

Discovering the Classical String Trio

The Vivaldi project
Elizabeth Field, violin

Allison Edberg Nyquist, violin and viola
Stephanie Vial, cello

Sonata in D major, B.36 (c. 1755-1762)
for two violins and basso

Johann Christian Bach
(1735-1782)

Allegro assai
Allegro grazioso

Sonata in G minor op. 1, no. 2 (1755-1762)
for two violins with a thorough bass for
harpsichord or violoncello

Carlo Antonio Campioni
(1720-1788)

Largo andante
Allegro spiritoso
Allegro assai

Divertimento in D major, H. V:15 (c. 1755-1762)
for two violins and basso

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Adagio
Allegro
Menuet-Trio

Trio in F major, op. 9, no. 3 (1766)
pour deux violons, basse, et cors ad libitum

François-Joseph Gossec
(1734-1829)

Allegretto
Tempo di Minuetto

Intermission

Trio Concertant in A major, op. 33, no. 1 (c. 1780's)
pour violon, alto et violoncelle

Giuseppe Cambini
(1746-1825)

Allegro con grazia
Moderato arioso e cantabile

Trio Concertant et Dialogué in Bb major,
op. 27, no. 4 (c. 1786) a violon, alto, et violoncel

Jean-Baptiste Sébastien Bréval
(1753-1823)

Allegro
Adagio
Presto

Program Notes

The Vivaldi Project has, since 2015, been immersed in the study of the classical string trio—its relationship to the earlier baroque trio sonata (as exemplified by Vivaldi and his contemporaries), and its role as a popular 18th-century genre in its own right side-by-side with the emerging string quartet. Following upon the release of *Discovering the Classical String Trio, vol.1* in the Spring of 2016, we have continued our exploration, seeking out works in libraries around the world, and like kids in a candy store, pouring over mountains of scores. The result of our labors is this evening's program, combining works from our first CD with works soon to be released in *Discovering the Classical String Trio, vol. 2*.

It is curious that only a few Classical string trios survive as celebrated works for today's performers and audiences. These are Beethoven's op. 9 set of three trios, the two youthful works of Schubert (the first unfinished), and the grand six-movement *Divertimento in E flat* by Mozart, notably the sole representative from the 18th century. All are truly masterful works, frequently performed and recorded, but which naturally made us wonder, "Is this really all there is?" The answer is a resounding "No!" The statistics are quite astonishing. As apparent from the Breitkopf thematic catalogue alone, string trios during the period from 1762 to 1770 outnumbered string quartets by more than five to one. Like string trios, the majority of 18th-century quartets were written by lesser-known composers, who while tremendously popular and revered in their own day, have since faded into relative obscurity. Yet as interest in the string trio abated, interest in the quartet only intensified, resulting in the modern phenomenon of the professional string quartet, dedicated to presenting "the great masters" of the past three centuries. Sadly the success of the string quartet, also came with a price: an important, untold part of the chamber music story in works (upwards of 2000 in number) no longer played. More particular is the loss of the richly varied language, style, and techniques specific to the trio and its role in 18th-century musical life.

The D major *Sonata for Two Violins and Basso, B. 36*, one of a set of six by **Johann Christian Bach**, the highly versatile composer and youngest son of J.S. Bach, grabs the listener from its very start. The sudden dynamic contrasts of the opening *Allegro assai*, combined with the ebullient sixteenth notes from the second violin, keep us on the edge of our seats throughout the delightful romp. The minuet-like *Allegro grazioso*, which follows, is as charming and elegantly phrased as its title implies. While little is known about the history of these trios, it is difficult to imagine that they could belong to any period other than Bach's years in Italy. During this transformative period (1755-1762), Bach not only abandoned his Protestant faith, but also fell in love with and began composing opera (the first of his family to do so). Indeed, one can almost feel Bach thinking in the fuller orchestration and the dramatic drive of an Italian overture or symphony.

Selecting one work from among **Carlo Antonio Campioni's** seven sets of trios (42 in all) is no easy matter. The avid music collector and amateur violinist, Thomas Jefferson, evidently agreed, penning to a music vendor that he owned several of Campioni's compositions and "would be glad to have everything else he has composed of solos, duets, or trios." Campioni wrote an unusual number of his trios in minor keys, the equivalent of one in every set with G minor being a clear favorite. The op. 4 set stand out in their treatment of the cello, which is given a true share, and often leading role in the melodic material. In spite of this, the title page of op. 4, like all of his trios, describes a *thorough bass* (improvised keyboard harmonies above an independent bass line) which can be played by either "harpsichord or violoncello." This is a not uncommon option also offered much earlier by Vivaldi and

Corelli, indicative of the fluid relationship between baroque trio sonata and classical string trio and resulting in the frequent mislabeling of the latter as the former. Yet in this case, it is difficult to imagine how the plucking harpsichord could effectively produce such lush bass line melodies, particularly the plaintive rising and falling fourth gesture which characterizes the opening *Largo andante*. The *Allegro spritoso* shows off Campioni's unique brand of Italian flair combined with the French poise, having spent his years in France. The finale *Allegro assai* is a rousing *gigue*, calling to mind bagpipes through the use of open string double stops and clever instrumental pairings.

