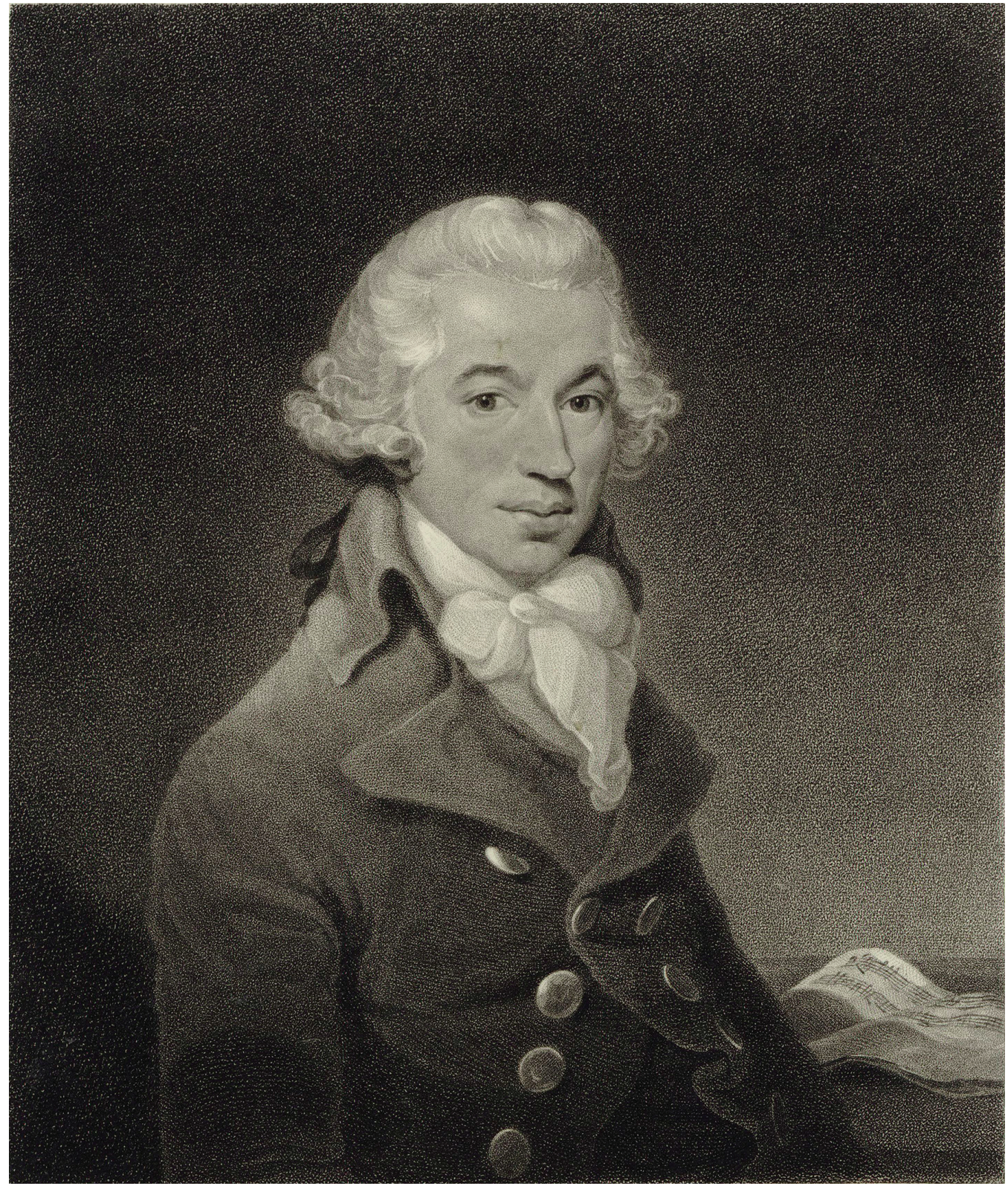
Ignaz

PLEYEL

String Trios, Ben. 401–403

Three Duos for Violin and Cello, Ben. 504–506



Pettman Ensemble

Ignaz Pleyel (1757–1831)

String Trios, Ben. 401–403 · Three Duos for Violin and Cello, Ben. 504–506

By the early years of the 19th century, Ignaz Pleyel was arguably the most popular composer in Europe. Almost from the moment he completed his studies with Joseph Haydn in the late 1770s Pleyel's music began to attract the interest and admiration of virtually everybody who encountered it, including Mozart, who wrote enthusiastically to his father about Pleyel's first published set of string quartets. Pleyel proved an extremely versatile composer whose prolific output included a large and varied corpus of chamber music. These works were published, republished and pirated in almost every corner of Europe, and by the turn of the century, over 2,000 editions of Pleyel's compositions had appeared in print, dwarfing in number those of any of his contemporaries – including his illustrious teacher. He had also founded a music publishing firm in Paris that was rapidly becoming one of the leading houses in Europe, and from 1807 his firm began manufacturing instruments. This part of the business, and the Salle Pleyel, the concert hall he founded in 1830, the year before his death, survive to this day.

