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Solo
MUSICA

TRIO BRONTË

Works for Piano Trio by Schubert & Rihm

WOLFGANG RIHM

1 Fremde Szene III 11:55

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat major, D. 898, Op. 99

2 I. Allegro moderato 15:35

3 II. Andante un poco mosso 10:34

4 III. Scherzo: Allegro 7:23

5 IV. Rondo: Allegro vivace 9:48

12. INTERNATIONALER WETTBEWERB

FRANZ
SCHUBERT
UND DIE
MUSIK DER
MODERNE

GRAZ/AUSTRIA

This production was awarded as a prize during the 12th International Chamber Music Competition Franz Schubert and Modern Music 2025, organized by the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz (KUG).

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Dear audience,

Robert Schumann described the essence of chamber music as ‘for each other – with each other – alongside each other, we cannot do it alone’. How necessary it is, then, that chamber music teaches us what we need to know for the further development of our human society: to respect each other, to listen and look at each other, to give each other recognition and allow each other to be, to bring voices together and yet allow each to remain distinct – may this succeed anew and ever better. I hope you enjoy listening to the recordings on this CD! All the best to the Trio Brontë on their journey together!

Werner Strenger

Vice-Rector for Arts and EEK (University of Music and Performing Arts Graz)



How this CD came about...

This CD is the result of the 12th International Competition “Franz Schubert and Modern Music” (FS&MM), which took place in February 2025 – organised by the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz – and at which its production was awarded as a separate special prize.

An extended jury consisting of personalities from the field of concert organisation – Annett Baumeister (Germany), Inna Davidova (Latvia), Birgit Hinterholzer (Austria) and Ulf Werner (Germany) – listened to all three finalists in the competition categories Lied Duo, Piano Trio and Piano Duo. Their task was to select the ensemble that stood out most from the finalists from their point of view. They chose the Trio Brontë, which was awarded this special prize in addition to first prize in the Piano Trio category: a CD production including accompanying promotion.

The package includes:

- Release of selected competition repertoire, performed by the ensemble, published by the Solo Musica label.
- Distribution of the physical and digital CD via Naxos.
- 6-month PR programme via the NO.TE agency, including a CD presentation concert.
- Targeted journalist promotion at an international level.

We, the Rectorate of the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz and the competition organisation team, are delighted to be able to give Trio Brontë this artistic calling card – in this case a first release!

Geschätztes Publikum,

mit ‚Füreinander – Miteinander – Nebeneinander können nicht alleine‘ beschreibt Robert Schumann das Wesen der Kammermusik. Wie notwendig, was uns somit die Kammermusik für die weitere Entwicklung unserer menschlichen Gesellschaft lernen lässt: einander achten, auf einander hören und schauen, einander Geltung verleihen und belassen, Stimmen zusammenzuführen und doch jeweils bestehen zu lassen - es möge wieder neu und immer besser gelingen. Allen ein frohes Hören der Aufnahmen auf dieser CD! Dem Trio Brontë alles Gute auf dem gemeinsamen Weg!

Werner Strenger

*Vizektor für Kunst und Entwicklung und Erschließung der Künste
(Kunstuniversität Graz)*

Wie es zu dieser CD-Produktion kam...

Die vorliegende CD geht auf den 12. Internationalen Wettbewerb „Franz Schubert und die Musik der Moderne“ (FS&MM) zurück, der im Februar 2025 – veranstaltet durch die Kunstuniversität Graz – stattgefunden hat und bei dem deren Produktion als eigenständiger Sonderpreis vergeben wurde.

Eine Extended Jury, bestehend aus Persönlichkeiten aus dem Bereich der Konzertveranstaltung – Annett Baumeister (Deutschland), Inna Davidova (Lettland), Birgit Hinterholzer (Österreich) und Ulf Werner (Deutschland) – hat alle drei Finali der Wettbewerbssparten Liedduo, Klaviertrio und Klavierduo gehört. Ihre Aufgabe war es, das aus ihrem Blickwinkel am meisten hervorsteckende Ensemble aus den Finalist*innen auszuwählen. Sie entschieden sich für das Trio Brontë, dem zusätzlich zum 1. Preis in der Kategorie Klaviertrio dieser ausgelobte Sonderpreis zugesprochen wurde: eine CD-Produktion inklusive begleiteter Promotion.

