

Dvořák

Piano Trio No. 1 in B flat major Op. 21 (B51)

Piano Trio No. 2 in G minor Op. 26 (B56)



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Trio des Alpes

Antonín Dvořák

(Nelahozeves, 1841 - Prague, 1904)

Piano Trio No. 1 in B flat major Op. 21 (B51)

34:38

01	Allegro molto	13:12
02	Adagio molto e mesto	09:06
03	Allegretto scherzando	06:24
04	Finale: Allegro vivace	05:56

Piano Trio No. 2 in G minor Op. 26 (B56)

30:20

05	Allegro moderato	11:29
06	Largo	06:52
07	Scherzo: Presto	05:45
08	Allegro non tanto	06:14

Running Time

65:03

Trio des Alpes

Hana Kotková, Violin

Claude Hauri, Cello

Corrado Greco, Piano

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK.

Piano Trios Op. 21 and Op. 26

Antonín Dvořák's chamber music is still only partially known today; except for a few compositions, and despite the author's undisputable renown, it is rarely performed. Needless to say, it is a pity, because there are excellent pages that, played more frequently, could significantly add to the sclerotic repertoire of chamber music concert programmes. It includes, among other things, fourteen string quartets, two piano quartets, two piano quintets, and two string quintets, in addition to the four piano trios, the recording of which the *Trio des Alpes* complete with this second release. The most famous of these trios is undoubtedly the last one, the so-called *Dumky Trio* Op. 90 composed by Dvořák in 1890 and consisting of six extraordinarily melodic and expressive short lyrical pages; the remaining three works, however, are not to be underestimated.

Dvořák was born in Nelahozeves, not far from Prague, Bohemia, in 1841. Bohemia was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (the Austrian Emperor was also King of Bohemia). Its population, especially in the countryside, was largely Slavic, but in cities there were flourishing German communities consisting of state officials, traders, and professionals, and German, with its prestige, was clearly the main cultural language. The Bohemian people's rightful nationalist aspirations, therefore, not only were met by the comprehensible resistance of Vienna's central administration, but also clashed

against the will of a substantial part of the population who felt they were German in language and culture and wanted to remain such. In the middle of the 1800s, however, nationalism began to gain ground in the cities and among the Bohemian intellectuals, significantly influencing the music that was being produced and performed in the country – music that was, so to speak, in search of a national identity. All the same, if a Bohemian composer wanted to earn international renown and possibly also a lot of money, he had to print his works and have them performed in Vienna, Berlin, or Leipzig; which could clearly pose a problem.

From this point of view, Dvořák was particularly lucky and successful, even though not everyone, in his native land, appreciated the peculiar way in which his music tried to reconcile national aspirations, of which Dvořák was undoubtedly a strong supporter, with the then widespread and in-vogue music language of Austro-German mould. That is why, to date, Dvořák is less loved in his homeland than Bedřich Smetana, considered to all effects and purposes the true father of Bohemian music.

The son of an innkeeper, Dvořák revealed his musical talent from an early age. After regular musical studies in the city of Zlonice, from the 1860s he found a job as violist in the orchestra of the Bohemian Provisional Theatre, dedicating himself, at the same time, to composition. It so happened that his *Third Symphony*, composed in 1873 and still deeply influenced in its language by the then triumphant Wagner model, found the appreciation of the two

most fierce adversaries of Wagner in the Viennese musical establishment: the composer Johannes Brahms and the music critic Eduard Hanslick. Brahms's positive reception and approval, and Hanslick's press support changed the young musician's destiny and created propitious ground for his future success. Thanks to Brahms, Dvořák published with Simrock of Bonn his first collection of *Slavonic Dances*, with which he immediately became well-known to the public at large. At the same time, his language got gradually closer to that of Brahms, as he tried to reconcile his inspiration, rich in elements of Bohemian folklore, with the forms and expressions of the great Viennese tradition, of which Brahms was undisputably the most authoritative exponent.

The composer's mixed feelings towards the classical-romantic tradition, often respected, more than loved, and frequently eluded, is very clear in the four piano trios Dvořák composed between 1875 and the beginning of 1891. However, these are not the only trios written by the Bohemian musician. Around 1871-72 he composed two more works of this genre (listed, in the complete Dvořák catalogue drawn up by Jarmil Burghauser, as B 25 and B 26), which are mentioned in the chronicles of the day but were later destroyed.

The first *Piano Trio* published by Dvořák, in B flat major Op. 21 B 51, was completed in the spring of 1875 and has few things in common with Brahms, who, incidentally, at the time had only written and published the first version of his *Trio No. 1* in B major Op. 8 (dating as far

back as 1854-55). Op. 21 is in four traditional movements that lack some consistency in the quality of their music, beginning with the first, an *Allegro molto*, which could be accused of the capital defect of much of Dvořák's music: long-windedness (especially in the development section, which is very ample); it features, however, some engaging ideas, such as the delightful second theme, in the dominant key and in pure popular style. The work's best page is undoubtedly its second movement, an *Adagio molto e mesto* in 4/8 and in G minor ideally taking not so much from Brahms as from Franz Schubert's *Andante con moto* from the *Trio No. 2* in E flat major Op. 100. It is a piece characterised by a sorrowful, restrained lyricism flowing from beginning to end, in which the melody's Slavic inflection does not feel like added colour but permeates the dialogue between the three instruments in a very natural way. The light and easy third movement, *Allegro scherzando*, in C minor, includes a *Trio* in B major that makes this work feel even closer to Schubert's music. The *Finale, Allegro vivace*, in 6/8 and admirably concise, is serene and joyful, positive without giving in to the emphatic and empty imperiousness that afflicts much contemporary instrumental music, especially in final movements.

