



LAWO  
CLASSICS

# SS ENS TRIO

BEETHOVEN  
STRING TRIOS, OP. 9

## BEETHOVEN'S EARLY YEARS IN VIENNA

In 1792, the young Beethoven, short and considered rather ugly by his contemporaries, arrived in Vienna from his hometown of Bonn. Pejoratively dubbed 'il spagnolo', he was described by his early biographer Alexander Thayer as "this small thin, dark complexioned, pockmarked, dark eyed, bewigged young musician of 22 years who had quietly journeyed to the capital to pursue the study of his art".

Almost immediately Beethoven enjoyed the patronage of several members of the aristocracy and quickly found lodgings in a garret in the residence of Prince Lichnowsky, who was to become one of his most important patrons. Beethoven's student Carl Czerny recalled: 'Far from being neglected and oppressed in Vienna, the truth is that he enjoyed, even as a young man, all possible respect on the part of our high nobility, which has rarely been the portion of a young composer'

As for the dedicatee of the works presented here, Count Johann Georg von Browne, he and his wife were between them the dedicatees of the three piano sonatas op.10, the piano sonata in B Flat Op.22, and several sets of variations. Count Browne was one of Beethoven's most important benefactors during his early years in Vienna. Indeed one of the rewards that Beethoven was granted from the Count for his previous works was a horse, which was ridden a few times then promptly forgotten about.

Beethoven's early years in Vienna, unsurprisingly, were years of a young man of extraordinary talents trying to find a way in the musical capital of Europe. He studied with the important composers of the day, Haydn, Salieri and Albrechtsberger. He established himself as a tremendous performer and perhaps the greatest improviser that had ever been heard.

It was also at this time that his health began a long period of decline that would result eventually in his deafness. Even by 1798, when the Op.9 string trios were written, his hearing had begun

to decline, although he kept this a closely guarded secret.

Although not considered to be quite 'ripe' enough to give his own Akademie, which was the means by which the most important composers announced ambitious works and attempted to earn a large sum of money, by 1797 he was in great demand by the publishing houses. He even boasted that he was able to demand 'whatever he wished' from them in the way of compensation. Naturally, he began to write chamber music that through publishing sales could be a good source of income for him.

### The Opus 9 String Trios

Composed in early 1798 the contract for the published edition of Op.9 is dated March 16th.

Notwithstanding the enormous reputations and influence of Haydn and Mozart he chose to write for string trio rather than quartet, and develop his ideas independent of these giants of the string quartet. Perhaps his ambivalent relationship with his teacher Haydn was also a reason for him to avoid writing quartets, due to Haydn's enormous success in the format.

No doubt he was able to refine his string writing in his trios, but it is a bit patronising for the modern critic to claim that the already mature Beethoven wrote these works in preparation for his first string quartets, Op.18, the instrumental format that would in the future see some of his most glorious, learned and groundbreaking works. Indeed these trios bear more resemblance to some of Haydn's symphonies than they do to his extraordinary string quartets from this period. Mozart's influence as well can be seen coming more from the great Divertimento in E flat rather than from his equally masterful quartets.

### Op.9 No.1

In four movements rather than the three that were typical of the serenades or divertimenti, the first movement of this trio has a slow imposing

introduction which leads into the following allegro. The four-note motif of the allegro, borrowed from the introduction, is utilised brilliantly in the development section, displaying Beethoven's strong counterpoint, the study of which he had so seriously pursued in the mid-1790's. In the tender second movement, Beethoven modulates to the mediant, a harmonic area very uncommon at that time, and a modulation that would become characteristic of his music in his middle-period, such as in the Waldstein Sonata.

A light scherzo follows, and the concluding Finale is a type of perpetual motion piece in sonata form, another spectacular display of his fully formed technical arsenal.

### Op.9 No.2

For the second trio, again following the four movement plan, there is a decided emphasis on the violin, and perhaps this was due to the influence of Ignaz Schuppanzigh, a brilliant violinist who was one of Beethoven's collaborators. The allegretto has very lyrical writing for the violin with a rather incessant accompaniment. The second movement, a flowing dance in the minor mode, allows the cello a moment of glory in the high register. Featuring a minuet instead of a scherzo is a nod to a more courtly style, and in the finale the cello is given the first statement of the theme but in the end the violin wins out and has the final say..

### Op.9 No.3

C minor was a favourite tonal choice for Beethoven when he wished to release the stormy and elemental forces that were often brewing inside him. He chose this key for some of his most brooding and dramatic works, including the 5th Symphony, the 'Pathétique' Sonata, and the 3rd Piano Concerto. In this case, writing for three string instruments, perhaps the added resonance of the open C and G strings contributed to the choice of C minor, allowing for dark and resonant colours.

The opening of this great work, perhaps Beethoven's finest up to this point, is a unison passage descending to the dominant, which immediately sets the foreboding mood, and returns frequently throughout the movement.

The sweetly lyrical Adagio con espressione in C major, is deeply felt, similar to the Largo, con gran espressione of the Piano Sonata Op.7. He uses double stops in many places throughout the movement which further enhances the texture and creates the illusion of four instruments playing.

He returns to C minor and the mood of the first movement for the extraordinarily energetic and dramatic scherzo. Strong accents typical of Beethoven's mature style are heard throughout. The mood is lightened with a delicate and charming middle section, functioning as a trio, although not explicitly marked as such. This trio in C major again uses double stops to thicken the texture and maintains a hint of the foreboding mood of the scherzo, which upon its return surprisingly fades out in a magnificent pianissimo.