The Austrian composer **Joseph Haydn** excelled in every musical genre, vocal and instrumental alike. The *Adagio* of the D major Diverimento no. 15 flows like one of his lovely Italian arias. With breathtaking simplicity, the violin floats above as the cello slowly outlines the harmony, with the viola providing a lute-like pizzicato accompaniment. At the same time, the phrases are rarely regular, ebbing and flowing according to melodic contour, rhythmic momentum, and key. The clever manipulation of irregular phrasing also characterizes the *Allegro* which begins with a kind of trumpet or horn-like call to attention and which recurs throughout. A four-bar question opens the *Minuet*, which is then answered in unison by the violins. The voices then imitate each other in the d minor *Trio*, allowing the cello moments to have its say. It is not surprising that these early works, written for connoisseurs around the same time as the op. 1 and op. 2 string quartets, were well-received. Numerous copies of the trios (18 of which survive today) circulated in the 1760s and 70s along with accounts such as Giuseppe Carpani's (Le Haydine, 1812) describing their "singularity of style and seductiveness of manner" which "made them a success everywhere, and the subject of discussion in the profession."

François-Joseph Gossec was one of the most prolific composers and important organizers of musical life in 18th-century France. The path of his career directly reflects the effects of social position and politics on the life of the Parisian musician in the second half of the century: from court composer to independent director of one of Europe's finest orchestras (becoming the first to perform a Haydn symphony in France), to a prominent musical voice for the French Revolution, and culminating in a disappointing career end as the result of shifts in political power. Gossec wrote in a wide range of genres and styles, including instrumental and vocal music for both church and theater, demonstrating a particular flair for orchestration and dramatic sound effects. He continually sought ways to use instruments in new and surprising contexts, which makes it all the more disappointing that the two optional horn parts of op. 9 (also specified by Vanhal in his trios) have not survived. The subtitle of the trios dictates that the first three trios should be played by only "*trois personnes*" and the second three by "*grande orchestra*," with the practical addendum to the parts of the latter that they "can also be played by only three people." The first three are far more densely textured than the second, giving the effect of more than three players. The opening 10 bars of the Trio in F major are like an orchestral introduction, after which we find ourselves in the midst of an operatic aria. A great variety of textures are achieved through murmuring 32nd notes, varied articulations, and techniques like unison passages of up-bow *spiccato*. The cello is given its own voice throughout this *Allegretto* as well as in the large scale *Tempo di minuetto*, which again features many contrasting ideas as well as frequent irregular phrase structures.

The Italian born composer and violinist **Giuseppe Maria Cambini** made his career in Paris and is one of the most prolific composers contributing to the development of both the string quartet and string trio in France. Cambini wrote at least 24 trios for two violins and cello, 18 for violin, viola, and cello, and at least 12 for two violins and viola, a combination which both J. Stamitz and J.C. Bach (and much later Anton Dvorak) also used. Cambini titles a number of his trios, including the op. 33 set, *Trios Concertants*, capitalizing on the light, cheerful, and highly popular *Symphonies Concertantes* (a combination of symphony and concerto, of which Cambini composed 82). Cambini was adept at

knowing how to please his audience, but this is not to diminish the undeniable expertise and considerable deftness with which he composed in the musical language of his day. The first violin beckons us with simple alternating eighth notes into the charming *Allegro con grazia* of the A major trio. The ear is treated to a variety of thematic ideas and one gets glimpses of the language that Beethoven would later use. The *Moderato arioso e cantabile* consists of a set of virtuosic variations, with each *concertante* soloist given a voice and character distinctly its own.

