ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	REVISITING OLD FORMS: THE PIANO TRIO, THE DUO SONATA, AND THE SONATINE AS SEEN BY BRAHMS, TCHAIKOVSKY, AND RAVEL
	Hsiang-Ling Hsiao, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2017
Dissertation directed by:	Professor Rita Sloan School of Music

This performance dissertation explored three significant piano trios, two major instrumental sonatas and a solo piano *sonatine* over the course of three recitals. Each recital featured the work of either Brahms, Tchaikovsky or Ravel. Each of these three composers had a special reverence for older musical forms and genres.

The piano trio originated from various forms of trio ensemble in the Baroque period, which consisted of a dominating keyboard part, an accompanying violin, and an optional cello. By the time Brahms and Tchaikovsky wrote their landmark trios, the form had taken on symphonic effects and proportions. The Ravel Trio, another high point of the genre, written in the early twentieth century, went even further exploring new ways of using all possibilities of each instrument and combining them.

The duo repertoire has come equally far: duos featuring a string instrument with piano grew from a humble Baroque form into a multifaceted, flexible classical form. Starting with Bach and continuing with Mozart and Beethoven, the form traveled into the

Romantic era and beyond, taking on many new guises and personalities. In Brahms' two cello sonatas, even though the cello was treated as a soloist, the piano still maintained its traditional prominence. In Ravel's jazz-influenced violin sonata, he treated the two instruments with equal importance, but worked with their different natures and created an innovative sound combination.

The solo piano work in this dissertation, the Ravel *Sonatine*, is beautifully constructed, revisiting older forms while being firmly rooted in new early-twentieth century Impressionist sounds.

Two of the three recitals featured a major trio by Brahms and Ravel coupled with sonatas and a *sonatine*. The Tchaikovsky Trio, monumentally long and difficult, was presented alone at my lecture recital. The recitals were performed on December 7, 2014, November 15, 2015, and March 30, 2016 at the University of Maryland School of Music's Gildenhorn Recital Hall, and I was assisted by violinists Sharon Oh and Dr. James Stern as well as cellists Seth Castleton and Andrew Hesse. The recitals were recorded on CDs, which can be found in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

REVISITING OLD FORMS: THE PIANO TRIO, THE DUO SONATA, AND THE SONATINE AS SEEN BY BRAHMS, TCHAIKOVSKY, AND RAVEL

by

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INTRODUCTION

Piano chamber music, comprised of combinations of different instruments with piano, includes duos, trios, quartets, quintets, sextets, and even septets. The instrumental duo has grown from its early Baroque form and taken many paths. The piano trio originated from various forms of trio ensemble in the Baroque period, which consisted of a dominating keyboard part, an accompanying violin, and an optional cello.

When Mozart composed what we now consider the first piano trios[1] in 1786, the string quartets of Haydn were already at a high level for professional performers. Several reasons contributed to the late arrival of the piano trio. First, the strings needed to grow from the accompanying role to a near-equal partnership with the keyboard. Second, composers began to intentionally compose the keyboard part for the pianoforte rather than the harpsichord when the Industrial Revolution advanced piano construction and thus made available an instrument that was louder, richer, and stronger than before. Last but not least, to write effective chamber music for piano and strings was not an easy task.[2]

The duo repertoire featuring a string instrument with piano grew from a very humble Baroque form into a multifaceted and flexible classical form. Starting with Bach and continuing with Mozart and Beethoven, the form traveled into the Romantic era and beyond, taking on many new guises and personalities.

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[1] K. 496 in G, K. 498 in E-flat, and K. 502 in B-flat.

[2] Basil Smallman, *The Piano Trio: Its History, Technique, and Repertoire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 117.

In the early duo sonatas, the piano was self-sufficient and the violin had merely an accompanimental role. Mozart, in his late violin sonatas, was the first composer to bring the violin to equal partnership with the piano. Even though in Beethoven's violin sonatas, he often created music dialogues and shared melodies between the two instruments, notably the opening melody of the Spring Sonata, the violin was only beginning to be on equal footing with the piano. It is important to remember that in the nineteenth century almost half of the sonatas written were for solo piano. Of the ones written for piano with a string instrument, most were written for violin. This form, too, traveled into the Romantic era and beyond, with many innovations and other changes happening along the way.

DISSERTATION RECITAL I: BRAHMS

December 7, 2014, 2:00 PM
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Sonata for Piano and Cello No. 2 in F major, Op. 99 (1886)

I. Allegro vivace
II. Adagio affetuoso
III. Allegro passionato
IV. Allegro molto

Andrew Hesse, cello

Intermission

Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8 (revised version, 1889)

I. Allegro con brio
II. Scherzo: Allegro molto
III. Adagio
IV. Allegro

Pyung-Kang Sharon Oh, violin
Andrew Hesse, cello

Recital I: Program Notes

Johannes Brahms, born in Hamburg in 1833, was an accomplished pianist and a prolific composer, and his chamber music works are among the most important in music literature. The significance and greatness of his chamber works make it impossible for any pianist, and particularly any collaborative pianist, not to encounter them in one's musical journey. His gifts to the world include seven wonderful string-and-piano duos: three violin sonatas, two viola sonatas (written originally for the clarinet) and two cello sonatas. Just as Brahms got great help and inspiration from Joseph Joachim for his violin works and Richard Mühlfeld for his clarinet sonatas, notable German cellist Robert Hausmann was Brahms' muse for his second cello sonata, and it was to him that the piece was dedicated.

A member of the Joachim Quartet, Robert Hausmann was an important figure in relation to Brahms' works for cello. He popularized Brahms' first Cello Sonata through his fine playing, premiered the Double Concerto in A minor with Joachim, and also premiered the Clarinet Trio in A minor with clarinetist Mühlfeld and Brahms himself at the piano.