Das Paket beinhaltet:

- Veröffentlichung von ausgewähltem Wettbewerbsrepertoire des Ensembles durch das Label Solo Musica.
- Vertrieb der physischen als auch digitalen CD über Naxos.
- 6-monatiges PR-Begleitprogramm über die Agentur NO.TE inklusive CD-Präsentationskonzert.
- Zielgerichtete Journalist*innen-Promotion auf internationaler Ebene.

Wir, das Rektorat der Kunstuniversität Graz und das Team der Wettbewerbsorganisation, freuen uns sehr, dem Trio Brontë damit diese künstlerische Visitenkarte – in diesem Fall eine Erstveröffentlichung – in die Hand geben zu können!

Many thanks to / Einen herzlichen Dank an



In collaboration with / In Kooperation mit



Trio Brontë

The origin of our name & biography

Our name, Trio Brontë, comes from the Brontë sisters. There were actually four sisters in the Brontë family: Anne, Emily, Charlotte, and Maria. The younger three sisters – Anne, Emily, and Charlotte – became well-known as published authors in England during a time when this was very much not the norm for women. One of the first pieces that our trio ever played together was Felix Mendelssohn's Trio No. 2 in C minor. Mendelssohn published his trio just two years before the publication of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, a tragic novel about the passionate and petulant Cathy and the brooding Heathcliff, and one can hear similarities in the tone between these two works. We named ourselves after the sisters, inspired by their passion for storytelling, their intelligence, and their companionship.

Trio Brontë was founded in Berlin in 2022 and consists of German-Italian violinist [Chiara Sannicandro](#), Bulgarian pianist [Lili Bogdanova](#), and American cellist [Annie Jacobs-Perkins](#). After playing together for only a few months, the Trio Brontë won 1st prize at the 2023 *Ilmari Hannikainen International Piano Chamber Music Competition* in Finland. 2025 has brought them more success, including 1st prize and the special prize of a CD production at the *Franz Schubert und die Musik der Moderne Competition* in Graz, Austria, and 2nd prize at the *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Hochschulwettbewerb* in Berlin, Germany.

Highlights of their recent seasons include performances at the Konzerthaus Berlin, Stefaniensaal Graz, Mendelssohn-Haus Leipzig, and Aldeburgh's Jubilee Hall, as well as being a 2024-2025 Britten Pears Young Artist. Further performances have brought them to Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK.

In March of 2023, Trio Brontë appeared as the soloist for Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Jyväskylä Sinfonia under the baton of Jan Söderblom. Their performance from this concert was featured on the Areena Broadcasting

Company of Finland. After winning a grant from the Bulgarian "Culture Perspectives" Foundation, they collaborated to present their program "Un Jour," focusing on works by Germaine Tailleferre, Mel Bonis, Kaija Saariaho, and Lili Boulanger in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Annie, Lili, and Chiara met while studying at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin where they are currently coached by Jonathan Aner. They have received additional coaching from Eldar Nebolsin, Troels Svane, Frans Helmerson, and David Waterman.

Notes on Wolfgang Rihm's "Fremde Szenen"

To Wolfgang Rihm, the act of composing was synonymous with the act of trying. About his three piano trios, titled *Fremde Szenen I-III*, Rihm wrote that they were three "Versuche," or attempts for piano trio. Both in his essay titled "Musical Freedom", and in countless interviews with different journalists and presenters, Rihm spoke about how the act of composing is a "crisis"; the composition process consists of uncomfortable "pauses, during which time nothing stays still." In an interview with *Guardian* journalist Tom Service, Rihm stated, "Every day I go through the same crisis...I sit there and nothing comes. But I win the struggle, because every day, I write. And this crisis refreshes me."

