

Trio for Clarinet, Viola and Piano in E-flat major, K. 498 ("Kegelstatt," 1786)  
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Salzburg, 1756 - Vienna, 1791)

The story that gave this work its nickname (that Mozart composed it while playing at a *Kegelstatt* or bowling alley) may not be true, but it was probably invented for a reason: Mozart did love the game and we may be sure that the uncomplicated, natural tone of this work hardly cost him long weeks of hard struggle at the writing desk. The composer loved to spend time with friends, and the very scoring of this trio indicates that it was written for an intimate circle. A highly accomplished violinist in his early years, Mozart preferred to play the viola at private chamber music sessions (when he was not at the keyboard). The clarinet part was written for Anton Stadler, an outstanding clarinetist and a good friend who later became the dedicatee of the Clarinet Quintet and the Clarinet Concerto. The piano part, certainly not one of the most demanding that Mozart wrote, belonged to Franziska von Jacquin, one of his pupils (her brother Gottfried was one of the composer's closest friends).

*What to listen for*

The trio begins with a gentle Andante, not a spirited Allegro as usual. It is based on a single melodic idea (an ornamental figure, really) that is present almost continuously without becoming monotonous in the least. It is followed by a stately minuet with a trio in which occasional dark shadows appear, and then by a completely carefree, melodious rondo.

Contrasts for Clarinet, Violin and Piano, Sz. 111 (1938)  
by Béla Bartók (Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary [now Sînnicolau Mare, Romania], 1881 - New York, 1945)

In 1938, the famous violinist Joseph Szigeti, who frequently performed sonata recitals with Bartók, suggested to Benny Goodman that he commission a work from the Hungarian composer for violin and clarinet with piano accompaniment. The result was *Contrasts*, Bartók's only chamber work involving a wind instrument. The initial agreement with Goodman (who paid Bartók a fee of \$300) called for a piece in two movements (slow-fast) after the pattern of the two violin rhapsodies (which, like Debussy's Clarinet Rhapsody, followed a tradition first established by Franz Liszt). It is in that two-movement form that the work was first heard in public, on January 9, 1939 in New York, with pianist Endre Petri standing in for the composer. The original title was *Rhapsody -- Two Dances*. The middle movement was already written but was being temporarily withheld by Bartók.

*What to listen for*

The first movement is called "Verbunkos," after a dance genre that had a decisive influence on all forms of Hungarian music in the 19th century. (The name comes from the German *Werbung* ["recruiting"] since, according to tradition, this dance was used at gatherings where young men were recruited for the army.) In turning to the *verbunkos*, Bartók was reclaiming a tradition that he had cultivated in his early works but then publicly repudiated, only to return to it several times during the last decade of his life. The movement is based on two themes. The first melody has the typical dotted pattern of the original

*verbunkos* dance, while the second relates to the folk-music idiom of the violin rhapsodies. There is a brilliant clarinet cadenza at the end.

The second movement ("Pihenő" or "Relaxation") opens with a theme whose melodic material is highly chromatic and whose meter is constantly changing. Despite these "modern" traits, the melody was clearly inspired by Hungarian folksong. The music becomes agitated in the brief second section, while the third contains a near-literal quotation from Bartók's piano piece "On the Island of Bali," from *Microcosmos*. For all their "contrasts," however, all three sections of "Relaxation" are variations on the same descending-ascending idea.

The last movement ("Sebes" or "Fast") calls for *scordatura* on the violin (the E-string is tuned down to E-flat and the G-string up to G-sharp). The resulting diminished fifths instead of the expected perfect ones are a "play on tones," as it were, analogous to the plays on words which Bartók loved so much. After the opening measures, the violinist switches to another instrument, tuned normally. One of the episodes, in 13/8 time, exemplifies the so-called "Bulgarian rhythm," which Bartók employed in several of his works. Then it is the violinist's turn to play a cadenza. After a transitional *meno mosso* ("less fast"), the tempo speeds up considerably in the final section, and the work ends with a brilliant flourish.

Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor, Op. 66 (1845)  
by Felix Mendelssohn (Hamburg, 1809 - Leipzig, 1847)

Felix Mendelssohn, born 200 years ago, was a child prodigy like Mozart who grew up to be one of the leading composers of his time and who, again like Mozart, died while still in his thirties. The present trio, one of Mendelssohn's mature works, shows him at the height of his powers; it is characterized at once by Romantic passion and Classical clarity, offering a perfect example of how Mendelssohn was able to achieve a perfect balance between those two tendencies, sometimes seen as opposites.

*What to listen for*

Both of Mendelssohn's piano trios are in minor keys, exploring the dramatic side of the Classical heritage: the manner that some have referred to as *Sturm und Drang*, or "storm and stress." The opening theme of the second trio, played by the piano in a mysteriously soft unison, immediately establishes that agitated voice, which remains an almost constant presence throughout the movement (only one theme, the third one introduced, brings some respite.) Contrary to general practice, Mendelssohn does not take a break between exposition and development; the sweeping force of his melodic ideas does not allow a moment of rest but carries the music right into the central section, filled with unusual modulations that raise the excitement to an even higher level. The return of the opening piano theme, agitated as it is, sounds almost subdued in comparison. The recapitulation is quite irregular; the "respite" occurs earlier than expected, so that Mendelssohn can resume the passionate tone of the movement and even append an extended, and quite fiery, coda.

The second-movement "Andante espressivo" is a lyrical "Song without words" whose theme is played in turn by the piano and the two strings. The volume never rises above *piano* until the middle section where, however, the music quickly reaches *fortissimo* dynamics. The faster accompaniment passages added to the piano part, significantly, stay on even when the

opening lyrical melody returns.

The third movement belongs to the special type of scherzo Mendelssohn cultivated in many of his works (most famously in the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). This time, he uses duple meter and a constant flow of light-footed sixteenth-notes, even in the middle section where a new melody appears, in the bright key of G major as opposed to the darker g minor of the scherzo proper.

The finale, *Allegro appassionato*, returns to the agitated tone of the opening movement, but this time, the tensions are resolved by the surprising introduction of a chorale-like melody (closely related to the hymn known as "Old 100th"), which leads directly to a jubilant ending in C major filled with happiness and positive energy.