



Montrose Trio

October 15, 2022

PROGRAM NOTES

Support for the program notes is generously provided by Roberta Viviano.

DAVID BAKER

(INDIANAPOLIS, 1931–BLOOMINGTON, IN, 2016)

Boogie Woogie, from *Roots II* (1992)

David Baker wore many hats throughout his phenomenal career as a jazz musician, composer, scholar, and educator. He earned degrees at Indiana University and returned there in 1966 to serve as Distinguished Professor of Music and Chairperson of the Jazz Department. Prior to that he studied jazz trombone and composition with an array of esteemed artists, including J.J. Johnson and George Russell. In 1953, Baker was injured in a car accident, which weakened his embouchure, so he shifted his focus to cello, paving the way for that instrument's inclusion in jazz. Baker authored over 70 books on African American musical traditions, founded the Indiana University 21st-Century Bebop Band, and composed over 2,000 works in varied genres.

Baker composed *Roots* in 1978 as a commission for the Beaux Arts Trio. The sequel to this piece, *Roots II*, is a five-movement suite that incorporates two movements from *Roots*. The composer's note addresses each movement's stylistic traits.

Each of the five movements is a stylized portrait of a musical form from the African-American tradition. "Boogie Woogie" is a stylized version of a popular black piano music which flourished from roughly 1938 to 1945. Also known as "fast Western," "juke," and "rent party music," this style was based on the blues form and a left-hand ostinato. Boogie woogie was the basis of the rhythm and blues, and rock and roll of the 1940s and 1950s. As in the original, the piano is the focus of this movement.

JOAN TOWER

(NEW ROCHELLE, NY, 1938)

***Big Sky* (2000)**

American composer Joan Tower describes *Big Sky* as a musical depiction of her amazing memories of riding her horse in La Paz, Bolivia:

This slow seven-minute trio for violin, cello and piano was intended as a companion piece to a short and fast trio entitled *And... They're Off* (which was commissioned by the Scotia Festival in Canada where I served as composer/conductor-in-residence in 1996). The common subject of these two works is horses—namely race horses. As a young girl—and like many young girls—I had an obsession with horses. When I was growing up in South America, my father bought me a racehorse. This was in Bolivia, where horses, even racehorses, were very cheap. I loved this horse and took very good care of it in our makeshift garage/stable. My obsession with horses continued into my teens when I learned to jump. More recently (and many years later), I found a partner whose main love is playing the horses!

Big Sky is a piece based on a memory of riding my horse "Aymara" around in the deep valley of La Paz, Bolivia. The valley was surrounded by the huge and high mountains of the Andes range; and as I rode I looked into a vast and enormous sky. It was very peaceful and extraordinarily beautiful. We never went over one of these mountains, but if we had, it might have felt like what I wrote in this piece.

After spending her childhood in South America, Tower graduated from Bennington College in 1961 and earned her master's degree in composition from Columbia University. She rose to prominence in New York as pianist and founding member of Da Capo Chamber Players for whom she composed many works. She began teaching at Bard College in 1972 and received her doctorate in composition from Columbia University in 1978. Tower is best known for her orchestral works, which include *Silver Ladders* (1987), *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman* (1987), and *1920/2019* (2020), as well as a number of solo concertos for various instruments composed between 1988 and 2013.

MIECZYŚLAW WEINBERG

(WARSAW, 1919–MOSCOW, 1996)

Piano Trio in A minor, Op. 24 (1945)

Mieczysław Weinberg was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1919 and received early training from his father, a composer and musician who worked at a Jewish theater where Mieczysław began performing on piano at age 10. In 1939, Weinberg's life was completely upended as he escaped the Nazi occupation of Poland, but his parents and sister did not. Arriving in Minsk, Belarus, Weinberg

attended Vasily Zolotaryov's composition classes until he had to flee from the Nazis once again in 1941. He relocated to Uzbekistan and was urged by Dmitri Shostakovich to move to Moscow in 1943 after a mutual friend shared the score of Weinberg's First Symphony with Shostakovich. Shostakovich became a source of inspiration for Weinberg, as his encouragement propelled Weinberg to become a prolific composer even though most of his art music compositions were rarely performed in his lifetime due to Soviet aesthetic specifications that condemned "formalism." Like most Soviet dictums, the official definition of "formalistic music" was vague, but typically instrumental music that was too intellectual or that displayed modernistic compositional techniques fell under the umbrella and was denigrated. Weinberg's catalog contains over 150 large-scale compositions, including 7 operas, 26 symphonies, and 17 string quartets, but he earned a living primarily from composing film, theater, and circus music.