Rihm titled his set of piano trios *Fremde Szenen I-III* ("Foreign Scenes I-III") after Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. The first work in Schumann's *Kinderszenen* bears the title "Of foreign lands and people." Each "Scene" references the work of Schumann, the composer whose sense of freedom and abandon Rihm admired so much. Though this reference to Schumann is undisputed, there is never a direct quote in any of Rihm's three trios. Rather, it is the spirit of Schumann that seems to live in the works.

Very important to Rihm was the idea that musical structure is not something planned out ahead of time. Instead, it should evolve or grow from the sense of freedom. In "Musical Freedom", Rihm wrote about musical cells in two ways: in one sense, a musical cell can be a single unit which is not compelled to evolve, and on the other hand, it can serve as the seed or core for further evolution. One hears both in *Fremde Szene III*. While the first section of *Fremde Szene III* sounds as foreign fragments existing in space, the rest of the piece journeys through tonal territory not completely unfamiliar, but totally unbound in its sense of exploration.

Original Quotes by Wolfgang Rihm

...there is a composer whose musical thought was already perceived by his contemporaries as anarchic, and whose musical speech moves so freely, that to me, it appears the ideal case and embodiment of fantasy itself, which was able to flow from within to the outside world without strangulation; this composer is Robert Schumann.

Wolfgang Rihm, "Musical Freedom"

"The foreign tongue speaks what is most intrinsic;
no tone is quoted — one falls, plunges into the 'tone'."

Wolfgang Rihm, program note on *Fremde Szenen*, Universal Edition

Notes on Franz Schubert's Piano Trio in B-flat major

In Josef von Spaun's remembrances of Franz Schubert from the year 1858, Spaun recounted a timid sentence that his friend once whispered to him: "Secretly, in my heart of hearts, I still hope to be able to make something out of myself, but who can do anything after Beethoven?"

It's hard to believe that the deaths of Schubert and Beethoven are separated by only 20 months. Schubert, bereft at the funeral of Beethoven in March of 1827, never dreamed of taking the older composer's place or writing works that would one day leave a similar legacy. Schubert, then only thirty years old, was just on the cusp of more widespread success and feeling a sense of urgency in his career. Schubert's shyness had seriously limited the spread of his work, and his declining health had been worrying him since 1823 and 1824. In fact, the Op. 100 Piano Trio in Eb major was the first piece of his to be published outside of Vienna, by Schott in Leipzig. The manuscript for the Op. 99 Bb major Trio is lost, therefore the exact date is not as certain as that of its counterpart, however, it is nearly certain that it was written first. Schubert had written another, standalone movement for piano trio in 1812, "Sonatensatz," as well as the posthumously-titled "Notturmo," D. 897 in 1827, but Op. 99 and Op. 100 are the first mature full-length works that he wrote for this instrumentation.

Both of Schubert's piano trios were written in the last year of his life, along with many of his most revered compositions. The B-flat major Trio, which was most likely composed concurrently with the song cycle *Winterreise*, could not possibly be more different. While *Winterreise* explores the depths of human misery, the B-flat major Trio is comparatively extremely optimistic. As performers, a trope that we are often told as students is that "every happy moment in Schubert comes with a tear, and every sad moment with a small smile." This piece may be the exception, with each movement moving between joy and sweet singing.

While many have written about Schubert's Trio, it is hard to encapsulate its essence better than Robert Schumann did in his article from the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1836:

One glance at Schubert's Trio – and the wretched hustle of men flies away and the world once again shines bright and fresh. It was already about ten years ago that, like a powerful heavenly apparition, a trio by Schubert appeared on today's musical scene; it was already his hundredth work, and he died shortly after writing it in November of 1828. This newly published trio seems older. In style it resembles no earlier period and may have been written shortly before the already-known trio in Eb Major. Inwardly the two differ measurably from one another. The first movement, which in the Eb trio is full of deep anger and overwhelming longing, is in this one charming, trusting, and innocent; the Adagio, which in the Eb trio grows as a sigh of heartache, is here a blissful dream, a rise and fall of beautiful human emotion. The scherzos resemble each other, but I prefer that from the second trio. About the last movement I can't decide. In a word, the Eb trio is more active, masculine, dramatic, while ours is rather suffering, feminine, and lyrical. May this work be a precious legacy left to us! Time, though what it offers us is precious and beautiful, will not soon bring us another Schubert.