In the 18th-century hierarchy of chamber music genres, trios and duos were undoubtedly considered trifles in comparison with the string quartet, but there is nothing trivial about the works featured on this recording. As Leopold Mozart wrote astutely to Wolfgang in a letter dated 13 August 1778, 'What is slight can still be great, if it is written in a natural, flowing and easy style – and at the same time bears the mark of sound composition …Good composition, sound construction, *il filo* – these distinguish the master from the bungler – even in trifles.' Leopold Mozart could have been writing about any of the works on this album: he would surely have admired the ingenious way that Pleyel maintains musical continuity – *il filo* – through the use of subtle motivic links between themes and within connecting passages, yet there is also contrast, variety and surprise enough to delight the most accomplished players.

Hundreds of string trios were composed during the second half of the 18th century, although comparatively few of these, curiously, were written for violin, viola and cello. The overwhelming majority were scored for two violins and basso (a generic term which in chamber music generally refers to the cello) or less frequently for flute, violin and basso. Even Haydn, the most innovative composer of the period, cultivated the older type of string trio, although Pleyel doubtless encountered exemplars in the course of his travels by composers such as Luigi Boccherini and Felice Giardini, while his first important teacher, Johann Baptist Vaňhal, composed some 22 trios for violin, viola and basso, some of which he may also have known. Thus, while Pleyel was hardly an innovator in writing for this particular combination of instruments, he was certainly progressive in doing so and his three string trios are therefore of considerable historical importance.

Pleyel's three *Trios Concertants*, as they are styled in the earliest editions, appeared in 1787 and were likely composed not too long before this. Unlike the composer's string quartets and string quintets which generally adopt a three-movement cycle, the string trios are cast in two movements: an opening *Allegro* and a *Rondeau*. While two-movement pairings are not unknown in Viennese music – particularly in the keyboard divertimento – it is more characteristic of the French tradition. Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, to name one composer whose music was likely known to Pleyel, employed the two-movement *Allegro–Rondeau* pairing in both chamber works and in larger-scale compositions such as the *symphonie concertante*. Pleyel, ever alert to local tastes and preferences, adopted a number of French stylistic practices once he moved to Strasbourg in 1783, and the string trios reflect this.

The use of the term 'concertant' in the title signifies an equality of parts; that is, each of the instruments in the ensemble plays an important role in presenting thematic material. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of the cello part which is liberated at times from its functional basso role to participate fully in the musical dialogue. Pleyel's trios share many stylistic qualities with his string quartets and quintets, particularly in their skilful distribution of thematically important material between instruments, and in the deployment of instrumental pairings. His feel for the trio medium is at once apparent in his nuanced exploitation of contrasting musical textures which range from bold, homophonic writing in a quasi-orchestral style to brief sections of imitative writing that serve to animate the music. But technique without inspiration would not have been sufficient to make these works so successful. They abound in attractive ideas which are made all the more alluring at times by Pleyel's subtle use of chromatic inflections and unexpected if brief tonal excursions. The first movements reveal Pleyel's mastery of form, a legacy of his studies with Haydn, while the sparkling *rondeau* movements, although less structurally complex, are no less sophisticated in their exploitation of the medium.

The three duos for violin and cello featured on this recording belong to a set of six duos (*Benton 501–506*) which have an unusually complex publishing history even for Pleyel. Over 20 editions – including reissues – appeared during the composer's lifetime, and of these, nearly half (those of André, Artaria, Forster, Hummel, Longman & Broderip, Schmitt, Schott and Sieber) appeared in 1788. The earliest known print was issued by Götz in Mannheim the previous year but no copies of that edition are known to have survived. Of the plethora of editions that appeared the following year the earliest appears to be that of the Parisian publisher Sieber which was issued under the title: *Six / DUOS / Concertants / Pour Violon et Violoncelle / Composés Par / JGNA PLEYEL / Élève de / M. Haydn.* The publication was advertised in the *Frankfurter Staats-Ristretto* on 21 January. Although Pleyel was by now very well established as a composer and had been resident in Strasbourg for several years, it is interesting that Sieber still describes Pleyel as Haydn's pupil on the title page, something it seems unlikely that Pleyel himself would have requested at this point in his career. This highlights a problem frequently encountered in 18th-century publications when it is unclear whether the composer was involved in or even aware of the publication of the edition. In Pleyel's case, it is highly unlikely that he knew about most of these editions given their geographical spread, but he must have offered the works to at least one publisher (possibly Götz or Sieber) soon after their composition. Benton does not list extant manuscript copies of the works, but it is possible that some of the later editions were based on manuscript copies of early prints. Pleyel himself issued the *Six Duos* in 1802 and again during the period 1803–08 with a revised title page. André (1788) described the works as being written '*pour Violon et Violoncelle ou deux Violons*' (although the music itself is clearly conceived for violin and cello), and in subsequent years the duos were issued in a variety of scorings including violin and viola (Boyer, 1790), two flutes (Sieber, 1791) and two clarinets (Artaria, 1796). Arrangements for string trio and keyboard and strings are also known along with versions for keyboard and one wind or string instrument.

