Trio in E-flat "Kegelstatt" K. 498
  Andante
  Menuett
  Rondeaux: Allegretto

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano Left Hand in G minor
  Adagio ma non troppo

Josef Labor
(1842-1924)

-Intermission-

Trio for Clarinet, Viola and Piano
  Prelude: Largo
  Allergissimo
  Scherzando
  Largo
  Presto

Jean Françaix
(1912-1997)

Special thanks to Dr. Carina Canonico for her coaching and guidance.
Little introduction is needed for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. His compositional prowess significantly contributed to the evolution of chamber music, and in particular, wrote one of the first major concerti for the clarinet. The “Kegelstatt” is significant for a number of reasons. Mozart wrote the trio for friends, his favourite piano student, Franziska von Jacquin, and Anton Stadler, the clarinet virtuoso for whom Mozart also wrote the concerto and quintet. The clarinet was a relatively new instrument at the time and was quickly emerging into symphonic orchestra and opera scores. Mozart was also one of the first champions of the new pianoforte, opposed to the harpsichord. He began writing for it a year prior the trio (1786), during a time where he created a handful of masterful chamber works.

The nickname “Kegelstatt” is derived from a type of outdoor bowling; the German “Kegel” referring to the game, and “statt” the place. A translation would work out to “a trio composed while bowling”.

The three-movement work begins in sonata form, the opening melody full of charm and grace that rolls from phrase to phrase. The first motif, a single note followed by a flurry of notes known as a grupetto, pervades the fabric of the music, passing through the ensemble and creating a mosaic of colour. The Menuetto is in a traditional triple-meter dance form, showcasing light textures contrasted with the agitated minor-mode Trio. The Rondeaux returns us to the lovely Galant texture of the opening but demonstrates a distinct personality in how solo voices break out of the group texture. The movement contains elements from the first two movements, bringing the work to a satisfying completion.

Blinded at the age of 3 due to smallpox, Josef Labor nevertheless found great success as a performing musician across Europe. As an organist, he was said to be second only to Bruckner, and his tours across Europe eventually brought him into contact with King George V of Hanover, who was also blind. Labor was appointed as Royal Chamber Pianist in Hanover, and when in the following year Hanover was annexed by Prussia, Labor followed the King in exile to Vienna, where he worked as a teacher while continuing to perform and compose. Labor taught notable students such as Alma Schindler (later Mahler-Werfel), Arnold Schoenberg, and Paul Wittgenstein. Music for the left hand alone is often associated with Paul Wittgenstein (older brother of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein), who had his right arm amputated after sustaining an injury in the Great War. Later known for commissioning left hand alone works from composers such as Ravel, Prokofiev, and Korngold, the first person Wittgenstein turned to after his injury was his old teacher, Josef Labor, who immediately produced a concert piece for piano left hand and orchestra. In the following years, Labor produced a number of works for piano left hand, including concerti, solo works, and chamber music, such as the Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano Left Hand.

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Born in 1912, French composer Jean Françaix was a neoclassical composer, pianist, and orchestrator, best known for his vibrant style and prolific output. His father was the Director of the Le Mans Music Conservatory, and his mother was a voice teacher, both of which freely fostered his musical abilities as a child. He began tutelage with the illustrious Nadia Boulanger at age ten, who noted his exceptional understanding of harmony. Boulanger remarked in a letter to Françaix’s mother, “Madame, I don’t see why we should waste our time teaching him harmony. He already knows harmony. I don’t know how, but he knows it; he was born knowing it.” In 1923, Maurice Ravel encouraged Françaix after reading a manuscript, saying “Among this child’s gifts, I especially remark the most fruitful that an artist can possess, that of curiosity”.

Françaix was an accomplished pianist, earning the First Prize in Piano at the Paris Conservatory at age eighteen, and toured through Europe, notably with Francis Poulenc. However, his primary occupation was with composition, and remarked that he would “barely finish one before beginning another”. At the time of his death in 1997, his oeuvre spanned more than two-hundred works, including five operas, twenty concerti for various instruments, sixteen ballets, thirteen film scores, and more than fifty works for chamber ensemble.

Françaix eschewed atonality, twelve-tone, minimalism, and other such experiments in music, being content with the label of “neoclassical”. His style is often evocative of the 1920’s and 1930’s “interwar” period, with its circus, jazz, and burlesque, juxtaposed with tender, lyrical nostalgia. He had a particular fondness for the clarinet as a vehicle for this immense range of emotion, composing at least thirty-nine (excluding orchestral) works for it.

The Trio comprises five movements in a kind of suite, even a French Märchenerzählungen (trio for same instrumentation by Robert Schumann). A slow, atmospheric, slightly sorrowful prelude rises in a single gesture towards resolution followed by a swift, dashing Allegro assai that suddenly melts into Chaplinesque parody of Tango before scurrying away in a burlesque march with touches of Stravinsky and Jazz. At the center is a fantastic sectional Scherzando dance with a recurring melody based on a five-note motif and yet another section with a swaying three-note waltz idea. Both themes reprise in passing towards the end of the finale. The Largo forth movement is the slow, poignant moment of repose, smoky, languid and sensual. The finale is a jaunty burlesque full of musical play, effervescent textures and frenetic rhythms with the winning Scherzando theme from the third movement humorously making a brief entrance amidst the confusion. Much like fire, Françaix’s Trio showcases the warm glow of smoldering embers, the motion of dancing flames, the interplay of light and shadow, and the crackling of Firewood.

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