



CHAMBER MUSIC RALEIGH

Astralis Chamber Ensemble – February 22, 2026

Piano Quartet No. 3 in C major, WoO 36

Ludwig van Beethoven
1770-1827

In addition to his 138 works with opus numbers (172 if you count several works under one opus number like the opus 18 String Quartets), Beethoven composed about 700 other pieces – some early works, some on commission or for friends, some unfinished fragments. Among these *Werke ohne Opus* (WoO) are three piano quartets he composed in 1785, aged 15. At the time he was still living in Bonn, employed – as violinist and pianist – as a court musician.

The piano quartet form was rarely used by major composers in the late 18th century, the only major works surviving from that period are the two quartets by Mozart, published in 1781. Beethoven modeled his three quartets on Mozart's violin sonatas, Quartet No. 3 using material from Mozart's Violin Sonata No. 17, K. 296. He subsequently reused themes from the Quartet in his Piano Sonatas Nos. 1 and 3. He never considered the quartets worthy of publication, and they were published posthumously in 1828.

Beethoven only used the piano quartet form once more. When his Quintet for Piano and Winds Op. 16 sold poorly, he transcribed it for Piano Quartet, a form that sold well.

Phantasy for Piano Quartet

Frank Bridge
1879-1941

The son of a printer and passionate amateur musician, English composer, conductor and violist Frank Bridge is remembered today primarily for the tremendous influence he had on his one and only composition student, Benjamin Britten. Bridge's own composition teacher at the Royal College of Music (RCM), Charles Villiers Stanford, was notorious for his domineering and stifling pedagogy. Bridge's early compositions, before World War I, were, therefore late Romantic in style, and although Bridge accrued awards and prizes at RCM, his creativity was attenuated until he was able to emerge from Stanford's influence. Before World War I, he was known more as a brilliant conductor and chamber musician than as a composer. His oeuvre was dominated by chamber works.

In World War I, however, all sides of the conflict were traumatized and deflated by the unspeakable atrocities of the new trench warfare. Although because of his age, Bridge did not serve in the military, he was in such despair over the futility of the War that he would pace the streets in the early hours of the morning unable to sleep. His bitterness began to pervade his music, which became increasingly dissonant and atonal, and he became a lifelong pacifist; his feelings may have influenced Britten, who fled England at the beginning of World War II.

In 1922, Bridge had the great fortune to meet Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, America's grand patroness of music, who established the Berkshire Music Festival at Tanglewood. Her support enabled him to devote himself to composition for the rest of his life.

In 1905, Walter Wilson Cobbett, a music enthusiast and amateur violinist, established a prize to revive a specifically English form of 17th century chamber music, originally for viols, the

Fancy or Fantasy, or as he spelled it, “Phantasie”. This was to be a work for stings in a single movement, not longer than 12 minutes. Over the years, important English composers, including Ralph Vaughan Williams, John Ireland and Benjamin Britten, wrote phantasies and won the prize.

Bridge entered the competition in 1908 and 1909 with modest works for string trio and string quartet which won second and third prizes. Then, in June 1910, he composed the Phantasy for Piano Quartet, a work which helped establish his reputation as a composer. It won first prize. It was one of the last works he composed under the influence of Charles Villiers Stanford.

Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47

Robert Schumann
1810-1856

Robert Schumann’s five-year pursuit of his beloved, the brilliant Clara Wieck, had all the ingredients of a soap opera (or grand opera): A hostile father-in-law, an adoring young bride-to-be, secret correspondence, lawsuits and court battles, accusations of alcoholism, banishment from Wieck's house, economic pressure etc. Clara was herself an outstanding pianist and composer, and their eventual triumph led to a stormy but happy marriage unleashing a flood of creativity in both husband and wife – including eight children.

But in the first few years of their marriage – before the string of children put a damper on Clara – Robert felt like a second-class citizen to his touring virtuoso wife. He suffered from severe manic-depressive episodes that became worse over the years. His creative output matched his mood cycles, with frenzied creativity usually followed by periods of despondency when his inspiration ran dry. He also tended to bunch works of similar nature together: 1842 became the year of chamber music. In the spring he bought scores of all the Mozart and Beethoven string quartets in print, and between June and November, in a white heat, composed the three String Quartets Op. 41, the Piano Quintet Op. 44 and the Piano Quartet Op. 47. Schumann composed the Piano Quartet for Count Wielhorsky, a highly accomplished amateur cellist. The cello part is prominent and demanding, especially in the slow third movement, in which the C string is lowered one step to B-flat, giving the cello a drone-like quality.

The premiere of the Quartet, in 1844 in Leipzig, featured a star-studded ensemble: Violinist Ferdinand David (the concertmaster of the Gewandhaus Orchestra for whom Mendelssohn wrote his Violin Concerto), the violist was Danish composer and conductor Niels Gade, Count Wielhorsky was the cellist and Clara Schumann the pianist.

Program notes by:
Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn
Wordpros@mindspring.com
www.wordprosmusic.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZxc5eWJ1p0>