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Music Analysis, Vol. 6, No. 3. (Oct., 1987), pp. 319-332.

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W. DEAN SUTCLIFFE

HAYDN'S PIANO TRIO TEXTURES

The common textural understanding of the Haydn piano trios has always been that the piano sets the terms to which the two stringed instruments submit, that, with the exception of certain melodic favours granted by piano to violin, the essential musical content of these works could be just as well expressed on the keyboard instrument alone. Several rarely-voiced assumptions control these judgments, assumptions as to what may be regarded as right and proper activity for stringed instruments as opposed to the piano in a work of chamber music. Different standards of integrity are set for the constituent parts, for whilst it is taken for granted that the strings should be supplied with the maximum opportunities for independent action, the expectations of a piano part are rather less specific, with the quality and nature of the keyboard writing rarely, if ever, considered as such. This means that both in composition and in performance we would expect the piano to adjust to the demands of the strings, if necessary, rather than the reverse. Haydn's piano trios, on the other hand, offend sensibilities by seemingly placing the claims of the piano at the forefront, with the strings, particularly the cello, reduced to a role of unworthy subordination. Of course, the more usual system of priorities is justified to the extent that it reflects a natural imbalance in the medium, when several primarily monophonic instruments come up against an instrument whose polyphonic capabilities and less clearly defined timbral personality make it an obvious foil to the keener edge of the string tone. However, the fact that these distinctions of role are perhaps too firmly outlined is confirmed by performance practice: we have all heard chamber-music concerts or song recitals where the pianist is discreet to the point of submissiveness, thus frequently upsetting the composer's calculations and the rightful balance of the parts.

The question of performance practice is especially relevant to these piano trios: an account of any of the works on modern instruments creates major problems of balance which no amount of discretion on the performers' part can completely solve. Naturally it also affects our judgment of the composer's use of his resources. The manner in which our ears can be reopened to their textures is suggested by this review of a recording of two of Mozart's piano trios:

The London Pianoforte Trio claim there's perhaps no form of chamber music which benefits more from the historical approach than the piano trio of Haydn's and Mozart's day. . . . The piano of 1797 Linda Nicholson plays is by Schantz, a Viennese maker well known to Haydn. The violin and cello of her colleagues are in a condition contemporary with it, and the resulting sonorities offer some quite startlingly different perspectives and emphases. The matching of the instruments in weight and timbre is much closer than we're accustomed to hearing, when so often the string parts give the impression of being beefed up in order to balance the modern piano. In these recordings the strings never need to be insistent. . . . The less powerful Classical violin and cello are better at being supportive in the texture than their modern counterparts, and since even in Mozart's maturest music the origins of the piano trio in the accompanied piano solo are still manifest, there is a gain with the old instruments in the communication of musical sense.¹

All this applies to the Haydn trios as well, with the exception of the final thought. Paradoxically, although Mozart gives far greater independence of line to the violin and especially the cello, it is Haydn's works that are further removed from the atmosphere of a solo work. Whereas a Mozart trio typically has an open, role-conscious texture, where the leadership or aural focus at any one point is quite clear, Haydn's more concentrated use of his material and preference for leaner textures lead to a trio style where solo and accompanimental roles are blurred, so that interest is on the whole more evenly spread throughout the texture. There is but a minimal sense of the conscientious alternation of roles which was to become the most common means of progress in later piano trios. Haydn's three instruments, on the other hand, seem to have reached a prior agreement as to the significance of the material they are to perform. If the cello doubles the piano left hand far more frequently than in the Mozart trios, it must be added that the bass lines are generally far more complex and thematically rich than is the case with Mozart, paralleling Haydn's widespread avoidance of such homophonic habits as the Alberti bass in his solo sonatas compared with the piano works of the younger composer. Indeed, the significance of detail in the bass lines provides the most obvious evidence that these works were conceived for their medium from the start, that the very nature of their musical material derives from the possibilities and implications of the trio form as Haydn chose to utilise it with the instruments of his time. This idea of foreknowledge producing results that cannot simply be stripped down to their keyboard realization may seem straightforward enough, but it has rarely, if ever, been acknowledged as such, much less demonstrated. The main reason, I suspect, inheres in the lesser sensitivity to what constitutes an idiomatic piano part, as mentioned before: even where the piano part includes all the essential material, its layout is often quite different from that which we would encounter in a solo work (for instance, the sense of registral focus is generally not as sharp). But then Haydn's piano is often employed as an

organizer of the musical elements – as Charles Rosen mentions in his chapter on the trios in *The Classical Style*, ‘the piano is needed to tie the music together and give it a unified texture’² – and it is only natural that part of its role should be to give coherence to ideas that were conceived in terms of a wider or fuller texture than it would normally sustain by itself.

