

47

Ludwig van Beethoven Trio in C Major for two Oboes and English Horn, Opus 87

Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto: Allegro molto-Scherzo
Finale: Presto

John Mack, oboe
Joseph Turner, oboe
Patricia Grignet, English horn

NOTES BY FREDERICK DORIAN

MARLBORO RECORDING SOCIETY

Mischa Schneider, *Artistic Director*
Marlboro Music Festival, Marlboro, Vermont

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TIMING: Side 1—8:10, 6:01, 1:39, 4:56. Total—20:46

MRS-4

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born in Bonn, December 16, 1770; died in Vienna, March 26, 1827

A Favorite Medium

The chamber music ensemble of the trio played a crucial part in Beethoven's creative life. His Opus 1, composed from 1793 to 1795, is a set of three trios (in E-flat major, G major, and C minor) for violin, piano and cello. But prior to this *opus primum*, Beethoven had composed, during the earlier years in his native Bonn, a three-movement trio in E-flat.

A second set of trios (in D major and E-flat major), Opus 70, was completed in 1806 and published in 1809. In his Opus 97 (the so-called *Archduke Trio* in B-flat, completed in 1811), Beethoven reached an unsurpassable peak of mastery within this specific medium.

A number of additional Beethoven trios have become part of the chamber music repertory. To this category belong the trios, Opus 3; Opus 8 (*Serenade*); the three trios for violin, viola and cello, Opus 9; the piano trio Opus 11, and others.

The standard works in this medium have obscured the two trios, Opus 87 and Opus 44, heard on this Marlboro record. Every Beethoven lover—that is to say, every serious musician—will welcome the acquaintance with these unfamiliar works. As it happens, they are issued on the eve of the world-wide celebration of Beethoven's two-hundredth birthday.

Of the two works, the *Trio in C Major, Opus 87* is cast in a most unusual combination, namely for two oboes and English horn. The Vienna publisher Artaria issued the trio also in two other versions: as a trio for two violins and viola, as well as a sonata for violin and piano. There were still other arrangements of Opus 87 on the shelves of music publishers for a long

time. But only the original version for woodwinds does justice to the specific qualities of Beethoven's instrumental imagination.

The relatively high opus number of the *Trio, Opus 87* is misleading as far as the chronology of composition is concerned. Beethoven's work numbers pertain to the dates of publication rather than of origin and completion. So it is that the *Trio in C major* for two oboes and English horn, finished in 1794, received the high opus number 87. The score was not published until 1806, twelve years after its completion.

Beethoven scored, probably in 1796, another work for the same trio of woodwinds. His variations on Mozart's theme "Là ci darem la mano" (from the opera *Don Giovanni*) are likewise cast for two oboes and English horn.

It is likely that the Teimer brothers, virtuoso woodwind players and members of the Imperial Orchestra in Vienna, either commissioned Beethoven to write these two trios, or at least suggested their completion to him. In a concert of the Tonkünstler Gesellschaft on December 23, 1793, Johann, Franz and Philipp Teimer introduced a trio for two oboes and English horn by the German composer Helmbrecht-Wendt. The eminent Beethoven scholar Gustav Nottebohm (1817–1882) believed that the *Terzetto* by Helmbrecht-Wendt stimulated Beethoven to write the *Trio in C, Opus 87*.

The *Variations in E-flat Major for Pianoforte, Violin and Violoncello* were published in 1804 as Opus 44 by Hoffmeister in Leipzig. The date of completion is uncertain. But the following opinions deserve attention and study.

Nottebohm assigns Opus 44 to the last years of Beethoven's Bonn period. He came to this conclusion because a sketch of the *Variations*

appears along side of one for the song "Feuerfarb." We know that Beethoven set this poem to music prior to 1793.

Alexander Wheelock Thayer, author of the first comprehensive biography of Beethoven, believed that the *Variations, Opus 44* were written at the time of the *Septet, Opus 20*—around 1800.

Hugo Riemann, the great historian and theorist, places the *Variations* at a somewhat later time and gives intrinsically compositional reasons: he dates the *Variations* after the turn of the century, coinciding with the time of the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*. This estimate (as we shall see in the analysis of *Opus 44*) has considerable merit.

