



Helios Piano Trio

Friday, March 17, 2023

7:30 pm

Christ United Methodist Church



The Spirit and the Maiden
(2004)

Elena Kats-Chernin (b. 1957)

Composition Length: 15 minutes

Elena Kats-Chernin was born in Uzbekistan and attended the Gnessin Musical College before immigrating to Australia in 1975. She graduated from the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music in 1980 and was awarded a DAAD (German academic exchange) grant to study composition in Hanover, Germany. After 13 years in Germany, she returned to Australia, where she now lives in Sydney.

Kats-Chernin has composed for nearly every genre, including solo and small ensemble chamber music, opera, symphonic works, ballet, and musical theater. She has received several awards for her works, including Best Score or Sound Design in a Mainstage Production from the Sydney Theater Awards for her score of a musical adaptation of *Frankenstein!* Commissions have come from the Sydney Symphony Orchestras, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, the City of London Sinfonia, and our very own North Carolina Symphony.

What to listen for

Listen for changes in the mood of the piece. This piece creates such vivid imagery, you can almost hear a folk story playing out as you listen. You'll hear music that almost seems to be reaching out in yearning for love, and other times exciting and almost dangerous melodies. The piece ends with each of the instruments seeming to float off into the ether, leaving the listener in silence and awe. Kats-Chernin does such an amazing job of creating music that is gripping and exciting to listen to. She is, in my humble opinion, one of the great composers alive today.

To listen to a recording, [follow this link](#).

Trio No. 1 in d minor, Op. 49 (1839)

Felix Mendelssohn (1807-1847)

Composition Length: 30 minutes

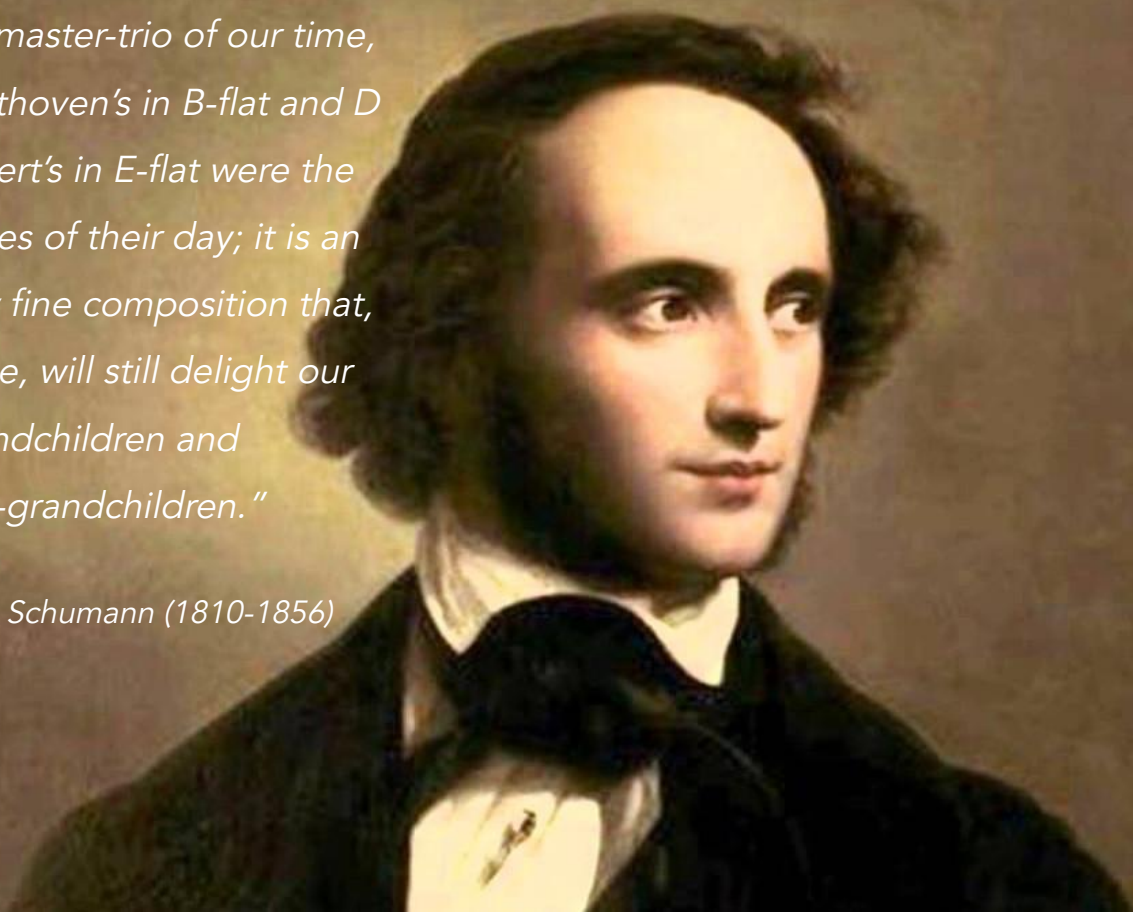
Felix Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1807. His parents, both pianists, gave him his first musical lessons. His family was Jewish, but waves of antisemitism throughout Europe at the time forced his family to convert to Christianity in order to avoid persecution. Young Felix and his sister were baptized in 1816, followed by his parents in 1822. Their baptisms encouraged the family to adopt the surname Bartholdy, after the family farm.

The Mendelssohn family traveled quite a bit in Felix's youth, moving from Hamburg to Berlin, and then to Paris. This gave him the opportunity to study and learn from great composers all over Europe, all the while developing his musical ability and compositional craft.