My first example has been chosen on the basis of familiarity (it is the opening movement of the ‘Gypsy Rondo’ Trio, No. 39)³ and because it would appear to be a model instance of a texture where only the piano part is necessary and the strings fulfil merely a doubling function. The question that should be asked, however, is who is doubling whom? The question can be advanced on the level of both performance practice and chamber-music expectations, as outlined before, and it is the latter aspect, of how we judge the evidence of the printed page, on which I shall concentrate. While it is true that the piano part encompasses all the essentials of this opening section, it is equally true to say that the violin and cello parts outline the primary sense of the theme, namely a dialogue of outer-voice contours, in which terms it was surely conceived. Seen from this perspective, the piano’s role here becomes principally one of unifying and fleshing out a texture whose original form is too thin for the medium. The melody and bass contours reflect and reinforce each other in various ways: for instance, the violin’s descent from e² to a¹ over bs 3 and 4 is answered in augmentation by the cello over the following bar. Even the cello’s simple drop of an octave over the first two bars of the movement echoes the coupling of the melody from g² to g¹ over a slightly longer span either side of it. More sustained evidence of this dialogue is heard in the parallel motion of the outer voices at bs 5-6, in the concertina-like shape of their mirror symmetry at bs 7-8 (which is echoed in simpler form at 12-14, with the parts moving inwards from D to their respective neighbouring notes, then back again) and in the stretto effect of bs 15-17. The inner parts added by the piano are by no means afterthoughts, however: in particular, the figure at bs 5-7, with its characteristic rhythm, is translated to the outer parts in the imitative passage at 15-17, in a manner of retrograde, whilst the bass line of b.4 returns in an inner voice in 14 to provide a natural link to this related passage. The bars following the stretto again feature a sympathetic correspondence between the outer parts, as the cello’s d^{♯1}-e¹ at b.17 is countered by the melody’s two-note pair c³-b², and the bass ascent in the next bar is met by the falling a²-g² above. In the final three bars the outer voices echo their initial downward octave couplings, with the cello once more granted sole occupancy of the lower octave, as its final extra octave pair reminds us:

Ex. 1*

Andante

Violino

Violoncello

Pianoforte

5 10 15 20

* Music examples by permission of G. Henle-Verlag.

These close interrelationships between the voices of the piece strengthen the distinction between piano solo and piano trio textures, for whilst this music is obviously playable on piano alone, it would hardly have occurred to Haydn in a solo context. Although some sonatas may suggest the participation of as many voices as are present here, the fact is that their realization would never be as full or as sustained as in the present instance. The larger form seems to give the composer confidence in the more thorough carrying-out of his part-writing intentions, whilst from a corresponding performance point of view it means that no idea need go to waste: in bs 5 and 6, for instance, with the strings providing a frame in the outer voices, the pianist is free to concentrate on inflecting the inner voice which will later rise to clearer prominence. It is in fact a principle in the comparison of the two sorts of textures that detail which can only be sketched out in a solo sonata can be brought much more actively to life in a trio. The instrumental parts are able to nourish each other, as it were; and if their interplay rarely suggests the conversational habits of the Haydn string quartet, there is nevertheless a form of dialogue in the sense that the instruments are listening closely to their partners, with details suggested by one being taken up in turn by another. This occurs in Ex. 1 at the end of the first period, where the violin at b.8 blossoms into a version of the initial neighbouring-note figure which the piano, not to be outdone, takes up in the following bar.

