



Live from St. George's, Bristol

SOMMCD 0135



BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
The Complete Piano Trios – Vol. 3

Trio in B flat major, Op. 11

Trio in G major, Op. 121a
'Kakadu Variations'

Trio in E flat major, Op. 38
after the Septet Op. 20

GOULD PIANO TRIO

Lucy Gould *violin*

Alice Neary *cello*

Benjamin Frith *piano*

ROBERT PLANE *clarinet*

Trio Op. 11 for clarinet, cello & piano

- | | | |
|-------|--------------------------------|------|
| 1 I | Allegro con brio | 9:22 |
| 2 II | Adagio | 4:53 |
| 3 III | Theme & Variations: Allegretto | 6:42 |

4 Variations on *'Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu'*, Op. 121a
17:15

Trio Op. 38 for clarinet, cello & piano

- | | | |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-------|
| 5 I | Adagio – Allegro con brio | 10:06 |
| 6 II | Adagio cantabile | 8:03 |
| 7 III | Tempo di Menuetto | 3:11 |
| 8 IV | Andante con Variazioni | 7:19 |
| 9 V | Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace | 3:17 |
| bl VI | Andante con moto alla marcia – Presto | 8:06 |

Total duration: 78:29

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BEETHOVEN
Piano Trios Vol. 3

Trio Op. 11

Trio Op. 121a *'Kakadu Variations'*

Trio Op. 38



GOULD PIANO TRIO

ROBERT PLANE *clarinet*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827): Piano Trios – 3

This is the third volume in the series of recordings of Beethoven's complete music for piano trio, the combination of violin, cello and piano which grew in popularity during the second half of the 18th-century, to the point where many composers felt obliged to provide music for this medium.

Indeed, Haydn is known to have composed over 120 such Trios, as they came to be known, but they were in response to continuous demands from his employer, Prince Nicolas Esterhazy, who was a noted amateur cellist himself. But Haydn's examples spurred Mozart (who wrote six such works) and Beethoven, as well as later masters – Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Dvořák as well as an extensive Russian school, from Tchaikovsky to Shostakovich.

Yet it was Beethoven who, more than any successor to Haydn, contributed most to the Piano Trio repertoire, and the works in this Volume comprise those published by him which were either subject to revision or were originally conceived for other combinations of instruments. Nonetheless, Beethoven's genius ensured that in transferring existing music to the relatively new guise of piano trio, the material appears as though it could not have been conceived for any other medium.

Variations on *'Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu'*, Op. 121a (c.1795, rev 1816)

Perhaps money played a part in Beethoven's revising: the set of Variations on *'Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu'* (often shortened to 'Kakadu Variations') was originally composed round about 1795, the year following the appearance of Wenzel Müller's 1794 comic Singspiel *Die Schwestern von Prag* ('The sisters from Prague'), in which this soon-to-be-popular song may be found. Over 20 years later, in 1816, Beethoven wrote to the Leipzig publisher Härtel offering 'Variations with an introduction and supplement, for piano,

violin and cello, on a well-known theme by Müller, one of my earlier compositions, though it is not among the reprehensible ones.'

It is much later revision accounts for the high Opus number of 121a; as Müller's comic opera was revived in Vienna in 1814, its renewed success doubtless urged Beethoven to look again and to revise these variations, fashioning them in the process into a work worthy of the great composer he had become. There is, as should be the case with such a humorous song – 'I am the tailor cockatoo' – a certain tongue-in-cheek attitude from time to time, and the mock-serious Introduction leads to the appeal of the song's tune itself: a genuine musical anticlimax which we may be sure the mature Beethoven relished.

There are ten variations, each seeming to become more elaborate than its predecessor, and this brilliant work ends with a quasi-fugue as the music hurries to its delightful end.

Trio in B flat major, Op 11 (1798)

I – Allegro con brio II – Adagio III – Theme and Variations: Allegretto

Two of the works in this Volume appeared in other guises, and the first of these, the Trio in B flat major, began by being composed in 1797-8 as a Trio for the relatively unusual (for the time) combination of clarinet, cello and piano. With an eye to increased sales, early editions of the work had an additional part for violin, replacing the clarinet. The music for both instruments is the same, of course, the violin part being naturally equally suited to that instrument, and the result is a splendid composition, inhabiting a rather different, certainly a more easeful, character than the three major works which constitute Beethoven's Opus 1. Perhaps the inherent sylvan nature of the clarinet as an instrument – witness Mozart's great Quintet and Concerto, both written less than ten years before – played its part in shaping the complexion of this music, but in truth this is a wonderfully contrasted masterpiece to set alongside the earlier works of Beethoven's Opus 1.

However, the music begins with a powerful unison idea, demanding our attention. But this is purely a dramatic opening device: the music now relaxes more, seeming to inhabit an urbane character – not perhaps always associated with the frequently fiery younger Beethoven – for even the second subject (when it eventually arrives) appears to have been born out of the first in some respects.

So there is not great drama; a greater sense of subtlety informs this music, gracious and at ease with itself, yet it is the pianist who appears to have the most to do. In the succeeding *Adagio*, in the expected key of E flat major, the lyricism of which Beethoven was such a master (when he chose) pours forth from the cello in a beautiful eight-bar theme, gently accompanied by the piano and taken up by violin as well as the piano. Yet it is the cello which tends to lead the music here, and it is only in the very beautiful and lengthy coda that both violin and cello join in a lyrical song-duet.