The F major Cello Sonata, Op. 99, was written, together with the A major Violin Sonata, Op. 100, and the C minor Trio, Op. 101, in the summer of 1886 near beautiful Lake Thun in Switzerland where Brahms also spent the following two summers. In a letter to his close friend Theodor Billroth, Brahms expressed, "I'm very glad to have come here. . . . You have no conception of how beautiful and comfortable it is here in

every respect."[3] The refreshing and relaxing environment near the easily accessible beer-gardens provided Brahms with fertile summer days.

Composed more than twenty years after the three-movement nostalgic E minor Cello Sonata, the F major Sonata is a fiery and passionate four-movement work. Without the usual presentation of a singable and catchy melody as heard in many of Brahms' other works, the exuberant opening of the first movement, *Allegro vivace*, immediately keeps the listeners on the edge of their seats with the *sforzando* tremolo from the piano providing the harmonic progression for the abrupt and fragmented cello outbursts. Commenting on the unusual cello opening phrase, composer and music theorist Arnold Schoenberg wrote in 1931: "Younger listeners will probably be unaware that at the time of Brahms's death this sonata was still very unpopular and was considered indigestible. . . . At that time the unusual rhythm within this 3/4 time, the syncopations which give the impression that the third phrase is in 4/4 . . . and the unusual intervals . . . the ninths contained in this phrase . . . made it difficult to grasp. I felt all this myself, so I know how seriously it must be taken."[4] The sharply rhythmic and bold leap of the ninth is soon balanced by the steadfast stepwise quarter-note response in the piano. The following second theme sees the extensive use of cross-rhythms, a feature of Brahms' compositional style, first between the two hands of the piano part, and later between the two instruments. In the restless and wandering development section the stepwise quarter-note response prevails although it is then transformed in rhythmic diminution from quarter notes to eighths. Near the end of the development section the fragmented jumpy cello

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[3] Styra Avins, ed., *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, trans. Josef Eisinger and Styra Avins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 139.

[4] Michael Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 193.

opening appears in the piano, but this time in a completely different character. Brahms augments the opening sharp rhythm first into quarters, and then into whole notes, creating the sense of calmness and spaciousness.

The second movement, *Adagio affettuoso*, although in the traditional ternary ABA form, shifts untraditionally to the remote key of F-sharp major, a semitone higher than the key of the preceding movement. The cello *pizzicati* provides the walking bass countersubject to the piano's opening melody of great warmth and affection, a combination appearing two more times in the movement, and Brahms inserts the cello *pizzicati* sixteenth notes while the piano is playing longer note values, cleverly giving a greater chance for the cello *pizzicati* to be heard. The urging and troubled middle section, in F minor, is achieved rhythmically through off-beats and syncopated writing and through the cello exploring its lower strings while the piano rhapsodizes with a passage of chromatic thirds and sixths. The scherzo movement, *Allegro passionato* in F minor, presents not only a daunting technical challenge for the pianist with chromatic sixths and arpeggiated chords, but also rhythmic complexity for both instruments as Brahms interweaves cross-rhythms throughout the entire movement. The trio section, with a sunny melody in F major, is a brief getaway from the stormy scherzo. The last movement, *Allegro molto*, is a relatively light finale considering the expansiveness of the preceding movements. Brahms turns to a more folk-like tune for the first theme and syncopations of peasant character for the second theme.

Although the F major Sonata is considered a finer work, it is technically much less comfortable for both the cellist and the pianist than the E minor Sonata. Another challenge the performers face playing this piece is that the heavy and thick writing of the

piano part poses a risk in covering the low-pitched cello. The issue of balance might not have been a concern for Brahms, as it was reported that when he played the E minor Sonata with Josef Gänsbacher, an amateur cellist to whom the piece was dedicated, he was playing so loudly on the piano that Gänsbacher complained he could not hear his cello at all. To this Brahms simply replied, "Lucky for you, too,"[5] and kept on going. In the case of the F Major Sonata, Hausmann, widely known as the best cellist of Brahms' generation, was believed to have "a tone so big and luminous that it could rise above the piano fortissimo,"[6] but even so, the issue of balance should remain a concern for performers nowadays.

By the time Brahms composed his Piano Trio in B Major, Op. 8, he was continuing the journey that Mozart began in 1786. After Mozart, the concept of piano trio writing had already been expanded by Beethoven who broadened the dimensions of the genre by giving musical interest and variety to each of the three instruments and employing wider keyboard spacing and stronger piano sonorities. Following Beethoven's example, a growing number of composers began to compose piano trios and, prior to Brahms, produced fine works, particularly those by Schubert and Mendelssohn.

Brahms began the composition of his Op. 8 in 1853, when he was merely twenty years old, shortly after having met Robert Schumann. Seeing this young man's great talent, Schumann spoke highly of Brahms in his magazine *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* as someone who "would achieve mastery, not step by step, but all at once...a young man at

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[5] Henry S. Drinker, Jr., *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 81.

[6] Drinker, *Chamber Music*, 98.

whose cradle graces and heroes stood watch."[7] However, Schumann's praise brought Brahms a tremendous burden and much pressure as he struggled to decide what works to publish and worked to live up to this expectation. Being an extremely self-critical composer, he unsurprisingly undertook a revision of this youthful work thirty-seven years later and republished it in 1891. Still, he was hesitant with the revision. In a letter to Clara Schumann, Brahms expressed his uncertainty: "I have rewritten my B major trio. . . . It will not be so wild as it was before, but whether it will be better----?"[8] Three months later he wrote to Clara, "I have already thrown the piece to the dogs and did not want to play it. The fact that it seemed inadequate to me and did not please me means little."[9] After receiving positive feedback from Joachim and other friends, Brahms finally gave his approval to the work.