Upon settling in Moscow, Weinberg was grateful to have accomplished musicians, like David Oistrakh and the Borodin Quartet, premiere his works and he quickly completed several chamber music compositions. Weinberg's only piano trio was composed in 1945 and is modelled on Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2 (1944), which concludes with a "dance of death" (also known as *Danse macabre* or *Totentanz*) movement built around a Jewish folk melody. Although Shostakovich's trio was a reaction to the death of a friend, unrelated to World War II, the overall sentiment reflects wartime hardships and immense tragedy. Like Shostakovich, Weinberg aims for a mix of stylistic signifiers that speak to the historical moment and his personal situation of losing his family. He remarks: "Many of my works are related to the theme of war. This, alas, was not my own choice. It was dictated by my fate, by the tragic fate of my relatives." Weinberg's references to Baroque music are plentiful in this trio, perhaps as a reflection on the longevity of European cultural traditions as a source of spiritual uplift amid terror. The trio begins with a dramatic outburst, wailing string instruments in an intense Prelude, followed by a sorrowful Aria. The aggressive Toccata is indicative of the chaotic panic that arises during wartime. The third movement, "Poem," is more eclectic as Weinberg strings together a lament, a tango, a chorale, and a children's song. Weinberg enacts tension between secular and spiritual spheres, which escalates in the finale as a fugue is dismantled through ecstatic energy, giving way to a merry Jewish klezmer dance, the "Freylekhs," and then solemnly retreating back to the chorale from "Poem." Some commentators have suggested that the trio contains glimpses of joy because Weinberg was a newlywed very much in love with his wife, Natalia Vovsi-Mikhoels, to whom the work is dedicated.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(HAMBURG, 1833–VIENNA, 1897)

Piano Trio No. 2 in C major, Op. 87 (1882)

In 1880, Brahms began composing a new piano trio. His previous effort, Opus 8, was completed in 1854 (revised 1889), just prior to Brahms's extended stay

at the Schumann residence during which he assisted Clara Schumann with domestic duties after Robert Schumann's suicide attempt and relocation to the Endenich asylum. So many years later Brahms still valued Clara's feedback, and sent her the opening movements for two piano trios, one in C major and one in E-flat major. Although she preferred the movement in E-flat, Brahms never managed to finish that piece, but the resultant work in C major is representative of his mature chamber music style and is full of soaring melodies, rich textures, and sophisticated rhythmic interplay between piano and strings. Upon completion of the trio, in 1882, Brahms informed his publisher that "You have not yet had such a beautiful trio from me and very likely have not published its equal in the last ten years."

The piece begins, as expected, with a sonata-allegro form in the key of C major. The opening measures feature an ascending chain of descending octaves in the piano, which are quickly transformed into ascending octaves in the strings to establish the overall emotional trajectory of the movement, which has often been called "Olympian." Brahms is indeed creating obstacles to overcome, a reference to the heroic Beethovenian narrative of triumph over adversity, and reaching to new heights, even requiring the strings to climb into their highest registers. The first movement is in triple meter, but at the outset, the piano accompaniment accents every other beat, creating a sense of a duple meter competing against the triple meter of the strings.

Brahms's melancholic Hungarian folk style appears in the second movement, a wistful variation set in the key of A minor. As the leading Austro-Germanic composer of instrumental music in the late nineteenth century, Brahms was heavily invested in creating unification across the four movements of his large-scale works. The opening measures of the second movement clearly tie it to the first through the unusual rhythmic flow of the piano accompaniment, a syncopated pattern stressing the off-beats in duple meter. The strings introduce the melody in unison, just as they did in the first movement. The scherzo presents a stark contrast—one that struck Clara Schumann as "rather manufactured"—between restless outer sections in C minor and a lovely internal section in C major. Brahms returns to the Olympian topos in the finale with an emphasis on broad ascending contours that gradually surmount an irksome harmonic obstacle, a diminished seventh chord, and a downward sinking, but beautiful, lyrical theme.

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