Composed a few months later, the *Trio No. 2* in G minor Op. 26 B 56 was written in a short time, between the 4th and the 20th of January 1876. In September 1875 the composer had lost his first daughter Josepha, only two days old. It was a terrible blow, which Dvořák tried

to soften by devoting himself to composition, and indeed Op. 26, written just a few months after his dreadful loss, does not seem to contain significant traces of it. Although it too has evident Slavic accents, this work is much more classical than the previous trio. Identical in formal structure, it consists of the usual four movements in the customary order, with the slow movement in second position. The initial *Allegro moderato*, sober and dignified, is compact and well-articulated; the following *Largo*, in C major, develops tranquilly, seeped in an almost Schumann-like elegiac lyricism. The *Scherzo, Presto* is quite original and very lively, with a more relaxed central *Trio*, and certainly not oblivious of the well-known Mendelssohn models. The *Finale, Allegro non tanto* does not fall into the trap of easy folklore, but tries to find its own expressiveness, wavering between the usual heroic perorations and a sparkle of slightly salon-like taste.

Danilo Prefumo

(Translated by Daniela Pilarz)

Trio des Alpes, founded in 2010, is formed by three musicians with a strong personality, who aim at the ultimate goal of chamber music performance, that is to say harmoniously blend three voices in a single sound.

Hana Kotková has been defined by the New York Times “a sublime soloist”, and The Strad spoke of “an alluring performance” and “many marvels”, reviewing the US première of Morton Feldman’s Violin and Orchestra she performed at the Lincoln Center in New York, the city that had seen her debut, the previous year, at Carnegie Hall. She was a member of the Smetana Trio of Prague, and among her numerous awards she was a winner at the prestigious “Prague Spring” international competition

Claude Hauri was a very young first cello with the World Youth Orchestra, with which he toured the world. He carries out intense performing careers both as a soloist and in chamber music. He is particularly dedicated to contemporary music and has premiered the works of authors such as Paul Glass and Salvatore Sciarrino.

With his piano, **Corrado Greco** provides a vital contribution to the music of the Trio, also on account of his experience playing with renowned partners such as Bruno Canino, Mario Ancillotti, Giovanni Sollima, Mario Caroli, Massimo Quarta, and members of the Berliner Philharmoniker.

Cleverly devised music programmes, often enriched by a leitmotif, are the distinctive trait of the ensemble. They feature known and lesser-known works of the repertoire and are often aimed at rediscovering unjustly forgotten pages. The Trio always approaches each work with care of the detail and respect of the original text, in search of the composer's intentions.

Trio des Alpes has performed the triple concertos of Ludwig van Beethoven, Giorgio Federico Ghedini, Daniel Schnyder and Bohuslav Martinů, the latter in a tour with the Orchestra da Camera di Mantova. In the field of contemporary music, they have performed works by Maria Bonzanigo and Caterina Calderoni (specifically dedicated to the Trio), Silvia Colasanti, Beat Furrer, Michael Jarrell, Daniel Glaus, Jennifer Higdon, Iris Szeghy, and Martin Wettstein. In 2023, their performance of "Dancing Universe", by US composer Linda Dusman, was included in the monographic programme of the CD "Flashpoint", released by Neuma Records.

Since 2011, the Trio has toured Europe, the US, and Brazil. It has moreover been "artist in residence" at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC).

In 2015 Dynamic published "XX Century Women Composers" a recording of the Trio featuring music by Amy Beach, Lili Boulanger and Rebecca Clarke. The CD received the praise of the specialised press, with the magazine "Musica" awarding it 5 stars and Gramophone commenting, "Clarke's 1921 Trio is the real revelation... It also gets by far

the best performance – fluent, committed and wonderfully energetic throughout".

Since 2020, Trio des Alpes have planned to record, for Dynamic, Antonín Dvořák's complete piano trios, in co-production with RSI. After a first CD with the trios Op. 65 and Op. 90, awarded 5 stars by "Musica", the present recording now completes that project. In the best tradition of chamber music, Trio des Alpes has often appeared with other musicians in quartet and quintet formation (instrumental and with voice) performing works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Dvořák, Fauré, Granados, and Messiaen.





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Dynamic Srl

Via Mura Chiappe 39, 16136 Genova - Italy

tel.+39 010.27.22.884 fax +39 010.21.39.37

dynamic@dynamic.it

visit us at **www.dynamic.it**



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