According to Brahms, he "did not provide it with a wig, but just combed and arranged its hair a little."[10] The revision is one-third shorter than the original version. The essential character, the youthful exuberance, of the piece is preserved as the main themes of all the movements are fundamentally unchanged. Some sections are deleted and new second themes are added to tighten the structure.

The opening theme of the first movement, *Allegro con brio*, is one of the most sincere, heart-warming melodies ever written, first presented by the piano alone, continued by the cello, and finally the violin joins them. The first theme, composed diatonically, is supported by simple tonic and dominant harmonies, and its rhythm falls

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[7] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 117.

[8] Drinker, *Chamber Music*, 56.

[9] Drinker, *Chamber Music*, 57.

[10] Musgrave, *Music of Brahms*, 195.

on the strong beats. The second theme, contrasting to the first theme, is conventionally more chromatic and its harmony richer. Starting with a falling third and a rising response, it is rhythmically interesting as well in that the note-groups begin on the weak beats. Besides, the triplet figure introduced before the second theme is important recurring material which Brahms uses extensively in the development section. With the two contrasting themes and the triplet figure, Brahms masterfully links the entire movement together.

The scherzo movement, *Allegro molto*, is the movement that stayed in its original form almost completely. Opened with a *leggiero* playful character, the B minor scherzo section features the rare usage of subito *fortissimo* and frequent third-beat *sforzando* in Brahms' music, a stylistic characteristic reminiscent of Beethoven whose music Brahms had studied diligently since his youth. The trio section in B major has another great melody constituted of nothing but simple diatonic notes which Brahms uses to generate waves of emotions to reach the movement's climax. In the A section of the ternary-form slow movement, *Adagio*, Brahms separates the piano from the strings and creates a dialogue between the two groups. The celestial and ethereal A section is contrasted by the relatively earthy and nostalgic B section, an effect enhanced through the use of registration and dynamics: in the A section the two hands of the piano are far apart on the keyboard and the dynamic markings are *p* and *pp*, whereas in the B section all three instruments go to their lower register and the dynamics range from *p* to *f.* The narrow-ranged opening theme of the last movement, *Allegro* in 3/4 time, has the first beat lifting in the air, resulting in an empty second beat even though the running accompaniment fills up all the beats with constant triplet figures. After all three instruments state the theme,

Brahms once again constructs a second theme that is complementary to the first theme, rhythmically square with the melody falling on each quarter-note pulse in a much wider melodic range.

The decade after 1880 was Brahms' mature period of chamber music compositions when he composed the three violin sonatas, the F major Cello Sonata, the other two piano trios, and started the revision of the B major Trio. This exceptional collection of work "exemplifies the composer's very personal form of Romantic Classicism attained through intensive study and stringent self-discipline."[11] The "intensive study," in addition to the years Brahms spent during his youth at both composing and at the piano, was a devoted analysis of Renaissance and Baroque music. This life-long work equipped him with a wealth of the kinds of compositional techniques that are key to his own compositions such as cross-rhythms, hemiola, rhythmic augmentation and diminution, and the use of thirds and sixths. The study of counterpoint enabled him to treat each voice independently and provide great interest in each separate part, which explained why he would elevate the importance of the strings in chamber music and create a high degree of independence for each instrument. The "self-discipline" was partly a result of striving towards Beethoven's unprecedented achievements, Schumann's praise, and public expectation. However, even more important was the high bar Brahms set for himself and his artistic view of music. He would not compose for the sake of publishing. He composed and destroyed his own works unhesitatingly as long as he found them unsatisfying. As Drinker put it, "[T]here is not a note designed merely to please the audience, without contributing to the expression

[11] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 121.

or development of the musical idea. Brahms never 'showed off'."[12] He composed for unity and beauty, and the result was the universal admiration and appreciation from his time to the present.

With the Op. 8 Trio, Brahms truly revisited the old form. With his symphonic approach and the high technical level required to perform this Trio, Brahms brought the genre out of the salon and into the concert hall, and created "a splendid culmination in the late nineteenth century."[13]

[12] Drinker, *Chamber Music*, 22.

[13] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 128.

DISSERTATION RECITAL II: TCHAIKOVSKY

November 15, 2015, 8:00 PM
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Lecture on Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio

Intermission

Piano Trio in A minor, Op. 50 (1881-2)

I. Pezzo elegiaco
II. Tema con variazioni:
Var. I: Andante con moto
Var. II: Più mosso
Var. III: Allegro moderato
Var. IV: L'istesso tempo (Allegro moderato)
Var. V: L'istesso tempo
Var. VI: Tempo di Valse
Var. VII: Allegro moderato
Var. VIII: Fuga (Allegro moderato)*
Var. IX: Andante flebile, ma non tanto
Var. X: Tempo di mazurka
Var. XI: Moderato
Variazioni Finale e coda: Allegretto risoluto e con fuoco –
(Coda) Andante con moto - Lugubre

Pyung-Kang Sharon Oh, violin
Seth Castleton, cello

* This variation, a cut permitted by the composer, is omitted from this performance.

Recital II: Program Notes

Born in 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's remarkable ear and interest in music stood out at an early age. Soon after Tchaikovsky's graduation from the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in 1865, Nikolai Rubinstein offered him the position of music theory professor at the new Moscow Conservatory. Tchaikovsky's ability to live as an independent man, after a failed marriage, was made possible by the generous financial support of Nadezhda von Meck, the widow of a railway engineer. The two of them exchanged countless letters for fourteen years.

