



CLEVELAND
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM NOTES

Junction Trio

May 11, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.

Saint Paschal Baylon

Ghostst

John Zorn

Born: New York, 1953

Composed: 2015

One of the most versatile creative musicians of our time, John Zorn has been active in jazz, rock, film music, Jewish music as well as in what we might call, for lack of a better word, “classical concert music.” In each of these categories, he references an extremely wide range of earlier music, from the movie scores of Ennio Morricone to the 14th-century French composer Guillaume de Machaut. The piano trio *Ghosts* takes its cue from Beethoven's so-called *Ghost Trio* (Op. 70, No. 1), whose extremely slow second movement is filled with unusual

harmonies, eerie tremolos and sudden emotional outbursts. If we may feel in a haunted house listening to the Beethoven, Zorn's piece will make us think that the ghosts are on the attack.

Isolated musical gestures, involving many extended techniques and dramatic surprises, create a spooky atmosphere from the very beginning. As in the Beethoven movement which served as inspiration, the tempo is mostly slow, but the intensity increases steadily right up to the explosive ending.

Piano Trio

Charles Ives

Born: Danbury, CT, 1874

Died: New York, 1954

Composed: 1904-11

Charles Ives was a musical innovator if ever there was one. Yet, paradoxically, his

innovations were always grounded in a profound nostalgia for the past. His music is

full of quotes from the old church hymns and other traditional songs he had grown up with in Connecticut, but he subjected those familiar tunes to elaborate polyrhythmic and polytonal games, suggesting that the world from which the tunes had come had changed almost beyond recognition.

In the case of the Piano Trio, many of the source melodies were associated with Yale University, Ives's alma mater. The three movements seem to represent three aspects of college life—an academic lecture, students having fun, and a Sunday church service on campus, respectively.

The first movement contains three segments of equal length and very similar content. The first segment is played only by the cello and the piano, and the second by the violin and piano, and it is only the third time that all three instruments join together. The intricate rhythmic interplay and the serious delivery suggest, according to Ives's wife Harmony, “an old professor of Philosophy.”

The second movement bears the letters “TSIAJ” as its title—an abbreviation that, as Ives revealed, stands for “This Scherzo Is A Joke.” (Of course, the Italian

word *scherzo* does mean “joke.”) It is a joyous medley of popular tunes, sometimes close to their original form, sometimes more distorted, sometimes superimposed on top of one another like the two village bands that, according to the well-known story, Ives's father George had directed, having them play two different marches at the same time.

Serious once again, the last movement nevertheless follows the same technique as the second, weaving together different traditional melodies—mostly church hymns in this case, combined with several original themes, and culminating in a highly emotional version of Thomas Hastings's hymn “Rock of Ages.” At the end, the tune is left hanging in mid-air as the piano ends the piece alone, in an inconclusive yet deeply satisfying way.

In 1948, Mrs. Ives recalled that the Trio had received a “private performance in New York some 30 years ago.” The first public performance, however, did not take place until May 24, 1948, when the Baldwin-Wallace Faculty Trio (George Poinar, Esther Pierce and John Wolaver) played it in Berea, Ohio.

Piano Trio No. 6 in B-flat major (“Archduke”), Op. 97 Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: Bonn, 1770

Died: Vienna, 1827

Composed: 1811

When Beethoven played through his new piano trio for his close friend, Countess Josephine Brunswick, they both felt that a particularly important work had been born. The year was 1811: the forty-year-old Beethoven was at the height of his powers, and at the peak of what latter-day musicologists have called his “heroic,” or “middle” period. Composed just before the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, the

“Archduke” Trio, as it has become known in the English-speaking world, manages to be grandiose and playful at the same time: grandiose in its dimensions and in the tone of several of its themes, and playful in many details of elaboration.

The opening theme of the first movement is one of those majestic gestures that appear in several of Beethoven's middle-period works (compare the opening

of the String Quartet in F major, Op. 59, No. 1, or the Piano Sonata in F-sharp major, Op. 78). Yet the movement as a whole oscillates between such weighty statements and lighter, almost humorous episodes. Contrary to the norm, the exposition does not modulate from B-flat major to the dominant key (F major), but instead to G major. This detail would seem to be a mere technicality, but even those without perfect pitch may notice that the flow of the harmonies does not proceed in a straight line but involves some unexpected twists that are, in fact, quite audible. In the development section, Beethoven uses his favorite technique of breaking up his melodic material into small fragments; in this trio, he carries this procedure to the extreme, reaching a point where the two string instruments play *pizzicato* (plucking the strings) and the piano keeps repeating a rhythmic fragment that isolates a very small element of the theme. Beethoven then puts the theme back together for the recapitulation, which ends with a truly grandiose coda.

The second-movement scherzo begins with an unaccompanied cello theme that is little more than an ascending major scale in dance rhythm. This simple opening turns into a lively and exciting movement, irresistible in its melodic power. The middle section develops a chromatic theme in

imitation (started again by the unaccompanied cello) and bursts out in an energetic waltz tune. After a number of most unusual modulations, the first section of the scherzo is repeated, followed by a brief coda based on the middle section.

The third-movement “Andante cantabile” is a set of variations on a beautiful hymn-like theme first presented by the piano. In the first four variations, the melody becomes more and more ornate, until the theme returns in its original form and a final *espressivo* variation leads directly into the finale—a rondo where the playful elements definitely predominate. Using a harmonic trick he has introduced elsewhere (most famously in the last movement of the Piano Concerto No. 4), the music starts in the “wrong” key, only reaching B-flat major at the end of the first phrase. There is a dynamic episode in C minor and a “Presto” coda whose first half, again quite audibly, suddenly veers off into the distant key of A major. Beethoven upsets the tonal balance only to restore it for the “home run” of the piece—a dashing variation of the rondo theme in tarantella rhythm. Twice, the music stops teasingly on a *fermata* (an elongated note or rest) before reaching the final cadence.

-Peter Laki

Mr. Laki is a musicologist and Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Bard College. He has been the annotator for the Society's program booklet since 2012, having previously served as annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra from 1990 to 2007. He is a native of Budapest and holds a Ph.D. in music from the University of Pennsylvania.