Thanks

We would like to thank the team and the competition of "Franz Schubert und die Musik der Moderne" for all their support and for the opportunity to record this album. We would like to send additional grateful thanks to our recording engineer, Alexander Van Ingen, and to Penny Wright and Andrew Neubauer for letting us record at Syde Manor, Gloucestershire, UK.

Trio Brontë

Über unseren Namen & unsere Biographie

Unser Name, Trio Brontë, stammt von den Brontë-Schwestern. In der Familie Brontë gab es eigentlich vier Schwestern: Anne, Emily, Charlotte und Maria. Die drei jüngeren Schwestern – Anne, Emily und Charlotte – wurden als Schriftstellerinnen in England bekannt, als dies für Frauen noch nicht üblich war. Eines der ersten Stücke, die unser Trio jemals zusammen gespielt hat, war Felix Mendelssohns Trio Nr. 2 in c-Moll. Mendelssohn veröffentlichte sein Trio nur zwei Jahre vor der Veröffentlichung von Emily Brontës *Wuthering Heights*, einem tragischen Roman über die leidenschaftliche und launische Cathy und den grüblerischen Heathcliff, und man kann Ähnlichkeiten im Ton zwischen diesen beiden Werken hören. Wir haben uns nach den Schwestern benannt, inspiriert von ihrer Leidenschaft fürs Geschichtenerzählen, ihrer Intelligenz und ihrer Kameradschaft.

Das Trio Brontë wurde 2022 in Berlin gegründet und besteht aus der deutsch-italienischen Geigerin [Chiara Sannicandro](#), der bulgarischen Pianistin [Lili Bogdanova](#) und der amerikanischen Cellistin [Annie Jacobs-Perkins](#).

Nach nur wenigen Monaten gemeinsamen Musizierens gewann das Trio Brontë 2023 den 1. Preis beim *Ilmari Hannikainen International Piano Chamber Music Competition* in Finnland. 2025 konnte es weitere Erfolge verbuchen, darunter den 1. Preis und den Sonderpreis einer CD-Produktion beim Wettbewerb *Franz Schubert und die Musik der Moderne* in Graz, Österreich, und den zweiten Preis beim *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Hochschulwettbewerb* in Berlin, Deutschland.

Zu den Höhepunkten der letzten Spielzeiten gehören Auftritte im Konzerthaus Berlin, im Stefaniensaal Graz, im Mendelssohn-Haus Leipzig und in der Jubilee Hall in Aldeburgh sowie die Auszeichnung als Britten Pears Young Artist 2024-2025. Weitere Auftritte führten das Trio nach Deutschland, in die Niederlande und nach Großbritannien.

Im März 2023 trat das Trio Brontë als Solist für Beethovens Tripelkonzert mit der Jyväskylä Sinfonia unter der Leitung von Jan Söderblom auf. Die Ausführung dieses Konzerts wurde von der finnischen Rundfunkgesellschaft Areena ausgestrahlt. Nachdem die Musikerinnen ein Stipendium der bulgarischen Stiftung „Culture Perspectives“ erhalten hatten, präsentierten sie gemeinsam ihr Programm „Un Jour“ mit Werken von Germaine Tailleferre, Mel Bonis, Kaija Saariaho und Lili Boulanger in Sofia, Bulgarien.

Annie, Lili und Chiara lernten sich während ihres Studiums an der Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin kennen, wo sie derzeit von Jonathan Aner betreut werden. Sie erhielten außerdem Unterricht von Eldar Nebolsin, Troels Svane, Frans Helmerson und David Waterman.