Neither the *Trio, Opus 87* nor the *Variations,*

Opus 44 have found much praise on the part of biographers and critics. Paul Bekker's life of Beethoven is one of the notable exceptions. Obviously it is not difficult to find a few faults in the works of the young composer. It is more gratifying to study the impeccable craftsmanship and instrumental fantasy of the young genius. In some of the compositional aspects of the two trios, the manner of Beethoven's teacher Haydn is reflected. Mozart's grace, likewise, illuminates some of Beethoven's structures, always cast with iron firmness.

"Receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands!"—this beautiful exhortation by Count Ferdinand Waldstein, addressed to Beethoven at his departure from Bonn to Vienna, is fulfilled on the finest pages of these two trios.

Trio in C Major for two Oboes and English Horn, Opus 87

The *Wind Trio in C Major* is an amply designed score. Its four movements (*allegro, adagio, minuet* and *finale*) are typical of the classical sonata cycle.

This insufficiently known Beethoven score has actually a great deal of interest. Goethe's observation that a master shows himself by voluntarily accepted restriction (*Beschränkung*) applies perfectly to the young Beethoven. He confines himself in this work to three members of the oboe family. With uncanny craftsmanship and imagination, he overcomes various handicaps. The compass of these oboes is restricted to treble and alto register. Their tone is similar. Numerous technical difficulties, such as breath control, are hurdles to the free unfolding of contrapuntal part-writing. In spite of all limitations, Beethoven succeeded in composing a full-length cyclic work of crystalline lines. The two oboes express a multitude of moods from the deeply earnest to the humorous and comical. The English horn provides the necessary depth to this tone play and excels at cer-

tain places with soloistic prominence. The score bristles with technical problems for the three instruments. It becomes obvious that Beethoven wrote the *Trio* for woodwind players of unquestioned virtuosity.

In Beethoven's time, the reed of the oboe was somewhat broader than the reeds used today, and the resulting sound was probably heavier. The English horn was rarely employed at the end of the eighteenth century. Its range is a fifth lower than that of the oboe. Therefore the English horn was also called "the alto oboe," and its tone is more sonorous and melancholy than that of the oboe.

I

The opening *allegro* of *Opus 87* displays sonata form. There is a "curtain" of two bars, in which the trio of oboes sounds the tonic chord. The theme (C major, 4/4) is first proposed by the English horn. It is answered in the distance of one bar by the first oboe.

In the next section, the oboe expands the theme to a phrase curiously reminiscent of the famous aria "Che farò senza Euridice" from Gluck's opera *Orpheus*. Is this one of Beethoven's musical games? Is it a subconscious citation of the opera that Beethoven so greatly admired?

In any case, the dotted head motive retains its structural significance throughout the movement and, to a certain extent, even throughout the entire work.

The subordinate subject with the first oboe leading is heard in the dominant key, according to a plan typical of early classical sonata form. The English horn engages the first oboe in a two-part canon. Brilliant scale work connects with the simple closing theme, heard in all instruments.

The development is relatively brief. Both the main and the subordinate themes are worked out, and their sequential fragments are heard in modulations.

The recapitulation does not dispense with the introductory tonic chords and temporarily follows the exposition. Eventually there occur changes, such as a certain amount of reinstrumentation.

The second oboe now participates more intensely in thematic statements. Thus the reprise compensates by making each of the three parts important.

II

The second movement typifies the poetic *adagios* of Beethoven's youth. The melody (F major, 3/4) dominates a predominantly monothematic design. It includes development, recapitulation and *codetta*.

The first oboe is entrusted with the lovely theme. Its accompanying "sighing" figures play a role in the oncoming *minuet*, whereas other building stones of the *adagio* melody are reminiscent of the first movement. Thus Beethoven's early score displays important traits of the the-

matic unification that was to assume great significance in the works of the mature master.

As the *adagio* unfolds, the English horn excels with an almost recitative-like figuration. This long flowing line is not easy to perform on the double reed instrument (because of the problem of breath control). We will encounter similar virtuoso passages in the finale.

III

The third movement bears a triple identification: *menuetto*; *allegro molto*; *scherzo*. The composite heading points to the pioneering *scherzo* type of Beethoven.

The title "*menuetto*" is misleading. This *minuet* is not akin to the French court dance which found its way into the early classical sonata cycle. Nor is Beethoven's *minuet* related to the kind of Austrian *Ländler* which Haydn not rarely placed, under the name of *minuet*, between the slow and last movements of his symphonies, sonatas or quartets. The *allegro molto* in Beethoven's Opus 87 bears only the name of the *minuet*.