During the summer of 1880, Madame von Meck engaged a young piano student from the Paris Conservatory to give piano lessons to her children and perform as pianist in a trio at her summer villa. To her delight the eighteen-year-old Frenchman even composed a trio. This young Frenchman was Claude Debussy. In a letter to Tchaikovsky, Madame von Meck wrote, "Every day trios are played to me, and every day I regret that you have not written one."[14] To this request, Tchaikovsky replied, "Forgive me, dear friend, I would do anything to give you pleasure - but this is beyond me! . . . I simply cannot endure the combination of pianoforte with violin or violoncello. To my mind the *timbre* of these instruments will not blend. . . . I do not care for the trio as a form, therefore I shall never produce anything sincerely inspired through the medium of this combination of sounds."[15] For Tchaikovsky, the warm and singing tone of the string instruments sounded limited when compared to the piano, which he felt was the *king* of instruments. However, even though it is the king, he still felt that the piano strives in vain

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[14] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 162.

[15] Modeste Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. Rosa Newmarch (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970), 391-2.

to *sing* like the string instruments. Therefore, he only saw the piano as being suitable for three roles: alone as a solo instrument, in piano concerti, or as background accompaniment to an instrumental soloist.[16]

When news of the death of Nikolai Rubinstein, a person of invaluable personal importance to Tchaikovsky, came by telegram in March 1881, Tchaikovsky needed an outlet for his devastation. Looking to showcase the piano, Rubinstein's instrument, Tchaikovsky suddenly made up his mind to experiment with composing a piano trio, a decision quite possibly related to Smetana's earlier example of using the piano trio as an elegiac medium to express personal grief over the loss of a family member.[17] Although Rubinstein was not a member of Tchaikovsky's family, and was only five years senior to Tchaikovsky, his name was one of the most famous in Moscow at the time Tchaikovsky moved there as an emerging musician. Not only was he the best interpreter of Tchaikovsky's works but also he had a significant influence on Tchaikovsky's life and career.

After the beginning of the trio was finished, Tchaikovsky wrote to von Meck, "I will not conceal from you that I have had to do some violence to my feelings before I could bring myself to express my musical ideas in a new and unaccustomed form. I wish to conquer all difficulties, however; and the thought of pleasing you impels me and encourages my efforts."[18] The trio was finished the next month in January 1882. He confessed, "I am afraid, having written all my life for the orchestra, and only taken late in

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[16] Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters*, 391.

[17] Smetana's G minor Trio of 1855.

[18] Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters*, 416.

life to chamber music, I may have failed to adapt the instrumental combinations to my musical thoughts. . . . . I may have arranged music of a symphonic character as a trio, instead of writing directly for my instruments."[19]

Dedicated to Nikolai Rubinstein, the Piano Trio in A minor, Op. 50, bears the subtitle *In memory of a great artist*. This large-scale work has two movements. The title of the first movement, *Pezzo elegiaco*, suggests the using of elegiac form in expressing personal grief over the loss of a lifelong mentor. Even though Tchaikovsky received a Western style of education in music theory and composition during his time at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he still preserved his Russian character in his melodic writing. The opening theme of the piano trio is an example of a beautiful Russian melody at its best. It is mostly based on the interval of a second, and the melodic range is rather limited. The descending five-note motif resembling the mourning sigh is first heard from the cello, then the violin, and lastly the piano. The motif appears in slightly different ways in different sections throughout the movement.

Compared to the first movement which is written in broad sonata form with a clear recapitulation and a funeral march coda, the form of the second movement is not as conventional. It is a set of variations on an ascending five-note theme, a figure inverted from the first movement descending motif. Tchaikovsky first presents the theme in 4/4, but in Variation II he changes the meter to 3/4. Each of the variations has a unique style and character quite different from the mournful quality of the first movement. For example, Variation III is playful; Variation V reminds the listeners of a music box; Variation VI is a graceful waltz, Variation IX is mesmerizing, and Variation X is an

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[19] Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters*, 417-8.

elegant mazurka. Tchaikovsky was said to get the inspiration for each of the variations from a particular event in Rubinstein's life. Even though the events were not individually identified, he mentioned to his brother Modest that "the variations are only memories. One is a memory of a trip to an Amusement Park out of town [perhaps No. 5], and another of a ball we both attended [perhaps No. 6], and so on."[20]

The lengthy second movement contains an ineffective three-part fugue in Variation VIII that the composer himself permitted to be cut *ad lib*. Again in the Finale, Tchaikovsky gave permission for a good amount of music to be cut, still leaving much sequential repetition before the climatic reiteration of the opening theme in A minor. The seemingly uneconomical second movement was believed to be a result of composing the piece in a feverish pace every day from 9 am to 4 pm. Tchaikovsky was probably under pressure to complete the work in time for the first performance at the first anniversary of Nikolai Rubinstein's death in March 1882.

However, as much emotion as it carries, the work received unpromising reviews in Tchaikovsky's time. When the influential music critic Eduard Hanslick heard its first performance in Vienna, he wished that this was also its last performance, saying "it belongs to the class of suicides among compositions, of those which kill themselves with unmerciful length."[21] Max Kalbeck, another critic, wrote an even worse review also criticizing the length of the trio: "It is dedicated 'to the memory of a great artist' (Nicolaus Rubinstein) and contains in its two never-ending movements an epitaph which,

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[20] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 167.

[21] Sandra McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna, 1896-1897: Critically Moving Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 210.

enabled by its length and involvedness, could be ample for twenty departed and thirty living pianists."[22] Nevertheless, the public appreciated the trio and it has since become one of the most representative pieces in the piano trio repertoire.

Tchaikovsky's compositional output was largely in ballet, opera, and orchestral works. Although he wrote splendid concerti for the piano, violin, and cello individually - namely, the First Piano Concerto in B-flat minor, the Violin Concerto in D, and the Rococo Variations - he was not attracted to chamber music as a medium of expression. He did not like the idea of bringing the three instruments together. Neither was he a pianist-composer like Brahms. These compositional characteristics were fully reflected in his piano trio. The piece is said to have the most difficult piano music the composer ever wrote, most likely because he was not a pianist, and therefore did not realize how difficult the part was. The writing is not idiomatic for the piano or the string instruments but in combination he creates a symphonic effect that is emphatically impressive. This symphonic effect is not only exemplified in the powerful dynamics and wide range of notes including extremely low and high pitches, but also represented in the extensive phrase repetitions and prolonged sequences.[23] In addition to the technical demands, this piece also requires a high level of stamina and muscle strength from the performers to perform in its entirety.