Kommentar zu Wolfgang Rihm's „Fremde Szenen“

Für Wolfgang Rihm war das Komponieren gleichbedeutend damit, einen Versuch zu unternehmen. Über seine drei Klaviertrios mit dem Titel *Fremde Szenen I–III* schrieb Rihm, dass es sich um drei „Versuche“ für Klaviertrio handelt. Sowohl in seinem Essay „Musikalische Freiheit“ als auch in zahlreichen Interviews mit verschiedenen Journalist:innen und Moderator:innen sprach Rihm darüber, dass das Komponieren eine „Krise“ sei; der Kompositionsprozess bestehe aus unangenehmen „Pausen, in denen nichts stillsteht“. In einem Interview mit dem Guardian-Journalisten Tom Service sagte Rihm:

„Jeden Tag durchlaufe ich dieselbe Krise ... Ich sitze da, und nichts kommt. Aber ich gewinne den Kampf, weil ich jeden Tag schreibe. Und diese Krise belebt mich.“

Rihm benannte seine Klaviertrios *Fremde Szenen I–III* nach Schumanns *Kinderszenen*. Das erste Stück von Schumanns *Kinderszenen* trägt den Titel „Von

fremden Ländern und Menschen“. Jede „Szene“ bezieht sich auf Schumanns Werk, dessen Sinn für Freiheit und Ungezwungenheit Rihm sehr bewunderte. Obwohl dieser Bezug zu Schumann unbestritten ist, gibt es in keinem der drei Trios von Rihm direkte Zitate. Vielmehr scheint der Geist Schumanns in den Werken weiterzuleben.

Für Rihm war es sehr wichtig, dass die musikalische Struktur nicht im Voraus geplant wird. Stattdessen sollte sie sich aus dem Gefühl der Freiheit heraus entwickeln oder wachsen. In „Musikalische Freiheit“ schrieb Rihm über musikalische Zellen auf zwei Arten: Einerseits kann eine musikalische Zelle eine einzelne Einheit sein, die sich nicht weiterentwickeln muss, andererseits kann sie als Keim oder Kern für eine weitere Entwicklung dienen. Beides ist in *Fremde Szene III* hörbar. Während der erste Abschnitt von *Fremde Szene III* wie fremde Fragmente klingt, die im Raum existieren, führt der Rest des Stücks durch ein tonales Terrain, das zwar nicht völlig unbekannt ist, aber in seiner Entdeckungsfreude völlig ungebunden bleibt.

Originalzitate von Wolfgang Rihm

„Dann gibt es einen Komponisten, dessen musikalisches Denken schon von den Zeitgenossen als anarchisch erspürt worden ist, und dessen musikalische Rede derart frei sich fortzeugt, dass sie mir als der Idealfall und die Ausprägung von Phantasie überhaupt erscheint, die ohne größere Strangulation von innen nach außen gelangen konnte; dieser Komponist ist Robert Schumann.“

Wolfgang Rihm „Musikalische Freiheit“

„Die fremde Zunge spricht Eigenstes, kein Ton ist zitiert, in den ‚Ton‘ wird gefallen, gestürzt.“

Wolfgang Rihm, Programmhinweis zu *Fremde Szenen*, Universal Edition

Kommentar zu Franz Schubert's Klaviertrio in B-Dur

In Josef von Spauns Erinnerungen an Franz Schubert aus dem Jahr 1858 berichtet Spaun von einem schüchternen Satz, den sein Freund ihm einst zuflüsterte: „Innsgeheim, in meinem innersten Herzen, hoffe ich immer noch, etwas aus mir machen zu können – aber wer kann schon noch etwas leisten nach Beethoven?“

Es ist kaum zu glauben, dass zwischen dem Tod Schuberts und dem Beethovens nur zwanzig Monate liegen. Schubert, der im März 1827 tief bewegt an Beethovens Beerdigung teilnahm, hätte sich nie träumen lassen, jemals an die Stelle des älteren Komponisten zu treten oder Werke zu schaffen, die eines Tages ein vergleichbares Vermächtnis hinterlassen würden. Der damals erst dreißigjährige Schubert stand kurz vor einem breiteren Durchbruch und verspürte eine zunehmende Dringlichkeit in seinem künstlerischen Schaffen. Seine Zurückhaltung hatte die Verbreitung seiner Musik über Jahre hinweg ernsthaft behindert, und seine bereits seit 1823 und 1824 angeschlagene Gesundheit bereitete ihm immer größere Sorgen.