In meter and expression, the third movement of the *C major Trio* is a new type of *scherzo*. It represents a new form that became one of Beethoven's most characteristic contributions to the sonata cycle.

Thus the *scherzo* of Opus 87, while still named *menuetto*, retains the light-footed 3/4 meter of the *minuet* but sacrifices its courtly elegance. The dance assumes a faster tempo; the expression is gay, even exuberant.

The English horn introduces the *minuet* with the kind of "rocket theme" favored by the composers of the so-called Mannheim School and found in many scores of the young Beethoven. The "rocket theme" is successively performed by the English horn and second oboe and finally absorbed by all three instruments. New figures keep it company.

The *Trio* section is introduced by syncopated chords. It maintains the jovial character of its

environment. Following this *trio*, the *minuet* is performed without repeats and bridges to a *coda*. The main motive is now heard like a merry fanfare.

IV

Finally we hear a *rondo*. Its lively theme (C major, 2/4) is marked *presto*. We hear its antecedent performed *staccato* and *piano*. The consequent is played *forte*.

The *rondo* displays diversity through a number of episodes. The first of these is a long run of brilliant passages, produced in triplets by the first oboe. Its long solo compensates for the recitative of the English horn in the *adagio*.

The principal section of the *rondo* returns

and gives way to a development treated as a *fugato*. *Dolce*, the English horn announces the fugal subject (an augmented version of a motive appearing in the principal section). The three instruments carry the *fugato* subject successively. Later, an inversion of the fugal subject dominates the *stretto* between English horn and the first oboe.

There is another repetition of the principal section, followed again by the rapid scale work of the first oboe. The inverted part of the development (*fugato*) follows suit and leads to a *coda*, which has the character of an extended cadence. The trio of instruments, playing as a team, aims for the six-four chord, and resolves it with a trill for the cheerful ending.

Fourteen Variations in E-flat Major for Piano, Violin and Cello, Opus 44

The *Fourteen Variations, Opus 44* were published in 1804, the year of the completion of the *Eroica*. A few analogies with the magnificent *Eroica* finale, likewise a variation movement, come to mind.

Both the *Fourteen Variations* and the *Eroica* are in E-flat major. The variation themes are both in double time. In both cases, the thematic material appears in two basic shapes: first as a unison-octave pattern, stated as a theme. It is given out without harmony. During one of the variations, the theme appears as a bass to an evolving melody. The procedure in Opus 44 forecasts aspects of the variation technique applied in the last movement of the *Eroica*.

Tema; Andante

The theme of the *Fourteen Variations* Opus 44 has twenty-two measures and is announced by all three instruments. Their octaves freely circumscribe first the broken tonic chord of E-flat major, and later other main chords of this key.

In the theme, stated in eighth notes, *alla breve*, there are rests on the off-beats. The melodic range, for the time being, is limited to one octave. All three parts are heard in ascending and descending progression.

In the fourteenth bar, the voices land on the dominant B-flat with a *fermata* and round up the movement with a simple cadential scheme. This harmonic blueprint of the theme is reflected in the different variations of the evolving series.

I

The first variation retains the tempo and basic key relationship. The thematic melody belongs to the piano but is embellished by adding sixteenth notes to the preceding eighth notes in the right hand, which sustains this pattern throughout the variation.

The two string instruments, always *staccato*, underscore the chordal figuration of the left hand on the piano. Gradually, the outline of the original theme is somewhat altered.

II

In the second variation (*dolce*) we hear the piano as a solo. Scalewise ascending and descending passages of neighboring eighth notes prevail. Both violin and cello remain silent.

The variation introduces turns as embellishments and, toward its end, chromatic triplets. The accidentals veil the contours of the theme. The left hand plays a rocking motion of eighth notes.

III

Each of the three instruments pursues a different rhythm. In the violin, the theme is often suggested by the first note of its triplet pattern. This is set in counterpoint to the rocking broken chords of the piano. The accompanying notes of the cello correspond to the left hand of the piano, both in pitch and rhythm.

IV

The cello, ascending to the tenoral register, continues the scale passages of eighth notes that the piano had initiated in the second variation. Here, in the fourth variation, the piano provides a simple accompaniment of quarter notes, set in horizontal and vertical dimension. The violin remains silent throughout.

V

The fifth variation resolves the theme into a triplet figure performed by both hands of the piano in octaves. Again the thematic intervals are frequently heard in the first note of each triplet (comparable to the treatment of the violin in variation III).