Although their unusual scoring undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the duos, their musical qualities – evidenced by the large number of contemporary arrangements – probably played a greater role. Like the string trios, the works are rich in attractive and distinctive melodic material; Pleyel writes idiomatically for both instruments and his part-writing is varied and interesting. As the designation 'concertant' implies, the cello is by no means subordinate to the violin in these works and takes an equal share in the presentation and development of thematic material. Like the trios, Pleyel also adopts the two-movement pairing of an *Allegro* first movement and a concluding *Rondeau*, or, in the case of *Benton 506*, a *Menuetto*. The *rondeaux* perhaps encourage the works not to be taken very seriously, but they nonetheless demonstrate in their own way a level of compositional mastery and a freshness and vitality comparable to that found in their finely wrought first movements.

Allan Badley

Also available

NAXOS

Ignaz
PLEYEL

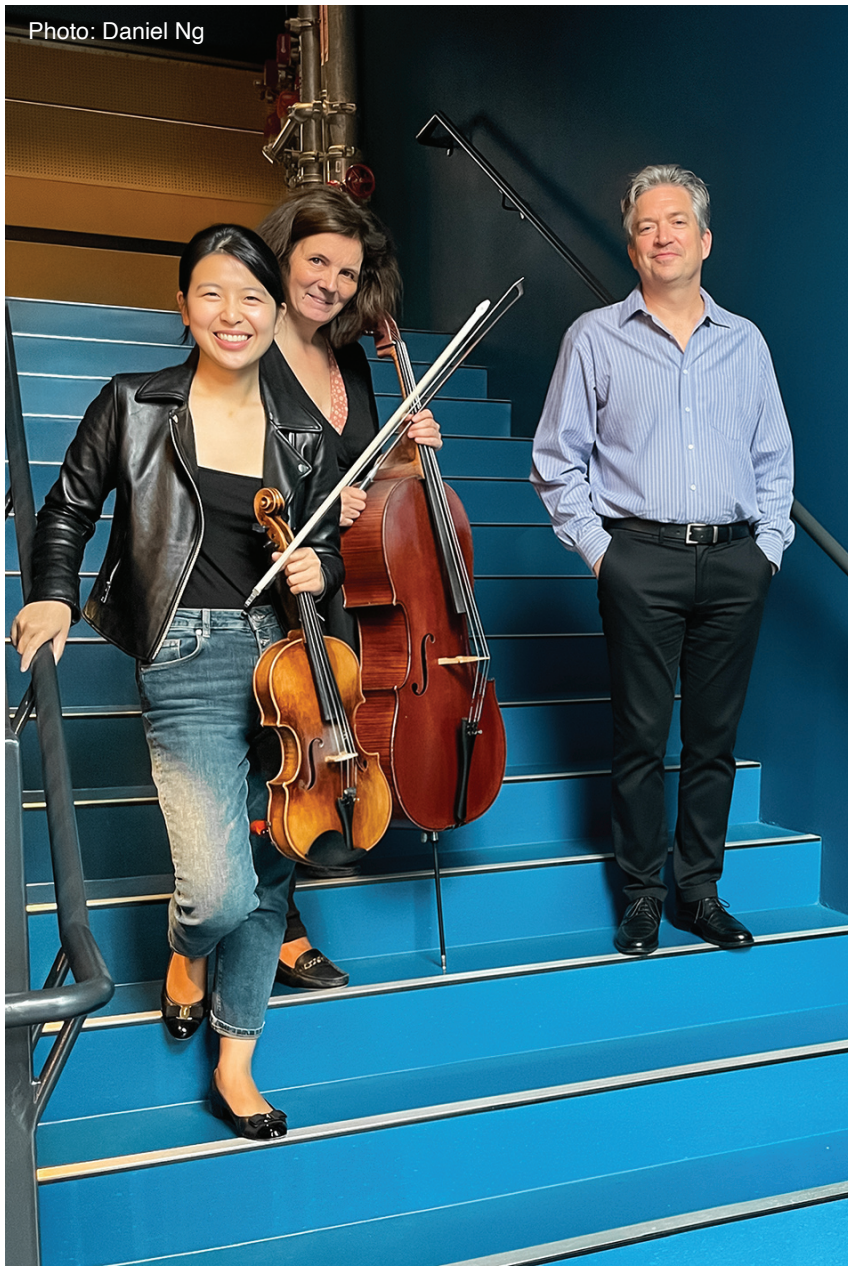
String Quintets, Ben. 271–273



Pettman Ensemble

8.574492

Pettman Ensemble



The Pettman Ensemble is a flexible touring group of musicians from New Zealand and Australia dedicated to performing chamber music from early Classical repertoire to contemporary works. The ensemble collaborates with leading Australasian performers and emerging young artists in a wide variety of chamber music formations. The Pettman Ensemble has appeared throughout New Zealand, Australia, the UK and Europe, with engagements including performances for the Royal Overseas League in London, the University of Glasgow concert series, and Opera North, as well as broadcasts on BBC Radio 3's *In Tune*. Recent projects have included recordings of Hummel's arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies (Naxos 8.574200) and the chamber music of Ignaz Pleyel (8.574492). The ensemble served as ensemble in residence at The International Akaroa Music Festival from 2023 to 2025, presenting concerts, masterclasses, and collaborative performances with guest artists and young musicians. Alongside its international touring activities, the Pettman Ensemble continues to develop new recording and performance projects across Australasia and beyond.

www.pnja.co.nz/pettman-ensemble

www.artaria.com

Sources

The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

String Trio in E flat major, Benton 401