Once again the dark C minor mood continues in the finale, written in sonata form. Abundant unison passages, fast repeated notes and great dynamic contrasts contribute to the mature and highly expressive nature of this piece which ends softly in the key of C Major, perhaps a nod to his great teacher, and sometimes rival, Papa Haydn.

# SSENS<sup>TRIO</sup>

SØLVE SIGERLAND, *violin*  
HENNINGE LANDAAS, *viola*  
ELLEN MARGRETE FLESJØ, *cello*

**Ssens Trio** (pronounced 'Essence') was established in 2014 by three musicians with a wealth of experience in the international music scene.

The trio has appeared in concert with Geir Inge Lotsberg, Eivind Ringstad, Håvard Gimse and Leif Ove Andsnes, among others.

Their first CD, *Beethoven: String Trios Op. 3 & 8* (LAWO Classics), received Pizzicato Magazine's "Supersonic Award" and a prestigious ICMA Awards nomination in 2018.

Fanfare Magazine wrote: "With absolutely no hesitation I will say that it goes right to the top of my Beethoven String Trios list." (Jerry Dubins). And the following from a review in Pizzicato Magazine under the heading 'Beethoven With A Communicative Joy of Music Making': "Their performance is brimming with the joy of playing together. An outstanding 'trialogue', with each performer fully sensing the other. Through this interactive music making, which in the Adagio and Minuet movements invokes a remarkably intimate mood, Beethoven's works gain in depth and sensuousness. And when one combines the sensitive playing with a wonderfully eloquent virtuosity, the way is clear for pure listening pleasure." (Alain Steffen).

In 2019, Ssens Trio released a CD on the LAWO Classics label with music of W. A. Mozart. This recording received glowing reviews in *Classica* (France), *Fanfare Magazine* and *Pizzicato Magazine*, among others, and it was nominated for the Opus Klassik Award in Germany and the ICMA (International Classical Music Awards) in 2020.

The latter recording has had over 4 million streams on digital platforms and has regularly over 15,000 unique listeners each month.

The CD "Ricer-care," (LWC1238) featuring music by Johan Kvandal, Finn Mortensen, Edvard Fliflet Bræin, and Bertil Palmar Johansen, was released in 2022. It has received glowing reviews in *Gramophone*, *The Strad*, *Pizzicato Magazine* (where it received the Supersonic Award), *Sonograma* in Spain, and leading journals in the Netherlands. In Norway, it has been very positively received in *Dag og Tid*, *KlassiskMusikk*, and *Ballade*. "Ricer-care" was nominated for the ICMA Awards and Opus Klassik in 2023.

Ssens Trio is supported by the Norwegian Arts Council and the Bergesen Foundation.

**Sølve Sigerland** has devoted the greater part of his career to chamber music, while appearing as soloist with leading Scandinavian orchestras conducted by Andrew Litton, Daniel Harding and Walter Weller, among others. In 1993 Sigerland represented Norway at the Nordic Soloist Biennial in Stockholm, and later he won two prizes at the Tibor Varga International Violin Competition in Sion, Switzerland. As a member of the Grieg Trio, he has performed in Europe, the USA and Asia and received prizes for both performances and recordings. Sølve Sigerland has served as a jury member in competitions such as the ARD Competition in Munich, the Trondheim TICC, and the Schubert and Modern Music competition in Graz, Austria.

**Henninge Landaas** was Co-Principal violist in the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra for 18 years and a member of the internationally renowned Vertavo String Quartet, with which she performed in concert halls the world over. The ensemble's critically acclaimed recordings include works by Carl Nielsen, Brahms, Bartok, Grieg and Debussy, among others. With the quartet she shared the Norwegian Music Critics' Prize, Spellemannprisen (Norwegian Grammy), and the prestigious



French award, Diapason d'Or. Henninge Landaas has released several CDs on the LAWO Classics label, among them, *Johannes Brahms: Sonatas for Viola & Piano, Op. 120* and *The Golden Hindemith*. She plays a G.B. Guadagnini viola on loan from Dextra Musica.

**Ellen Margrete Flesjø** was a founding member of the Grieg Trio in 1987. With this ensemble she has performed in Europe, the USA and Asia and has released critically acclaimed recordings on EMI, Virgin and Simax Classics labels.

Prizes she has received include the Parkhouse Award, First Prize and two additional prizes at

the Colmar International Chamber Music Competition (Colmar, France), the Norwegian Music Critics' Prize, and Spellemannprisen (Norwegian Grammy). She has performed as a soloist with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra and the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra and has served as section leader in the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra. From 2004 to 2009, Ellen Margrete Flesjø was co-artistic director of the Stavanger International Chamber Music Festival, together with her colleagues in the Grieg Trio.



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**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**  
(1770-1827)

### *String Trio in G major, Op.9 No.1*

1. I. Adagio - Allegro con brio (10:24)
2. II. Adagio, ma non tanto, e cantabile (7:06)
3. III. Scherzo. Allegro (3:20)
4. IV. Presto (5:24)

### *String Trio in D major, Op.9 No.2*

5. I. Allegretto (8:40)
6. II. Andante quasi Allegretto (5:32)
7. III. Menuetto. Allegro (3:49)
8. IV. Rondo. Allegro (7:13)

### *String Trio in C minor, Op.9 No.3*

9. I. Allegro con spirito (8:28)
10. II. Adagio con espressione (5:59)
11. III. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace (3:28)
12. IV. Finale. Presto (6:03)

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