Tchaikovsky adopted Smetana's example of using the trio as an elegiac form, and took it further to pay homage to a deceased musician with whom the composer was

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 164.

closely associated,[24] which became a formula for several subsequent Russian composers. Sergei Rachmaninoff composed his Second Piano Trio in Tchaikovsky's memory, and Anton Arensky dedicated his Piano Trio to the memory of a fellow cellist Karl Davydov. Similar to Tchaikovsky's Trio, these Russian piano trios tend to have overweight keyboard parts and quasi-orchestral scoring which distinguish them from the German predecessors in the sense of "pure" chamber music.[25]

With this two-movement monumentally long work, Tchaikovsky, like Brahms before him, revisited the piano trio. In its larger than life proportions and emotions, this is another work for the concert hall rather than the salon.

[24] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 148-9.

[25] Smallman, *Piano Trio*, 161.

DISSERTATION RECITAL III: RAVEL

March 30, 2016, 8:00 PM
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Sonatine (1903-05)

I. Modéré
II. Mouvement de Menuet
III. Animé

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in G (1923-27)

I. Allegretto
II. Blues: Moderato
III. Perpetuum mobile: Allegro

James Stern, violin

Intermission

Piano Trio (1914)

I. Modéré
II. Pantoum: Assez vif
III. Passacaille: Très large
IV. Final: Animé

James Stern, violin
Seth Castleton, cello

Recital III: Program Notes

Maurice Ravel was a representative French composer of the early twentieth century. Considering himself a classicist, he imported his twentieth-century harmonies and techniques into traditional forms and structures. His music was extremely well-crafted despite his relatively limited compositional output.

Ravel's *Sonatine*, written between 1903-05, is not a work to be neglected, even though it was written during the time he was going through his infamous five failed attempts for the Prix de Rome, an annual French government scholarship for young composers. The first movement also shows the lack of luck that Ravel had with competitions in general: he entered another competition with this movement and was the only competitor, however still did not win, and the reason had nothing to do with the quality of the piece; it was because the competition called for works not to exceed 75 measures, and Ravel's was a few measures too long. After catching the public's attention with *Jeux d'eau* in 1901, a piece showcasing Lisztian influence and the impressionistic side of his compositional style, the *Sonatine* is a clear return not only to the classical form, but also to the classical style. This return is in accordance with the anti-Romantic attitude arising from such French composers as Saint-Saëns, Fauré and Debussy, an intention to get away from the late-Romantic tradition of extended tonal harmony and complexity of formal structure.

The first movement of the *Sonatine*, marked *Modéré*, with its elegance and clarity of texture, is an example of Neoclassical sonata writing. Based on F-sharp Aeolian mode, the melody is set in octaves keeping the accompanimental figure in the middle. In the brief development section, through the accumulation of volume, speed and rhythmic

density, the climactic *ff* is reached but it only lasts for one measure before being quickly dissolved and then returning to the opening melody. The second movement, *Mouvement de Menuet*, shows Ravel's preference for the graceful eighteenth-century dance form. Accompanied by block chords, the short-phrased melody sometimes has an accent on the second beat, sometimes on the third beat, causing rhythmic and melodic interest. *Animé*, the last movement, is a dazzling display of toccata writing with the brilliant arpeggiated figures weaving neatly in and around the melody.

The *Sonatine* is unified tonally, intervallically and melodically. The key of the second movement, D-flat major, though seemingly distant from F-sharp, can be understood as the enharmonic dominant. The tonal connection is enhanced when the third movement not only has the starting pitch on C-sharp, the enharmonic spelling of D-flat, but it also goes back to F-sharp minor. Besides the key relationship, another unifying feature of the work lies in the use of like intervals. The opening melody of the first movement starts with a descending perfect fourth, from F-sharp to C-sharp. Its inversion, the perfect fifth, opens the second movement, whereas the ascending perfect fourth and perfect fifth play a major role in the last movement. Lastly, the opening melody of the first movement is integrated in the last movement, when it is cleverly modified from its original 2/4 time to a 5/4 meter with the implied pulse of 3+2. The *Sonatine*, abbreviated in its length as the title suggests, is also compact in its use of the keyboard register. The majority of the music involves only the three middle octaves.

Ravel's sonata writing was further exemplified and advanced with his G major Sonata for Violin and Piano, his last chamber work, when he incorporated Jazz, specifically Blues, into Western classical music, at a time when Jazz had just started to

come to Paris and before Ravel had even visited America or met George Gershwin. Composed between 1923-27, the slow progress of the Sonata was possibly due to Ravel's loss of interest. Ravel was originally planning on writing a violin concerto for Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, a great violinist and one of his closest female friends. However, she had to abandon her performing career because of rheumatism, and therefore the concerto was never composed. The idea of the concerto was changed to that of a sonata, yet Ravel got distracted in the middle of it and turned to writing *Tzigane* for another violinist, Jelly d'Arányi, niece of Joseph Joachim. Not until 1927, upon being given a deadline from his publisher, did Ravel really concentrate on finishing the work. An anecdote from the final day of the composing process was recorded: the eleven-year-old Yehudi Menuhin was having his violin lesson with Georges Enescu when Ravel

> suddenly burst into our midst, the ink still drying on a piano-and-violin sonata which he had brought along . . . Enescu, chivalrous man that he was, craved my indulgence . . . then, with Ravel at the piano, sight-read the complex work, pausing now and again for elucidation. Ravel would have let matters rest there, but Enescu suggested that they have one more run-through, whereupon he laid the manuscript to one side and played the entire work from memory.[26]

A few days later Enescu gave a wonderfully successful premiere of the sonata with Ravel at the piano.