Tatsächlich war das Klaviertrio in Es-Dur, op. 100, das erste seiner Werke, das außerhalb Wiens veröffentlicht wurde – durch den Verlag Schott in Leipzig. Das Manuskript des B-Dur-Trios, op. 99, ist verschollen, weshalb das genaue Entstehungsdatum nicht mit Sicherheit feststeht. Dennoch gilt als nahezu gewiss, dass es zuerst komponiert wurde. Bereits 1812 hatte Schubert einen eigenständigen Satz für Klaviertrio geschrieben – den sogenannten „Sonatensatz“ – sowie 1827 das posthum betitelte „Notturmo“ D. 897. Doch erst mit den Trios op. 99 und op. 100 legte er reife, voll ausgearbeitete Werke für diese Besetzung vor.

Beide Klaviertrios entstanden im letzten Jahr seines Lebens – zusammen mit vielen seiner heute am meisten geschätzten Kompositionen. Das Trio in B-Dur, das vermutlich zeitgleich mit dem Liederzyklus *Winterreise* entstand, könnte unterschiedlicher kaum sein. Während die *Winterreise* die Abgründe

menschlichen Leids auslotet, erscheint das B-Dur-Trio im Vergleich dazu von heiterem, fast hoffnungsvollem Charakter.

Als Interpret*innen hören wir im Studium oft die Redewendung: „Jeder glückliche Moment bei Schubert kommt mit einer Träne, und jeder traurige mit einem leisen Lächeln.“

Dieses Werk jedoch bildet womöglich eine Ausnahme – jeder Satz bewegt sich zwischen freudigem Aufblühen und innigem Gesang.

Zahlreiche Autor*innen haben sich mit Schuberts B-Dur-Trio befasst, doch kaum jemand hat sein Wesen treffender beschrieben als Robert Schumann in einem Artikel über das Werk in der *Neuen Zeitschrift für Musik* im Jahr 1836:

Ein Blick auf das Trio von Schubert und das elende Menschentreiben flieht ängstlich zurück und die Welt glänzt wieder so frisch. Ging doch schon vor etwa zehn Jahren ein Schubert'sches Trio, wie eine zürnende Himmelser-scheinung, über das damalige Musiktreiben hinweg; es war gerade sein hundertes Werk, und kurz darauf, im November 1828, starb er. Das neuerschienene Trio ist ein älteres. Im Styl verrät es durchaus keine frühere Periode und mag kurz vor dem bekannten in Es-Dur geschrieben sein. Innerlich unterscheiden sie sich aber wesentlich von einander. Der erste Satz, der dort tiefer Zorn und wiederum überschwängliche Sehnsucht, ist in unserm anmutig, vertrauend, jungfräulich; das Adagio, das dort ein Seufzer, der sich bis zur schreienden Herzensangst steigert, ist schön menschlicher Empfindung. Die Scherzo's ähneln sich; doch gebe ich dem im früher erschienenen zweiten Trio den Vorzug. Ueber die letzten Sätze entscheid' ich nicht. Mit einem Worte, das zweite Trio ist mehr handelnd, männlich, dramatisch, unseres dagegen leidend, weiblich, lyrisch. Sei uns das hinterlassene Werk ein teures Vermächtniß! Die Zeit, so zahllos und Schönes sie gebiert, einen Schubert bringt sie sobald nicht wieder.