The finale is another set of variations on a theme from a then-new (1797) comic opera, Josef Weigl's *Lamor marinaro* ('Love at sea') – the aria being '*Pria ch'io l'impegno*' ('I have a commitment – I am foresworn'). As with the 'Kakadu' variations the delightful theme, marked *Allegretto*, undergoes several transformations. The first variation is for solo piano (a picture of the sea, perhaps?), the second for the strings, alone, the third sees all three together. The fourth variation is in the minor key, the next two in the major, brilliant and ebullient, the variations succeeding one another until the pulse changes to a syncopated 6/8, in which the mastery of Beethoven's inexhaustible invention is given full rein, here displaying all of his wit and charm.

Trio in E flat major Opus 38 (1803-5)

- I. Adagio – Allegro con brio II. Adagio cantabile III. Tempo di Menuetto
IV. Andante con Variazioni V. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace
VI. Andante con moto alla marcia – Presto

The concluding work in this final Volume is a rarity: the Piano Trio version of the Septet Opus 20. The music was composed in its original form during the winter months of 1799-1800, and was first performed in April 1800, when it formed part of a concert which also included the first performance of Beethoven's First Symphony, a piano concerto, with Beethoven also improvising on the spot, plus music by Mozart and Haydn.

The concert was an immediate success for Beethoven, who was to celebrate his 30th birthday the following December. The Septet was published in 1802 and was so successful that Beethoven soon produced a new version for piano trio, giving it the separate Opus number 38. The music falls into the tradition of the instrumental classical serenade in that there are no fewer than six movements. These may be described as the by-then usual four movements of the late-Classical sonata or symphony, together with a set of variations on a popular tune (the Rhineland song '*Ach Schiffer, lieber Schiffer*'), alongside a Scherzo, *Allegro molto e vivace*.

The practice of framing a central movement with two minuet-like movements was well established at the time and is to be found in Mozart's serenades (as well as those of many other composers), as is the idea of making the second minuet faster and more scherzo-like than the first (still in three-four time, of course). Beethoven increased the sense of symphonic cohesion by prefacing the first movement with an important slow introduction, and by echoing the procedure with another slow introduction to the final Presto.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2014

Since winning first prize at both the Premio Vittorio Gui in Florence and the inaugural Melbourne Chamber Music Competition, while being promoted in Europe and the US as British 'Rising Stars', the GOULD PIANO TRIO is now considered as one of the best of its kind performing today. *The Independent* described its members as 'master musicians', and their widely diverse repertoire and ever-expanding discography display a strong stylistic conviction appreciated by audiences and critics alike. Concerts at major venues such as the Wigmore and Carnegie Halls and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and tours of North and South America, Europe and the Far East, as well as highly regarded educational projects, have introduced them to a wide and varied public. Having established their own annual festival with Robert Plane in the Northumbrian town of Corbridge, they enjoy exploring contrasting chamber music genres with their musical peers. Their first-hand experience of work with contemporary composers has led to the commissioning of many new works, the most recent being a piano trio from James MacMillan for premiere in 2014. The Trio is the first ensemble to record all seven trios by Brahms (Quartz), now released as a boxed set and recent recordings include the complete Dvorak trios (Champs Hill Records). Clarinettist Robert Plane joined the Trio to record the late English Romantics, combining the piano trios of Stanford and Bax with their clarinet chamber music, short-listed for a *Gramophone* award. Naxos have also released their CD of the Piano Trios of John Ireland, while Chandos have recorded a disc of the trios and a clarinet quintet by Cyril Scott and a Messiaen CD including *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps*. This major project to record all Beethoven's trios marks the Gould Piano Trio's first recordings for SOMM. Volume 3 will feature clarinettist Robert Plane joining the Gould Piano Trio in two of Beethoven's Trios.

ROBERT PLANE won the Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition in London in 1992 and has since enjoyed an international solo and chamber career. He has made concerto appearances in the USA, China, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Malta and Ireland with the Virginia Symphony, Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Dortmund Philharmonic, RTE

National Symphony Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony and on tour with the City of London Sinfonia and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. He made his BBC Proms concerto debut in 2011 in Simon Holt's Double Concerto 'Centauromachy'.

A successful recording artist, his account of Finzi's Clarinet Concerto won *Classic CD Magazine's* 'Best Concerto Recording' Award and was selected as BBC Radio 3's recommended version in 'Building a Library'. His recording of Bax Sonatas was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award. *Gramophone* has hailed recordings of 'ravishing lyricism and conviction by Robert Plane, who has surely now fully occupied the shoes of the late sea King in his championship of British clarinet music.'

Robert has collaborated with the Gould Piano Trio for over 20 years, in concert and on disc. CDs of music by Brahms, Bax, York Bowen, Stanford and Cyril Scott have been highly acclaimed, *BBC Music Magazine* describing their release of Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time as the 'best modern account' of this monumental work. Together, they direct the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival in Northumberland. He regularly performs with leading string quartets (Maggini, Auer, Brodsky, Dante, Mandelring, Vellinger, Carducci, Cavaleri, Tippett) and with pianist Sophia Rahman. Chamber tours have taken him to the USA, South America, New Zealand, Trinidad, Sri Lanka and China.

Robert has held the principal clarinet positions of Northern Sinfonia, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

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