American Jazz came as a breath of fresh air into Paris in the 1920s, especially to such open-minded and receptive composers as Ravel and Milhaud. Wanting to understand it, Ravel learned the language of jazz through his four-year weekly tutorial sessions starting in 1924 with a French jazz trombone player. The jazz elements he incorporated in his works included syncopation and blue notes, as well as lowered thirds

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[26] Gerald Larner, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 194.

and lowered sevenths in the major scale. The middle movement of the Sonata served as the best example of his jazz writing. Titled *Blues*, Ravel made extensive use of the imitation of banjo in the accompaniment, first in the violin *pizzicati*, and later in the piano chords. He also created "bent" pitches, achieved by the violinist sliding the left hand finger through notes. Aside from these jazz elements, Ravel made no use of the traditional Blues chord progressions; moreover, he employed his favored bitonality in the movement, a semitone apart, G and A-flat, resulting in a "stylized Jazz." As Ravel himself described this, a jazz "more French than American in character perhaps."[27]

The economy of material and sparse texture highlight the opening movement of the Sonata. Marked *Allegretto*, the piano starts with a flowing and lyrical single-line melody. A chirping motif serves as a contrast. While having an equal chance to present the thematic materials, the two instruments stay independent from each other. Two-part texture appears frequently throughout the movement when the piano is only playing a single voice. As Ravel said, the two instruments "are in my opinion essentially incompatible. Far from balancing their contrasts, the Sonata reveals their incompatibility."[28] The difference between the violin and piano is apparent in the entire Sonata, but even more so in the third movement. After a short introduction using the chirping motif from the first movement, the violin takes off with the perpetual motion non-stop sixteenth notes for almost two hundred measures, matching the title *Perpetuum mobile*. The violin line is virtuosic as it runs quickly between low and high registers and

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[27] Robert Orledge, "Evocations of exoticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42

[28] Arbie Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 32.

asks for ever-changing bowing styles. On the contrary, the piano, being seemingly dispassionate from the violin's busyness, goes on its own way with light-hearted and jaunty motives. Thus the different sonorities of the two instruments, one percussive and the other bowed, are not being compromised or balanced, but instead they are being brought together in a newly-conceived sound combination.

The early Ravel we hear in the elegance of the *Sonatine* and the late Ravel in the freshness and bareness of the Violin Sonata are dissimilar from the middle-aged Ravel of the Piano Trio, which is dominated by the late-Romantic writing of complexity, heavy texture, and exaggerated dynamics. Greatly concerned with World War I and eager to enlist, Ravel had worked around the clock to finish the Trio as quickly as possible. Completed shortly after the outbreak of the War in 1914, he dedicated the Trio to his counterpoint and orchestration teacher at the Paris Conservatory, André Gédalge, to whom Ravel "owe[s] the most precious elements of [his] craft."[29]

Born in the Basque country in 1875, the far southwest corner of France on the border of Spain, Ravel credited his Basque heritage to his mother, who "sent [him] to sleep with Basque and Spanish songs."[30] Although living most of his life in Paris, Ravel remained close and attached to his Basque heritage. In the first movement of the Trio, *Modéré*, he took the Basque *zortzico*, a dance in 5/8 meter featuring dotted second and fourth eighth notes, and modified it to 8/8 meter, creating the 3+2+3 swing. The recurrent delayed downbeat, resulting from the highly elaborated grace notes, added to the exotic flavor of the movement. The title of the second movement, *Pantoum*, is a poetic form of

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[29] Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 50.

[30] Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 12.

Malayan origin in which the second and the fourth lines of a stanza become the first and third of the following one. Even though Ravel did not follow the principles strictly, the interlacing of materials, specifically the spiky first theme and the smoother and wave-like second theme, is similar to the poetic form of *Pantoum*. The unpredictable presentation of thematic materials and the irregular placement of accents contribute a feeling of aural collage to the scherzo section. The complexity intensifies in the middle section when the strings stay in 3/4 meter and the piano changes to 4/2 meter, resulting in the unmatched bar lines, and they depart along their own independent trajectory miraculously remaining together, seemingly without any recognizable rhythmic stability.

The third movement is a slow *Passacaille*, a Baroque dance form, with variations built on a repeating bass line. The order of appearance by the three instruments suggests a palindrome: the piano starts the theme, hands the melody to the cello followed by the violin. The three instruments then build up collectively to the powerful climax in the middle of the movement; after that the tension dissipates, starting from the unaccompanied violin and cello duo, then going to the cello, and eventually returning to the piano alone. The palindrome exists not only in the order of appearance, but also in the use of register in all three instruments, from low to high and back to low, and also in the density of texture, which starts and ends as a thin homophonic line with a thick polyphonic mid-point. This well-planned craftsmanship provides a wonderful arch form to the movement. The opening theme of the *Final* has a "chinois" style and the meter switches between 5/4 and 7/4.[31] The writing of the last movement drew criticism at the time with the recurring muscular *fortissimo* chords above the bass octaves, in the style of

[31] The chinois style is associated with the use of pentatonic scale. Consisting of A, B, C#, E, and F# in this case, it is a five-note scale omitting the fourth and seventh scale degrees of the A major scale.

a bombastic and fireworks-like piano concerto. It was believed that in rushing to finish the piece, Ravel cared less about this movement than the ongoing war.