In his chamber music, the French composer and cellist **Jean-Baptiste Bréval** favors the popular title of *Quatours* or *Trios Concertants et Diologués*. Titles were chosen by composers in order to sell their work to the public, and are an important part of a genre's history. The terms “string trio” and “string quartet” came about relatively late. The earliest works tended to be called *Sonate*, then *Divertimenti a tre* or *quattro*, then *Trios*. The term *concertante*, highly popular in the latter half of the 18th century, indicates that the instruments will be more or less equal and to some extent soloists. Combined with *diologué*, the title conjures up the Parisian Salon where guests would gather to engage in polite and appropriate dialogue, and demonstrate their skill in the “Art of Conversation.” The trio in Bb major, op. 27, no. 4, like many of Breval's works (which he and others performed frequently at the *Concert Spirituel*), reflects the Parisian taste for elegant melodies, energetic passage work, and pleasing rather than adventuresome harmonies. Each player gets a turn with bravura passages in the outer fast movements, and lovely, affecting melodies in the flowing triple meter *Adagio*. Showcasing his own instrument, the cello especially is treated to extensive passages in upper registers of thumb position (classic cello writing of the time). The finale *Presto* is an especially crowd-pleasing romp, showing its sense of humor at the end with a simple F major cadence in *piano*.

Notes by Stephanie Vial

Group Bio

Praised for its brilliant and expressive playing, **The Vivaldi Project**, co-directed by Elizabeth Field and Stephanie Vial, is dedicated to presenting innovative programs of Baroque and Classical string repertoire that combine scholarship and performance to both educate and delight audiences. The period instrument ensemble takes its name from the virtuoso violinist and innovative composer Antonio Vivaldi in recognition of his pivotal position between earlier Baroque and later Classical composers (those well known and beloved as well as those rarely heard). The Vivaldi Project's educational arm, *The Institute for Early Music on Modern Instruments (EMMI)*, offers professional string players and advanced students the opportunity to study historical performance practices using their own modern instruments. The Vivaldi Project is a 2018 recipient of the Wolf Kahn & Emily Mason Foundation in support of its educational video project. www.thevivaldiproject.org

Reviews of Discovering the Classical String Trio Vol. 1, MSR Classics

“This is superb playing that will certainly lead to a renewed interest in the genre . . . highly recommended.” —FANFARE MAGAZINE

“The pieces here are stylish, charming and full of inventive writing . . . The performances are superb—sensitive and vital.” —COLORADO PUBLIC RADIO, Top 5 Pick

“The repertoire is charming, and the playing, on original instruments, is superb. This is lovely music, beautifully played, and deserves to be heard much more often.” —STRINGS MAGAZINE

Individual Bios

Violinist **Elizabeth Field**, distinguished for her passionate and stylistic playing on both period and modern instruments, is the founder of The Vivaldi Project. Field is concertmaster of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem and also performs with a wide variety of ensembles throughout the US: from Washington DC's acclaimed Opera Lafayette to the Sun Valley Summer Symphony. In addition to period instrument recordings for Hungaroton, Naxos, and Dorian, Field has performed and recorded extensively for Deutsche Grammophon with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Field holds a DMA from Cornell University in 18th-century performance practice and has held professorships at Sacramento State University and the University of California at Davis. She is a regular guest teacher at The Curtis Institute and is an adjunct professor at George Washington University. Her DVD with fortepianist Malcolm Bilson, *Performing the Score*, explores 18th-century violin/piano repertoire and has been hailed by Emanuel Ax as both "truly inspiring" and "authoritative."

Allison Edberg Nyquist's violin playing has been described by The Chicago Sun Times as "impeccable, with unerring intonation and an austere beauty." Ms. Nyquist has performed throughout North America, collaborating with many of the top baroque ensembles, including Chatham Baroque, The Washington Bach Consort, Haymarket Opera Company, and Apollo's Fire. Her discography includes recordings for the Eclectra, Delos, MSR Classics, and Centaur CD labels. Ms. Nyquist is concertmaster of the Indianapolis Baroque Orchestra, and a member of Ensemble Voltaire, Third Coast Baroque (Chicago), and The Vivaldi Project. She was Artistic Director of Music City Baroque (Nashville) and adjunct professor of baroque violin at the Blair School of Music, on the violin faculties of Lawrence University, Ohio State University and Interlochen Arts Camp and served as viola professor at Indiana State University and DePauw University.

Stephanie Vial is a widely respected cellist, praised for her technical flair and expressive sense of phrasing. Vial performs regularly in early music ensembles throughout the US and has given solo and chamber music concerts, lectures, and master classes at numerous universities and institutions: including The Shrine to Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, The University of Virginia, Duke University, and The Curtis Institute of Music. Vial holds a DMA in 18th-century performance practice from Cornell University. Her book, *The Art of Musical Phrasing in the Eighteenth Century: Punctuating the Classical "Period,"* published by the University of Rochester Press, was praised by Malcolm Bilson as "inspired scholarship" and "essential reading." She has recorded for the Dorian Label, Naxos, Hungaroton, and Centaur Records. Vial calls Durham, NC, home, where she is a lecturer at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.