This small-scale passing around of material is in stark contrast to the more typical later trio procedure, which alternates blocks of texture and melodic leadership. Haydn's working from within the given notes, as it were, rather than reallocation of composed entities is responsible for the particular intimacy of action that these trios demonstrate. In Ex. 2, the opening section of the finale of Trio No. 42, there are constant subtle changes in the prominence of the piano right hand and the violin. The free interweaving of roles means that the aural spotlight switches incessantly between the two, in such a manner as to make talk of doubling seem both unimaginative and inappropriate. To look at the different roles undertaken by the violin, it begins by picking out from the piano part the main motivic cell of this section, the chromatically filled-in third, which it repeats an octave higher in an extended form now rising a fourth by chromatic step up to c^2 at b.6, which note is somewhat disguised by the appoggiatura on d^2 . It then joins the piano on the downward flight back to the theme at b.9 via an inversion of the main cell at b.8 ($b\flat$ -a-ab-g). On the return to the theme the violin demonstrates greater initiative by presenting the cell a sixth higher, while its subsequent two-note pairs prepare for its supremacy at b.14. The single addition of its $e\flat^2$ at b.14, prepared by the insistent $e\flat^2$'s of its previous two phrases, in comparison with the $e\flat$ -less piano part indicates that the violin has assumed the leading role at the cadence point. It does so again at b.22 until the piano catches up, whilst at bs 32 and 34 it slips to the bottom of the texture, doubling the piano left hand and acting as a temporary bass line. At bs 38-40 it then imitates the piano's descending scale. Whilst the musical sense might be said strictly to be unaltered were the piano to play this last passage by itself, with the violin simply matching what the piano is playing an octave lower, Haydn's

disposition of the instrumental forces punctuates the close of the section far more decisively:

Ex. 2

The musical score for Ex. 2 is presented in two systems, each with a piano (p) and violin (v) part. The tempo is marked 'Presto'. The score is divided into measures, with specific measures circled and numbered: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes, while the violin part has a more melodic line with some slurs. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 30.

The image contains two musical excerpts. The first excerpt, marked with a circled '35', shows a piano trio texture with violin, cello, and piano parts. The second excerpt, marked with a circled '40', shows a similar texture with first and second endings indicated by '1.' above the staves.

It is evident from both the tone and the technique of this section that the trio form encourages a particular playfulness of part-writing, a juggling of the thematic elements which is manifest here in the continual presence of the controlling four-note motive, whether transformed into a diatonic version, as in the cello at b.37, or split in two and reordered in the service of a linear intervallic pattern, as in the cello at bs 18-20. Indeed, it seems that Haydn cannot do without it: in its full foreground form, with the attached leaps of a sixth, it appears for instance in inversion in the cello at bs 3-5, again with mirror symmetry between itself and the violin, which is immediately followed at bs 5-7 by the original form, now as part of a bass progression rather than an inner voice as before. The shape also appears in extended sequential form in the piano left hand at bs 27-31, whose ascent of a fifth is matched in contracted form by the rising chromatic lines of bs 31, 32 and 33. Finally, the sheer density of events in this music again emphasizes the different textural implications which the piano trio suggested to the composer's ear.

A more extreme instance of thematic tautness is provided by the Minuet-finale of the two-movement Trio No. 24, whose first section (bs 1-31) exemplifies that particular systematization of the musical elements afforded by the trio form. In contrast to the primarily two-part texture of Ex. 1 or the more volatile disposition of voices in Ex. 2, this movement presents a much more severe system of part-writing, carried out almost with the flavour of a

geometrical exercise and combining a mood of *Gemütlichkeit* and a certain matter-of-factness in a manner peculiar to Haydn. The texture of the first eight-bar period, for instance, is strictly maintained not only in terms of part-writing but also in terms of instrumentation: what Haydn wants us to hear is the combination of three discrete layers, cello playing the bass voice, violin the inner voice and piano enunciating the upper part, in addition to its customary role of holding the texture together by supporting the two lower parts. The basic shape announced in the first two bars is the naturally structural diminution of a third, with the result that many of the middleground shapes are drawn into its sphere of influence; it is as though a basic element of syntax has been elevated to a position of initial prominence which makes its subsequent appearances all the more logical and coherent. The opening motive has at once several implications. Above a tonic pedal, the two upper voices define contrary-motion movements of a third (cell 1), outlining the two upper degrees of the triad. The more immediately recognizable foreground form (cell 2) includes a neighbouring note to the respective initial degrees, occurring on the third beat of b. 1 in the upper voice and the second beat in the middle voice, while the complete neighbouring-note pattern (cell 3) is implied by virtue of the voice exchange between the two parts. The following six bars of the period represent a temporal extension of the first two; this is confirmed by the matching bass figures in cello and piano that terminate each section, at bs 2 and 8, while on the other hand the join is overridden by the answering of the piano's rising sixth in b. 2 by the bass at b. 3. The $g^1-ab^1-bb^1$ of the first two bars is answered an octave higher by the third progression $g^2-ab^2-bb^2$ at bs 3-7, a middleground enlargement of the initial rising-third motive, supported a tenth below by the bass with its own version of cell 1. Each note of the middleground enlargement at bs 3-7 is preceded by its own foreground form of cell 1: eb^2 and f^2 in b. 2 leading to g^2 in 3, then $f^2-g^2-ab^2$ in bs 4-5 and $g^2-a^2-bb^2$ in 6-7:

Ex. 3a

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piece titled 'Tempo di Menuetto'. The top system has a circled number '5' above the first measure. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Ex. 3b

Key:

x = incomplete form

In addition to the middleground enlargement of the initial upper-voice motive, the violin's inner voice in bs 1-2 also predetermines the voice leading of the following bars: its cell 2 is enlarged by the form of $b\flat$ (b.4)- c^1 (b.6)- a (b.6)- g (b.7), barred upwards from the lower staff of Ex. 3b. Within this controlling progression the bass line is composed of overlapping units of cells 2 and 3. Further evidence of the carefully poised symmetry of this opening unit is provided by the countering of the two ascending scalar figures in the bass (bs 3 and 5) by a pair of inverted forms (bs 6 and 7). Note also that the turn in the first bar of the piano part is taken up by the violin at bs 4 and 7, in another example of the interaction of detail between the instruments. These small differences on the printed page between the violin's inner part and the piano's supporting version again suggest the manner in which Haydn conceived the sound of his material, with the violin holding the chief responsibility for performing this particular voice. Indeed, the violin does not double the piano's upper voice until b.29 of the movement, where the sudden unison lends unanimity to the cadence

point and closure of the Fundamental Line.

The motivic concentration of this whole first section shows the extent to which the composer was unaffected by questions of leading and subordinate parts. The near-complete textural equality is admittedly unusual for any work of the Classical period, but the fact that it is present in a piano trio, and in the position of a finale, suggests that Haydn, unfettered by the more particular demands of other genres, felt free to approach the form with few formal or textural preconceptions. In fact, the very clarity of definition in the constituent voices makes possible a completely unexpected event in the reprise. Here (bs 82-9) Haydn inverts the counterpoint, with the original bass being transferred to the piano right hand and the two upper voices being taken care of by cello and piano left hand, while the violin adds a harmonically necessary countermelody. The inversion procedures continue quite literally beyond these eight bars, on the basis of the piano's original part, so that everything that first turned up in the left hand is now played by the right and vice versa, a pun on the two-handedness of the piano as opposed to the three-partedness of the texture. Finally, the original descending linear intervallic pattern is heard in ascending form (bs 106-9).

The coda to the movement demonstrates the manner in which the trio form could be dramatized. In a movement which has been spun out with a strange brand of imperturbability, the brusque chords at bs 139-41 come as a shock. The following four bars are conceived as a sort of gestural inversion to these, for while the violin and cello bear the primary timbral weight of the initial *forte* chords, with the piano playing the ascending scale fragments, the keyboard instrument replies with *piano* chords and the scale fragments are now to be understood as belonging to the strings (bs 143-6). Again, one must look beyond the doubling, for it is doubtful whether the dialogue of scalic figures at bs 143-6 would make much sense in a solo piano work: without the alternation of ascending violin and descending cello forms of the shape, the passage loses much of its colour and dramatic point. A rather differently intended confrontation of ascending and descending forms, in the extended pun on inversions that comprises the reprise of the movement, follows from b.152 onwards. The previous legato linear pattern is converted to a staccato attack, as the strings and piano left hand trot all the way down the scale, then all the way back up. The change of articulation manifests once more that particular enlivening of all the parts which Haydn's use of the trio form promotes. The very fact that the two other instruments share the piano's new left-hand articulation is what lends an edge to this rather odd conclusion: the oddness is shared socially, as it were, and is thus more disturbing than any show of eccentricity in a solo context. This strangely deadpan flavour, neither obviously witty nor especially purposive, is a quality which no other composer has ever reproduced.