In the Trio some colorful and fascinating instrumental effects are immediately noticeable. They include, from the piano, the sweeping arpeggios across the entire keyboard, glittering cascades of notes, *glissandi*, and, from the strings, high and sustained trills, extended passages of harmonics and *pizzicati*. Besides these characteristics, the complexity of Ravel's writing and the thickness of the texture are worth some attention. Looking at the score, one can comprehend the palette and breadth of sound Ravel was seeking through the use of the lowest note of the keyboard and the nearly-highest note within the same measure. One can also sense the scope of texture Ravel desired through writing three independent simultaneous contrapuntal lines in the piano part, and the frequent use of three staves. An extreme example, but telling of his aspiration, is in a *fortissimo* part in the last movement where he wrote one chord consisting of eleven notes. He made full use of the piano register, and he made distinctive decisions. At times he let the piano stay in the low register; at times both hands play in the high register, and at times he engaged all the registers at once. Moreover, he wanted everything the piano has to offer, including the use of all three pedals. Having access to the *sostenuto* pedal, a device made available in the mid-nineteenth century, current day assumption is that Ravel wanted pianists to make use of it. He also put *sourdine*, the soft pedal, in the music. Occasionally the pianist's left foot has to be in charge of both the soft pedal and the *sostenuto* pedal at the same time.

Ravel's meticulous nature, which is inseparable from his craftsmanship, is evident in all the works that he wrote. The *Sonatine* is an excellent example of this quality. For

the opening melody doubled at the octave and wrapping the accompanimental thirty-second notes in the middle, Ravel chooses a more complicated way of writing them: instead of giving the thirty-second notes to one hand, he designates the first note of each group to the left hand, and the rest to the right hand, which adds to the technical difficulty as the two hands are forced to crowd together. But this writing reflects Ravel's desire to make the thirty-second notes expressive rather than sounding like a tremolo. Ravel's meticulous nature is probably at its fullest in his tempo markings. Below is an example from the first half of the opening movement of the *Sonatine*:

Bars	Ravel's Tempo Markings:
1-12	*A tempo*
12	*Rallentando*
13-19	*A tempo*
19	*Ritenuto*
20-22	*Un peu retenu*
23	*Rallentando*, with a fermata on beat 3
23-38	*A tempo*
39	*Poco ritenuto*

All the detailed tempo markings crowded into this four minutes of music fully represent how Ravel wants the pianist to play this music, and thus make any extra interpretative choices seemingly unnecessary.[32] Nevertheless, the romantic nature and the beauty of Ravel's music easily tempt the pianist to indulge and make interpretative *rubatos* at places. Interestingly, from various resources one can be assured that Ravel strongly disliked those interpretative choices. For example, he stated that the *Menuet* movement be "supple," but "above all with absolute rhythmic strictness."[33] And in Ravel's own

[32] Norman Demuth, *French Piano Music: A Survey with Notes on its Performance* (London: Museum Press Limited, 1959), 98-99.

[33] Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 247.

playing of the first movement, from the account by Henriette Faure, a pianist who worked closely with Ravel, "There is not a hint of sentiment anywhere, but it manages to be deeply expressive."[34]

Ravel's multi-faceted music stands out, not only among the French composers but composers of all time. Through his craftsmanship he encompasses late-Romantic to Neoclassical textures, old *Menuet* and *Passacaille* dance forms and innovative twentieth-century string technique and piano writing. He then merges them with Basque rhythms, modal flavors, Impressionistic parallelism, thereby creating a highly personal and beautiful idiom. Ravel's art, as the esteemed Ravel scholar Arbie Orenstein puts it, is "for the 'contemplation of the Beautiful,' through the satisfaction of the mind by means of the ear's pleasure."[35]

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[34] Paul Roberts, *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2012), 126.

[35] Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 129.

CONCLUSION

When writing chamber music, the foremost challenge composers face is how to write for instruments of different timbre and sonorities. This is even more apparent in smaller groups of instruments, because the uniqueness of each instrument stands out distinctively. Even a genius like Mozart had a difficult time composing for the piano trio. However, by the end of the nineteenth-century, the genre had flourished with many iconic compositions. For the duo sonatas, the piano had kept a leading role until string instruments developed a near-equal partnership with the keyboard.

Brahms, through his intensive study of Renaissance and Baroque music and the use of traditional forms, composed music that is known for its Classical Romanticism.[36] Tchaikovsky, using an elegiac form to pay homage to Rubinstein, created a piano trio of a symphonic effect. Ravel, with his preference for the eighteen-century dance forms and his interest in the twentieth-century fashion, crafted a balanced fusion of old and new.

It is impossible to play every single piece that is composed in the vast amount of Western classical piano solo and chamber music. However, through this performance dissertation, I was able to study and perform works by major composers who represent different nationalities – German, Russian, and French – all important in the Western classical music tradition. Playing a single-composer program gave me an intense immersion in a particular composer's musical vision, and is therefore of high educational value. From this experience, I have learned about the development and maturation of the

[36] Basil Smallman calls it Romantic Classicism.

piano trio and the duo sonata, and I have also continued my growth as a pianist by performing a solo work along with these iconic chamber works.

DISSERTATION RECITAL I: BRAHMS

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

1-4	Sonata for Piano and Cello No. 2 in F major, Op. 99 (1886)	
1	I. Allegro vivace	[9:05]
2	II. Adagio affetuoso	[7:22]
3	III. Allegro passionato	[7:01]
4	IV. Allegro molto	[4:54]
5-8	Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8 (revised version, 1889)	
5	I. Allegro con brio	[10:57]
6	II. Scherzo: Allegro molto	[6:47]
7	III. Adagio	[8:40]
8	IV. Allegro	[6:53]

Pyung-Kang Sharon Oh, violin
Andrew Hesse, cello
Hsiang-Ling Hsiao, piano

Recorded Live on December 7, 2014 in Gildenhorn Recital Hall,
The Clarice, University of Maryland School of Music, College Park
Recorded and Mastered by Antonino d'Urzo, Opusrite™
opusrite@gmail.com