In 1829, Felix conducted the St. Matthew Passion for the first time since J.S. Bach's death in 1750. This performance is considered the catalyst for the revival of Bach's music during the 19th century. Over the years, Mendelssohn became a favorite composer of Queen Victoria, the reigning Queen of England at the time. His Scottish Symphony No. 3 was dedicated to her. Mendelssohn proved to be an incredibly prolific composer writing nearly 750 compositions, nearly a quarter of which were for piano!

"This is the master-trio of our time, even as Beethoven's in B-flat and D and Schubert's in E-flat were the masterpieces of their day; it is an exceedingly fine composition that, years hence, will still delight our grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

- Robert Schumann (1810-1856)



What to listen for in the Mendelssohn...

The *Trio No. 1* consists of four movements total and follows a very typical setting of musical form and emotions. The first movement establishes the mood for the piece, showcasing a more emotional and brooding side of Mendelssohn. Listen for times when the violin and cello join together, playing in octaves, and when they move and play off of each other. The second movement is a slower *Andante con molto tranquillo* (translated to "Slowly, but with tranquil motion") sounds almost like a love song to his wife, Cécile Jeanrenaud. The lush melody gets passed between each of the instruments, with each creating subtle changes to the harmony and structure. The third movement is a scherzo, or musical joke. The piano brings in the main theme, closely followed by the violin. This movement is fast and light with a very playful feel. It sounds almost like each of the instruments are in a frantic game of chase! The fourth and final movement is yet another change in mood that brings us back to our original key of d minor. However, this movement bookends the piece as a whole with a very different emotion than the first. While the first movement perhaps evokes a slightly darker emotion, the final movement almost has a playful quality, similar to the Scherzo. The piece concludes with a flurry and flourish in D Major, bringing out the sunlight and ending with a full heart!

For a recording, [follow this link.](#)

Piano Trio No. 4, Op. 90 B. 166 "Dumky" (1891)

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Composition Length: 32 minutes

Dvořák was born on September 8, 1841, in Czechia (now the Czech Republic). His musical upbringing, quite possibly inspired by his musically gifted father, was extremely eclectic. Young Dvořák heard traditional folk tunes in the local dance hall but was also regularly exposed to Western European classical music in church, such as Mozart and J.S. Bach. At six years old, Dvořák began violin and voice studies with his elementary school teacher. As a young teenager, he moved to Zlonice and began studying the organ and piano, in addition to his first explorations of composition. By the time Dvořák was 16, he had moved to Prague and began studying at the Institute of Church Music. He continued to develop his musical and composition skills and graduated second in his class.

Dvořák spent the next several years of his life as a freelance musician, working as a violinist and violist in various orchestras around Prague, as well as teaching piano lessons. In 1873, Dvořák married Anna Čermáková (whom he had known for years, as she was formerly his piano pupil!), to whom he lived happily with for the rest of his life. While in Prague, Dvořák's successes as a composer grew in fits, but remained largely local to the surrounding area. In 1878, he finally received a breakthrough with the recommendation by Johannes Brahms that his music be published under the same company. This led to international performances of Dvořák's music, exploding his notoriety across the world.



This led to world travels, guest conducting in Moscow and St. Petersburg (invited by Tchaikovsky himself, nonetheless!), and his famed trip to the United States from 1892-1895. It was during this tour of America that Dvořák composed his New World Symphony No. 9 and his American string quartet, which are perhaps two of his most famous pieces. In 1896, Dvořák returned to Europe, where he remained until his death in 1904. In his final years, Dvořák was struck with extreme anxiety and agoraphobia (the crippling fear of potentially dangerous situations, usually brought on by large crowds). This likely caused his compositional output to slow, as he only fully composed one piece between 1900 and 1904.

What to listen for in the Dvořák...

The term *dumky* (the plural of *dumka*) is a Czech or Ukrainian term that essentially means ballad, elegy, or lament. A *dumka* is typically heard as an homage to a hero or heroic act, and at times even used as a lament of a marginalized group of people. They often include contrasting sections of low and brooding moods with faster and brighter uplifting melodies.

Dvořák's "Dumky" trio is no exception.

Each of the six movements follows some combination of the moods listed above. The first three movements are typically played with little pause between, bringing the listener through a myriad of emotions, textures, and colors. The fourth movement starts with almost an almost pensive clock-like ticking in the violin, with the cello's melody sourcing above the other instruments. The movement moves to a faster middle section, before slowing down to a *meno mosso* (or *less quickly*) final section. The fifth movement picks up the tempo with a fast, exciting, and often quiet motion between the instruments, finishing with an explosive last few notes. The sixth movement starts soft and mysterious before moving into a flurry of notes passed around the violin, cello, and piano.

Of course, following Dvořák's typical inspiration, the piece as a whole is inspired by and based on folk tunes, bringing the listener on a journey to Eastern Europe. The "Dumky" trio was written right before Dvořák moved to America. Clearly this piece is a true homage to the folk traditions from his home country.

For a recording of this piece, [follow this link](#).



Matt Wilson, the author of the program notes that you hopefully found illuminating and inspiring, is currently a violinist and violist from South Carolina. He received a Bachelor's in Music Education from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC, before teaching in the public schools for several years. He received a Master's in Music Education from UNC Greensboro and is now pursuing a PhD in Music Education from the University of Kansas (KU) in Lawrence, KS.

He is an active researcher and presenter at the state and national levels, focusing his research on ways to best serve disadvantaged student populations. He has served as guest conducting clinician across the state of North Carolina, most recently as clinician for the NC Western Region Orchestra Repertory Orchestra in Greensboro, NC.

Matt has served in several leadership roles in the NC Music Educators Assoc. Orchestra Section in the past. He is a member of the National Association for Music Education and the American String Teachers Association (ASTA). He is currently a student representative for ASTA's national student advisory committee. He is also currently a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Fellow at KU.