The Casimir Trio  
Sunday, March 18, 2018, 3:00pm

Nancy Bean, violin  
Lloyd Smith, violoncello  
Marcantonio Barone, piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
(1756-1791)  
Piano Trio in C Major, K. 548

When Mozart wrote this piano trio in 1788, he was on the cusp of major changes in his style and indeed in his life. Six years earlier he had married Constanze Weber, and four years earlier he became a freemason. He was about to grow into a more mature person.

Mozart was beginning to find it more and more difficult to compose. There is clear evidence in the many false starts and discarded incomplete works from the period following this trio that his maturation was not coming easily.

This and two other piano trios, however, were products of the end of his most prolific and poetic period. He had completed his last three symphonies before 1788 but still had a strong interest in so-called popular chamber music, which included piano trios. We are fortunate to have this trio, so lucidly constructed, so light-hearted, yet so much the fruits of a major talent.

Antonín Dvořák  
(1841-1904)  
Four Romantic Pieces

By the time Dvořák had reached thirty years of age, there had been strong forces both helping with his success and frustrating his life. Both Johannes Brahms and his publisher Hanslick recognized Dvořák’s worth as a composer and helped make him known in Europe. But both of them also wanted him to move away from, in Hanslick’s words, “provincial Prague . . . Your art requires a wider horizon, a German environment, a bigger, non-Czech public.” Dvořák had been obliged to make his way into general recognition cautiously and with a great sense of personal conflict.

By 1887, well established throughout Europe and recognized for having brought Czech national character to life in his remarkable compositions, Dvořák was able to relax and enjoy his successes. His publishers, always hungry for salable new works, hounded him for the kind of music which could be played by amateurs as well as professionals and thus bought in great numbers.

Happily complying, he wrote his very popular Slavonic Dances for orchestra. Immediately after completing them, he wrote four Miniatures for two violins and viola, and the following week transcribed them for violin and piano and renamed them “Romantic Pieces.” This was the kind of music which made him known to countless music lovers all over Europe, perhaps even more than his great major works could do for him in the concert halls. They also, of course, made his publishers very rich and very happy.
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Piano Trio in Eb Major, Op. 70, No. 2

Beethoven’s move to Vienna from Bonn, Germany, at the age of 21 was a most fortuitous one. Vienna was arguably the cultural capital of Europe and to succeed in that city was to ensure one’s fame.

But fame had to be repeatedly earned in Vienna, and Beethoven had many flops along the way. His opera “Fidelio” was completed in 1805 and performed at a time when much of Vienna had fled because of the presence of French troops in the city. It was not a success.

Add to that the distraction of love spurned. Beethoven had fallen passionately in love with a young widow, Josephine von Brunsvik. She had four young children from her unhappy marriage, but her sister later wrote that a relationship with Beethoven might have been bad for them (not to mention Beethoven’s lower social standing).

But by 1808 he was apparently over it and had thrown himself once again headlong into creative work. His violin concerto, his fourth symphony, and his fourth piano concerto flew from his pen; then his fifth symphony, his Op. 69 cello sonata, and his sixth symphony followed rapidly. Immediately after completing the sixth symphony he got to work on his two Op. 70 piano trios. The energy he embedded in these works is enormous, and it marked a period of his life filled with outward uncertainty but inward drive. He had yet to achieve any position offering financial security and so was living by his considerable wits.

This trio is unlike any other piece Beethoven ever wrote. He deliberately never revealed his innermost inspirations, however, and we are left only to guess. It can be imagined that the memories of his unsuccessful love inspired this trio, because the writing is much more feminine and gracious in character than we are accustomed to hearing in Beethoven’s music.