DISSERTATION RECITAL II: TCHAIKOVSKY

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

1	Lecture on Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio	[19:46]
2-14	Piano Trio in A minor, Op. 50 (1881-2)	
2	I. Pezzo elegiaco	[19:25]
3	II. Tema con variazioni: Tema	[0:58]
4	Var. I: Andante con moto	[0:50]
5	Var. II: Più mosso	[0:37]
6	Var. III: Allegro moderato	[0:59]
7	Var. IV: L'istesso tempo (Allegro moderato)	[1:10]
8	Var. V: L'istesso tempo	[0:37]
9	Var. VI: Tempo di Valse	[2:40]
10	Var. VII: Allegro moderato	[1:21]
11	Var. IX: Andante flebile, ma non tanto	[2:57]
12	Var. X: Tempo di mazurka	[1:47]
13	Var. XI: Moderato	[2:05]
14	Variazioni Finale e coda: Allegretto risoluto e con fuoco – (Coda) Andante con moto - Lugubre	[8:19]

Pyung-Kang Sharon Oh, violin
Seth Castleton, cello
Hsiang-Ling Hsiao, piano

Recorded Live on November 15, 2015 in Gildenhorn Recital Hall,
The Clarice, University of Maryland School of Music, College Park
Recorded and Mastered by Antonino d'Urzo, Opusrite™
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DISSERTATION RECITAL III: RAVEL

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

1-3	Sonatine (1903-05)	
1	I. Modéré	[4:36]
2	II. Mouvement de Menuet	[3:23]
3	III. Animé	[4:11]
4-6	Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in G (1923-27)	
4	I. Allegretto	[7:54]
5	II. Blues: Moderato	[5:27]
6	III. Perpetuum mobile: Allegro	[4:08]
7-10	Piano Trio (1914)	
7	I. Modéré	[9:14]
8	II. Pantoum: Assez vif	[4:32]
9	III. Passacaille: Très large	[7:00]
10	IV. Final: Animé	[5:30]

James Stern, violin
Seth Castleton, cello
Hsiang-Ling Hsiao, piano

Recorded Live on March 30, 2016 in Gildenhorn Recital Hall,
The Clarice, University of Maryland School of Music, College Park
Recorded and Mastered by Antonino d'Urzo, Opusrite™
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This comprehensive collection of the letters of Brahms provides readers a primary resource to understand the composer and his life. The detailed annotations fill in the background and also serve as a biography.

Botstein, Leon, ed. *The Compleat Brahms: A Guide to the Musical Works of Johannes Brahms*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.

This survey of Brahms' music is valuable to scholars, professional and amateur musicians. Organized by genre, this book serves as program notes for each piece.

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Cooper, Martin. *French Music: From the death of Berlioz to the death of Fauré*. London: Oxford University Press, 1951.

This book covers French music from roughly 1870 to 1930. The author, at the end of book, also includes a chronological list of important musical and arts-related events that happened during those sixty years.

Demuth, Norman. *French Piano Music: A Survey with Notes on its Performance.* London: Museum Press Limited, 1959.

This book is a survey of French piano music written from around the mid-sixteenth century to the late-twentieth century, covering more than ninety composers. The author analyzes the works and offers performance suggestions.

Drinker, Henry S. *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974.

The book can be divided into two parts. The first part is on Brahms's life and his musical language. The second part is a detailed account of all his chamber works.

Howat, Roy. *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

This book is great for performers as the author discusses many editorial and performing issues of four major French composer's piano music. It also examines Impressionism and other musical roots of these composers.

Larner, Gerald. *Maurice Ravel*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996.

This is a biography of Ravel which closely integrates his life and his works. At the end it contains a selective discography of Ravel's works and suggested books for further reading.

Mason, Daniel Gregory. *From Grieg to Brahms: Studies of Some Modern Composers and Their Art*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927.

The author, in a series of essays, provides the biographical background of Grieg, Dvořák, Saint-Saëns, Franck, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and their aesthetics.

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This book is a resource for performers and scholars as it provides analytical insights on all of Brahms' chamber music.

McColl, Sandra. *Music Criticism in Vienna, 1896-1897: Critically Moving Forms.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

The deaths of Bruckner and Brahms and the rise of Mahler and Strauss happened during the eventful fifteen months covered in this book, written by music critics including Eduard Hanslick and Heinrich Schenker.

Meister, Barbara. *Music Musique: French & American Piano Composition in the Jazz Age*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

The book addresses first the French and American styles of composition before World War I, and then discusses how jazz influenced the important composers in the 1920s and 1930s.

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This collection of scholarly essays is a wonderful addition to Brahms scholarship.

The essays cover various topics including Brahms' reception at his time, a conductor's view of his music, an editor's view of his music, and his piano, chamber, and vocal music.

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The author divides Brahms' life into four periods and discusses Brahms' music according to genre within each period. The author gives musical examples in support of his harmonic and motivic analysis.

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This is an essential book to understand Ravel. In addition to the detailed biography, the author analyzes Ravel's aesthetics, musical language, and his creative process.

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The Cambridge Companion to Ravel, with essays written by international scholars, provides insights on various aspects about Ravel's aesthetic, musical explorations, and performance and reception. This chapter discusses the exoticism in Ravel's music.

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Roberts, Paul. *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel*. Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2012.

The scholarly book gives the readers another angle on Ravel's music. Being a pianist himself, the author incorporates Henriette Faure's accounts of her work with Ravel in understanding Ravel's music.

Schmidt-Beste, Thomas. *Cambridge Introductions to Music: The Sonata*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

The author first defines what a sonata is, and then gives a detailed analysis of sonata form and its development. He also provides an overview of sonata writing by the major composers.

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This indispensible book traces the development of the piano trio and covers the standard repertoire and background information.

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