A more straightforward use of the dramatic possibilities of the trio medium can be heard in the slow movement of No. 27, in which Haydn for once gives very clear leading roles to the violin and then the piano. The middle section

gives a remarkable sense of the passing of time. The effect of the piano's many notes, set against the spare pizzicati in the strings, is almost one of filling in the silence, particularly after the sustained violin melody of the first section, or literally an effect of divisions. Paradoxically, the presence of the two stringed instruments, whose notes have no expressive value other than to mark off the units of time, makes possible a greater degree of introspection than could be achieved in a solo work. They act as a foil to the ruminations of the piano, and hence concentrate the ear on the latter's isolation. It is difficult to think of many examples of eighteenth-century piano writing comparable to this Chopinesque vein of melancholic embellishment. The slow movement of Haydn's own Sonata No. 53 in E minor evinces a similar style, but the Trio's more shapely and fully realized writing confirms the belief that the trio form gave Haydn greater expressive confidence in his handling of the keyboard. Delicate though it is, the piano figuration in the sonata lacks the same conviction and sense of direction as the trio writing, as if the balance of embellishment and harmonic movement has not been successfully maintained. The piano style seems top-heavy, without the surrounding textural support required to put the diminutions in perspective. In the Trio's middle section, however, the string parts have been conceived as an extension of the piano soloist's controlling rhythmic impulse, in the same iambic harmonic rhythms that dominated the first section of the movement.

If the trio form encourages Haydn to a greater range of resource in his writing for the piano, this greater freedom also extends to the structures as a whole, whose breadth and frequent tone of generous expansion are uncharacteristic of Haydn's formal habits. It arises partly as a result of the more ambitious behaviour of the keyboard part, partly as a result of the natural possibilities of alternation inherent in the form, and most obviously through the stimulus to Haydn's imagination of a medium whose make-up did not demand the more rigorous treatment of the string quartet. This greater breadth is most noticeable in the rate of harmonic movement, which is often much slower than that which would be found in a solo sonata. In bars 41-4 of the first movement of Trio No. 29, for instance, no fewer than six consecutive neighbouring-note pairs are used to establish the dominant of the dominant:

Ex. 4

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano and violin. The first system, starting at measure 35, shows the piano part with arpeggiated chords and a scalic ascent, and the violin part with a two-octave arpeggiated leap. The second system, starting at measure 40, continues the piano part with arpeggiated chords and the violin part with a two-octave arpeggiated leap. The piano part is marked with *p* and *f*, and the violin part is marked with *f*.

In the Allegro of Trio No. 38, on the other hand, the three tonic chords of bs 24-5 are followed by five $\frac{5}{3}$ dominant chords spread over four bars. Here the expression of harmonic solidity is almost the only element that counts, as the thematic content is negligible. The most significant element is the answering of the harmonic rhythm of bs 24-5 by the threefold chords at 28-9; this is confirmed by the fact that the violin's two-octave arpeggiated leap recalls the piano's scalic ascent of two octaves in the earlier pair of bars:

Ex. 5

The musical score for Example 5 consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 20-22) shows the violin part with a melodic line and the piano part with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system (measures 23-25) shows the violin part continuing its melodic line, while the piano part provides a steady accompaniment. The third system (measures 26-28) shows the violin part with a melodic line and the piano part with a rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as [f], [p], and [cresc.] and articulation marks like slurs and accents.

Indeed, the melodic entities in these works are often less characteristic than in a solo piece, the melodic personality at any one moment is often less specific, as is the case with bs 34-41 of the first movement of Trio No. 29. Here, neither the piano nor the violin part is quite sharply turned enough to stand up by itself, so that once again attention is drawn towards the larger harmonic movement which their slightly impersonal constituent parts outline. With the wider focus of sound this slight lack of individual nuance enables broader gestures and harmonic shapes to be sustained. This is most evident in the sense of harmonic adventure in these works, with their extensive use of third-related keys almost outweighing the incidence of the more standard tonal relations.

The finale of Trio No. 45, an Allemande 'in the German style', illustrates many of the textural concerns of this essay: the dramatization of the trio texture, here into what Charles Rosen calls 'a grossly comic evocation of a village band',⁴ the free interweaving of parts with its consequent mercurial shifts of aural focus, the larger scale of harmonic action, and, particularly, the stylistic freedom and range of invention to which this form stimulated the composer. In such a movement the medium assumes a textural character as distinct as that of any Haydn string quartet. The necessary 'integrity' of the constituent parts derives from the equal rusticity of the accompaniment and of the melodic material, an equality which finally transcends any stratification of textural roles. It is surprising that those criticisms of the texture of these works, based on a misapprehension of Haydn's textural principles, have failed to acknowledge that it was precisely Haydn's very personal use of the possibilities of the form which led to such exciting and original results.

NOTES

1. Review by Stephen Plaistow, *The Gramophone*, Vol. 63, No. 746 (July 1985), p.141.
2. *The Classical Style* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p.354.
3. All references to the trios follow the numbering of the Doblinger edition, ed. H.C. Robbins Landon.
4. *The Classical Style*, p.360.