Edited by Allan Badley – Artaria Editions AE459
London, The British Library – h.318.ff.(1.):
Bland, *Three Trios, Op. 11*

String Trio in D major, Benton 402
Edited by Allan Badley – Artaria Editions AE460
London, The British Library – h.318.ff.(1.):
Bland, *Three Trios, Op. 11*

String Trio in F major, Benton 403
Edited by Allan Badley – Artaria Editions AE461
London, The British Library – h.318.ff.(1.):
Bland, *Three Trios, Op. 11*

Three Duos for Violin and Cello, Benton 504–506
Edited by Allan Badley – Artaria Editions AE408-2
London, The British Library – h.3212.f.(7.):
Longman & Broderip, *Six Duos, Op. 12*

Ignaz Pleyel, a pupil of Haydn, was arguably the most popular composer in Europe during the early years of the 19th century with his works published, republished and pirated across the continent. The *String Trios* and *Duos* illustrate the subtlety of his motivic links between themes and a rich variety of contrasts as well as unexpected excursions that surprise and entertain. Pleyel also liberates the cello from its previously functional *basso* role, and employs subtle chromatic inflections, revealing compositional mastery and freshness of invention. The Pettman Ensemble's recording of Pleyel's *String Quintets* can be heard on Naxos 8.574492.

Ignaz PLEYEL
(1757–1831)

	String Trio in E flat major, Ben. 401 (before 1787)	**13:46**
1	**I. Allegro**	**9:30**
2	**II. Rondeau**	**4:16**
	String Trio in D major, Ben. 402 (before 1787)	**13:14**
3	**I. Allegro**	**8:58**
4	**II. Rondeau: Allegretto**	**4:16**
	String Trio in F major, Ben. 403 (before 1787)	**11:13**
5	**I. Allegro con spirito**	**6:54**
6	**II. Rondeau: Moderato**	**4:19**
	Duo for Violin and Cello in G major, Ben. 504 (before 1787)	**11:21**
7	**I. Moderato**	**6:16**
8	**II. Rondeau: Allegro**	**5:05**
	Duo for Violin and Cello in A major, Ben. 505 (before 1787)	**11:43**
9	**I. Adagio**	**6:58**
10	**II. Rondeau: Allegretto**	**4:45**
	Duo for Violin and Cello in B flat major, Ben. 506 (before 1787)	**10:51**
11	**I. Moderato**	**6:21**
12	**II. Menuetto**	**4:30**

Pettman Ensemble

Curt Thompson, Violin • Wenhong Luo, Viola 1–6 • Edith Salzmann, Cello

Recorded: 3 1–2, 4 3–6, 6 9–12 and 7 7–8 September 2022 at the University of Melbourne, Australia
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Booklet notes: Allan Badley • Publisher: Artaria Editions • Sponsored by the Pettman National Academy of Music
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