Dank

Wir danken dem Team und dem Wettbewerb „Franz Schubert und die Musik der Moderne“ herzlich für ihre Unterstützung und die Möglichkeit, dieses Album aufzunehmen. Unser besonderer Dank gilt unserem Toningenieur Alexander Van Ingen sowie Penny Wright und Andrew Neubauer, die uns die Aufnahmen im Syde Manor in Gloucestershire, Großbritannien, ermöglicht haben.

Excerpt from the interview by Jennifer Ronyak¹ with Trio Brontë, First Prize Winners in the Category Piano Trio.

Jennifer Ronyak (JR): Greetings, Trio Brontë. Congratulations on winning first prize in the category Piano Trio. I'm pleased to be here with Chiara Sannicandro (CS), violin, Lili Bogdanova (LB), piano, and Annie Jacobs-Perkins (AJP), violoncello. I have a few questions for you, about your history as an ensemble, your repertoire and how you view your field. Could you reflect on how your different backgrounds as musicians each bring something to the ensemble?

CS: We all played a lot of chamber music, generally, before meeting, but usually, in this kind of getting together at a festival or at school, but not really having a super stable group. I'm very happy to have this kind of work, this deeper work.

AJP: And it's funny because we were just talking with the jury and getting feedback, and one of my favorite comments was just that they said that they can tell that all of us have ideas, and that's one of the things that I value the most about our group, because it's not one person leading the rehearsals. I think it's partly because we do have different backgrounds and come from different places. But we also all have so much respect for the way that the others play. It's really so amazing to hear something, and you're like – wow, I want to sound just like that.

JR: How would you actually describe your rehearsals?

¹ Jennifer Ronyak, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Musicology at the Institute of Music Aesthetics at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz.



AJP: I don't know how best to describe that, perhaps a lot of talking.

CS: Usually I love when rehearsals are with not that much talking. But I think that the more you work with one group, and the more stable you become, the less you can avoid the talking. So then, you have to find a way where you don't get stuck, but everyone can express their ideas. And there are a lot of discussions, in fact.

AJP: This was true actually in preparing for this competition. We did a few different things because, given real-life restrictions, there was limited time to prepare a lot of different material. And there were some pieces that were newer for us. And for those, we really made an effort to talk less, actually, and to play more, to have more nonverbal communication. And that was sometimes successful and sometimes less successful. And then other times, we tried having one person lead a rehearsal. And we also did some just purely singing rehearsals. This was because we had limited access to a piano after 5:30 p.m. and we had to figure something out after that. And so, for this commissioned piece (remark: the prizewinning piece of the International Composition Competition 2024), for example, we ended up just singing all of the parts together to make sure that we could figure out how to align them.

JR: Interesting. I actually have a question about that. And maybe it goes a little bit to the nature of this competition, Franz Schubert and Modern Music. They try to emphasize the connection between Schubert's time and newer music, which matters in Austria and Graz. Last night I found Constanze Wimmer's (remark: moderator of the competition finals) brief comment interesting that Wolfgang Rihm – whose trio you played in the competition – expressed that it was difficult as a modern composer to enter this traditional genre. And when I think about it also, I think the piano trio is just so at home

in the nineteenth century, this sound. How apt then do you find the piano trio sound for really recent works? Or, more specifically, how well-matched do you find the piano trio sound to much newer works: either *'Fields, Cities, Skies, and Ruins,'* the commissioned piece you rehearsed especially for the competition, or the Wolfgang Rihm that you played?

AJP: For me it's like anything – it just has to do with imagination. I think that's part of the reason that we love the Rihm and also playing the commission so much. You can tell that there are very specific things that are imagined. I personally don't think that any one ensemble is better suited to contemporary music than another, because I think it has everything to do especially with how the composers imagined the sound themselves. We could see with all of the works that the ensembles performed this week that there are so many different ways to do that. The way that the performers imagine those sounds is equally important. And ideally, I think we're being as creative with Schubert or Mendelssohn or anything else that we played as we are with contemporary music.

