

Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959): Trio for Flute, Violin and Piano, H. 254

Bohuslav Martinů's Trio for Flute, Violin and Piano was written for The Moyse Trio, a highly-acclaimed French chamber ensemble that consisted of flutist Marcel Moyse, Marcel's son Louis on piano, and Louis' wife Blanche Honneger Moyse on violin. Formed prior to World War II, the Moyse Trio performed throughout Europe for many years, eventually relocating to Vermont, where they became co-founders of the Marlboro Music School and Festival and the Brattleboro Music Festival. The Moyse family, who were close friends with Martinů, premiered this work in 1937 and then recorded it in 1938, making this the first of Martinů's works to ever be released on a recording.

Martinů began composing at age ten and was accepted to the Prague Conservatory not long after. Unfortunately, he was expelled from the school after several years of study, but his 400+ compositions, many of them chamber works, have stood the tests of both time and criticism making him one of the outstanding Czech composers of the twentieth century. His style is strongly nationalistic, scattered with influences from French culture, the wealth of impressionist music in Europe during his lifetime, and the surge of popularity around a unique style of music that was coming from the pen of Russian composer Igor Stravinsky.

The piece has no introduction, leading directly from the first note into an energetic kaleidoscope of sound. The opening movement, *Allegro poco moderato*, is always pressing forward, even during the brief lyrical interludes from each instrument. Brilliant counterpoint and lively Czech character set the tone for the remaining movements.

The *Adagio* begins in a haunting, contemplative place. The flute and violin move around each other freely in a way that encourages deep reflection, yet never reaching a place of darkness or sadness. The harmonic tensions that form over the short movement are ultimately lifted to a sweet, smooth close.

Then, the *Allegretto* takes off with a cheerful, brisk theme similar to that of the first movement, creating a whimsical character out of rapidly moving figures from all three instruments. A central trio features a sweet lyrical melody for the flute, which is shared with the violin before the allegretto theme returns.

Melding jazzy French rhythms and Czech folk melodies, the piano leads the way into the *Moderato* finale. Martinů continues to unveil his inventive characters through a series of variations for all three instruments as the trio comes to a delightful end in C major.

Josef Suk (1874-1935): Piano Trio, Opus 2

Josef Suk's music is appropriately placed in the center of today's program, as he was both Dvořák's student and Martinů's teacher. He was also the second violinist in the Czech Quartet for much of his life, which encouraged his interest in composing for chamber ensembles.

The Piano Trio, Suk's first complete work that survives today, was composed when he was just 15 years old, during his early years at the Prague Conservatory. Many evenings of reading chamber music with his school friends inspired Suk to try his hand at composing a new piece for the group. The Piano Trio, Op. 2 was the result of that experiment, subsequently catching the attention of his professor Karel Steckler, to whom Suk ultimately dedicated the piece. Steckler suggested that the trio—after several revisions—be performed on a recital celebrating the arrival of Antonin Dvořák, who was joining the faculty at the Conservatory. After this performance, Suk became one of Dvořák's composition students upon Steckler's high recommendation.

The three movement work begins with an *Allegro* theme produced by a pattern of emphatic chords from all three voices. Then, this idea remains in the piano while a dotted melody takes shape in the strings. Tension is frequent, but the music moves through a remarkable development section and ultimately resolves into the warmth of C major. The lyrical second theme introduced by the cello offers contrast and balance to the boldness of the opening.

The second movement provides a dramatic change of mood, the harmonies lilting and swaying with elegance. The lightness of this *Andante* allows space for the cello, violin and piano each to really sing. The movement comes to a most pleasant end, leaving only peace in its wake. Syncopated dance rhythms and playfulness pervade in the third and final movement.

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904): Serenade for Winds, Cello and Double Bass, Opus 44

“Take a look at Dvořák’s *Serenade for Wind Instruments*; I hope you will enjoy it as much as I do,” Johannes Brahms wrote in a letter to violinist Joseph Joachim. “It would be difficult to discover a finer, more refreshing impression of really abundant and charming creative talent. Have it played to you; I feel sure the players will enjoy doing it!”

Dvořák’s *Serenade for Winds, Cello and Double Bass* is an extroverted serenade with Czech musicality and tradition at its heart. Dvořák was somewhat slow to succeed as a composer in comparison to many of his musical predecessors who began composing as young children. He was 31 years old at the time his music was first publicly performed. However, at the age of 37, he completed his first set of Slavonic Dances for orchestra, which quickly changed his reputation and catapulted him to the top of the list of Eastern European classical composers in the late 19th century.

Only months before this shift in momentum, Dvořák had also completed his only *Serenade for wind instruments*, paying tribute to a particular style of music initially made popular by Mozart. Despite its distinctly Czech influence, Dvořák’s serenade frequently looks back to Mozart’s, paying particular homage to the *Gran Partita*. Dvořák’s orchestration was inspired by Mozart’s choice to omit flutes and higher strings; and to make it his own, Dvořák added a cello for more support in the lower register and an unexpected textural element in an ensemble composed primarily of wind instruments.

The piece begins with a fervently nationalistic march subject followed by a second theme utilizing rocking dotted rhythms. The second movement, a graceful *Menuetto*, is based around a Czech folk dance called the sousedská, or neighbor’s dance. Suddenly, the trio section switches gears with a fiery *Furiant*, another type of Eastern European dance, highlighted by shifted accents and rapidly flying passages in the higher voices.

Oboe and Clarinet take the lead in the *Andante con moto*, sharing a serene melody with gently pulsing accompaniment from the horns. Momentum and tension build to a bold climax, but the lyrical melodies from the oboe and clarinet return, bringing the movement to a peaceful close.

Despite its D minor foundation, the work as a whole carries a constant sense of optimism. The first three movements each end calmly and quietly, allowing for brief moments to cleanse the palate for the vitality and vibrancy that will soon follow. The *Finale*, which prominently features a return to the original march theme, is filled with unstoppable energy and captivating drive.