Violin and cello merely sustain the changing harmonies in long-held notes. Thus the strings make for a sparse chordal accompaniment. There is a varied use of dynamics.

VI

All instruments participate in the unison-octave statement of the theme (as they did at the

very beginning of the series). But now the articulation has changed to a brisk *staccato*, played by the ascending and descending eighth notes. The thematic melody occasionally coincides with the original metric structure.

VII

Key, meter and tempo change in the seventh variation, which is a *largo* in the parallel minor key. The cello recalls the original theme, adjusted to a gently swinging 6/8 rhythm. The violin continues the melodic thread. And as the variation unfolds, both string instruments alternate in the performance of brief thematic phrases.

The harmonic accompaniment of the piano marks the 6/8 rhythm. The tone volume remains reduced throughout the movement.

VIII

The slow tempo extends into the eighth variation. It is more complex than the preceding one. We hear an *adagio* (E-flat major, 2/2). The structure is of special interest. The original theme of the variations—the broken triad unison—appears in this eighth variation as bass (in the left hand of the keyboard part). But the theme receives a melody performed by the right hand of the piano.

Violin and cello share the triplet rhythm familiar from earlier variations. It remains an *ostinato* throughout. The tenacious return of the triplets unyieldingly cuts across the thematic performance heard on the keyboard. And thus the eighth variation achieves both an unexpected contrapuntal play and a new combination of sonorities.

In the *Eroica* variations, Beethoven follows an analogous procedure: the original unison theme later appears as bass to a theme borrowed from the *Prometheus Ballet*.

IX

The ninth variation restores the *tempo primo*, i.e., the initial *andante* of the theme, which is

discovered in certain eighth notes played by the *staccato* octaves of the piano. Violin and cello, jointly, comment on this thematic elaboration in changing intervals.

The entrances dovetail in the center of the variation. Toward the end, the *staccato* pattern is heard only in the strings, set in counterpoint against the series of trills performed on the keyboard.

X

A syncopated rhythm springs forth in the piano. The strings first play the theme in the original unison pattern. But the piano continues to dominate the tenth variation, when the strings retire to a sparse harmonic complement. The *sforzatos* on the weak beat give the dynamics a typically Beethovenian accent.

XI

Sempre dolce, the cello has the lead. Before long, it shares the melody with the violin. Both perform a sequence of five-note patterns. The thematic melody is found in the fourth and fifth note of this figuration.

The piano remains in the background. Both hands perform in the bass register, the right hand adhering to the triplet pattern.

XII

In the twelfth variation, the dotted rhythm again becomes thematically important. The head motive, both in direct and inverted positions, is shared alternately by all three instruments. Their entrances dovetail.

There are new aspects of articulation. Thus the theme fragments appear *staccato*, and contrast to the flowing triplet accompaniment (in the left hand of the piano).

XIII

The thirteenth variation, like the *largo* of the seventh, expresses earnest sentiment in slow motion. In the parallel minor key of E-flat, the theme is intoned *pianissimo* and spins itself forth in wide arches (performed by the right hand on the keyboard).

The thematic *legato* yields to sudden *sforzatos* on the fourth beat. The role of the string instruments is reduced to an occasionally syncopated accompaniment. At times, the cello reaches a higher pitch than the alto register to which the violin occasionally descends. This crossing of voices contributes to the harmonic color of the setting.

XIV

The fourteenth and final variation is the most extended of the series. The subdivision is more complex.

The key of E-flat major is restored for an *allegro* in 6/8. Thematic fragments, easily recognized, are altered in new melodic and rhythmic variants.

The first eight-bar period belongs to the piano in a kind of "note against note" setting. In the next period, the two string instruments join. Again, the piano solo prefaces the performance of the complete trio in this rondo-like variation.

An *andante* in G minor (the relative key) replaces the *allegro*. The time signature changes to *alla breve*. The setting of the *andante* temporarily recalls variation XIII. A cadenza-like flurry of the piano lands on the ubiquitous dominant seventh chord, and leads with a trill to the main key of E-flat major. Theme fragments form a brief *stretto*.

The piano forms a bridge to the final *presto*. It concludes the variation series *fortissimo*.

Ludwig van Beethoven Fourteen
Variations in E-flat Major for Piano, Violin
and Cello, Opus 44

Rudolf Serkin, piano
Hidetaro Suzuki, violin
Ronald Leonard, cello

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