CS: You feel in a way more liberated in these contemporary pieces because you don't have as much tradition to cope with – tradition or the opinions of others about how it should sound. There's not such a clear idea of right or wrong. I really enjoy that.

JR: And speaking of repertoire, what repertoire are you especially passionate about as a piano trio?

LB: I think all of it. We love playing classical period things, and we're all interested in historical performance. Also, in the case of very contemporary work, as Chiara pointed out, we enjoy so much digging into it.

CS: Once you figure it out!

LB: It's difficult, it's very difficult. But the more you get into it, the more it makes sense, and it becomes more fun.

JR: I noticed on your website that you have been involved in some projects highlighting women composers. You performed a concert focused on French women composers, for example. Can you speak a bit about your ambitions in dealing with what seem at first to be more peripheral corners of the repertoire?

AJP: I think all three of us feel strongly about this. I don't want to speak for anyone, but we want to be musicians first and then maybe after that we can be labeled as female musicians. And I think for me the point of playing music that hasn't been so much performed, is if, for one, it is great music then it's good for people to hear it. Actually, one piece that we were planning to play here, but our program was a bit too long, was a piece by Lili Boulanger (remark: D'un matin de printemps). That's an example of a piece that I think wasn't played for a long time for all the wrong reasons. But also, I think it's powerful just to know that this music exists in the first place. A friend of mine who teaches piano to young kids was telling me that she was giving them listening projects. And by accident she had given them all of the staples – for example, Schubert, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann. Then this little girl came to her and she asked: can I not write music because I'm not a man? And this was not her intention at all as a teacher, but it made her realize that this was the message that comes across.

JR: Oh, wow.

AJP: So, I think that's why, at least for me, it's important to play lots of different kinds of music and to show that anybody can be a composer, because our lives probably would have been very different fifty or sixty years ago.

JR: Great. Thank you. What are chamber music competitions like for you?

CS: It feels nicer to do it together but also, I think you have less control than when you do a solo competition, and you just have to trust much more, and you have to rely and just go with what happens. I think we managed very well. The atmosphere plays a big role. It is important to feel like things can happen, and there's not going to be a bad feeling from the others. But I like also that we have to react in the moment, no matter if it's a competition or not. It is important to just feel each other. You can tell when someone maybe feels good or not so good. It is a matter of being able to rely on each other. That is a nice feeling.

LB: Yeah, it's also, for me, much more relaxed than solo competitions, but at the same time, you have a lot of responsibility for your partners, you don't want to let them down. And in a way, I think this helps me be stronger, because I really want to do well and to make them happy, because we put in so much work together. When we are on stage and I look at them, I feel how they're with me, and I feel that I have to be strong for them and for myself.

JR: This is quite an open question, and you've answered some of it throughout, but did you have anything more to say about what's most important to you in trio playing as an aspect of your broader, more kaleidoscopic career endeavors?

LB: The mutual respect and the feeling that each member is equal, and we all get the chance to express our opinions and ideas completely honestly. You also have to pay attention to how you speak, because it's very sensitive giving criticism to others. That's why some groups end up hating each other, because at some point it gets too honest. But it's important to feel like it's a safe space where you are allowed to do this. Only in this way do you really develop – instead of piling up some things that you didn't dare express.

AJP: Yes, for me, this group feels very safe. Preparing for competitions is of course really stressful, and we definitely had some moments of tension leading up to it, but being able to talk through those things, and knowing that there's this foundation of respect and friendship, is important. My family's on the opposite side of the ocean, and my trio members are sort of my family in Europe. It's important to me to have that kind of safety, where you know you

can speak your mind. And that we will figure it out. And assuming the best of somebody else, I think, is part of that. If somebody's having a bad day, it's not because they're trying to be nasty.

CS: It is good to express yourself musically and have the space to do so, but then also give the space. It feels very nice in this group.

JR: Nice. Well, congratulations again! And it's great to talk to all of you.

The German translation and full version of this interview can be found on our website at <https://schubert.kug.ac.at/dokumentation/2025/interviews>.







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