's *Piano Trio in F major, Op. 22*, dedicated to Princess Esterházy, dates from 1807. This work is very much of its period, suggesting a musical language familiar from Haydn. The first movement starts with a sonata-form exposition, duly repeated. After a brief development, it is the secondary theme that forms the substance of the recapitulation, bringing a fugal treatment of the melody

before the final section. The B flat major *Andante con variazioni* has the piano introduce the theme, capped by the cello and then the violin. The piano has the first variation, followed by a version for the cello, with plucked chords from the violin. There follows a variation in which the violin assumes prominence, while the cello leads the final version of the material. The fashionable *Rondo alla turca* preserves the features borrowed from the janissary band, with the piano doing much to provide the essential percussive element of what was then known as Turkish music, with its standard harmonies and figuration.

Hummel's *Piano Trio in G major, Op. 35*, was written in 1811. The piano proposes the first subject, with the second subject entrusted to the violin, in a repeated exposition. The characteristic snap rhythm of the first subject is heard at the start of the development, which soon moves into B flat major, with the piano recalling the first subject and the cello the closing theme of the exposition. The triplet figuration of each player in turn is followed by the violin leading into the recapitulation. The second movement is a C major *Tempo di menuetto*, with an F major trio section that gives some prominence to the strings. The last movement is a *Rondo*, marked *Vivace e scherzando*. Its main theme offers a momentary surprise in a sudden pause, framing an episode in D major before returning with a further surprise to the listener. A fugal C major episode is followed by varied forms of the second theme, before the return of the main subject and a reminder of the second superimposed, before the emphatic conclusion.

The *Grand Trio in E flat major, Op. 93*, dates from 1822. The very classical first movement is introduced by the piano with a short rhythmic figure that is to return as the movement proceeds. The second subject is entrusted first to the cello, followed, in a higher register, by the violin, and a further thematic element is introduced to bring the exposition to an end. The development opens in dramatic style. The recapitulation is signalled by the return of the opening motif and theme, with the second subject given now to the violin. The B major slow movement is in broadly ternary form, with shifts of harmony in its central section, before the return of the opening melody. The final *Rondo*, with the spirit of Mozart never too far away, duly uses the opening principal theme to frame contrasting episodes that bring their own due touches of counterpoint and drama.

The last of Hummel's piano trios is the *Piano Trio in E flat major, Op. 96*, which also bears the date 1822. The work was dedicated to Baroness Luise Anna von Könnneritz. The first movement opens with a figure played by all three players, before the violin introduces the first subject proper, with a second subject given to the cello. The exposition is repeated, and the development shifts first to the key of D major, with the varied recapitulation starting with the opening figure of the movement now in A flat. The B flat major second movement is a set of informal variations and the work ends with a *Rondo* with an allegedly Russian lively principal theme.

Keith Anderson

Gould Piano Trio

Lucy Gould, Violin • Alice Neary, Cello • Benjamin Frith, Piano



Photo: Chris Stock

Recently compared to the Beaux Arts Trio by the *Washington Post* for their "musical fire" and dedication to the genre, the Gould Piano Trio continue to bring the masterpieces of their repertoire to an ever-widening public. After winning Melbourne's inaugural International Chamber Music Competition, the Goulds quickly established a worldwide reputation with many tours throughout Europe, the United States, South America, the Far East and New Zealand. After their highly regarded rendition of James MacMillan's *Fourteen Little Pictures*, they commissioned a second piano trio from the composer, given its première at the Bath International Music Festival in May 2014 and subsequently toured in Britain. The Goulds have performed complete cycles of the Dvořák trios at Wigmore Hall and the Beethoven trios at St George's Bristol; this "live" Beethoven appears on the SOMM label. The trio's discography is very far-reaching. Their Brahms cycle is unique in including both his early trios and those for clarinet and horn, and their exploration of the works of the late British romantics such as Stanford, Ireland, Bax, Scott, Milford and

York Bowen (Chandos and Naxos) has brought critical acclaim. The Trio have always found the space in their musical lives to coach, principally at the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama where they hold residencies. Their outreach work with schoolchildren and in the community brings a sense of added communication and perspective to their outlook. Of particular pride is the creation of the Corbridge and the RWCMD festivals by the Gould Piano Trio with clarinettist Robert Plane, where the collaboration with guest artists refreshes their musical inspiration.

Johann Nepomuk Hummel studied with Mozart, later taking lessons from Salieri, and worked closely with Haydn at the court in Esterházy. This exalted pedigree equipped him well for the life of a virtuoso keyboard player and composer, and he became admired as a distinguished writer of church and theatre music in particular. But he did not neglect chamber music, composing a series of *Piano Trios* that reveal his sure command of the idiom. These entertaining works reflect the musical current of the time – with variations, a fashionable and delectable *Rondo alla turca*, snappy rhythms, and warmly lyrical melodies.

Johann Nepomuk
HUMMEL

(1778-1837)

Piano Trios • 1

**Piano Trio No. 6
in E flat major, Op. 93**

19:17

❶ Allegro con moto

7:57

❷ Un poco larghetto

5:33

❸ Rondo: Allegro con brio

5:47

**Piano Trio No. 3
in G major, Op. 35**

14:32

❷ Allegro con brio

7:18

❸ Tempo di menuetto

3:50

❹ Rondo: Vivace e scherzando

3:26

**Piano Trio No. 2
in F major, Op. 22**

13:06

❹ Allegro moderato

5:42

❺ Andante con variazioni

4:11

❻ Rondo alla turca: Vivace

3:13

**Piano Trio No. 7
in E flat major, Op. 96**

18:28

❿ Allegro con spirito

8:24

⓫ Andante quasi allegretto

4:11

⓬ Rondo alla russa: Allegro vivace

5:53

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