



G. Fauré: Trio op. 120 in D minor

'To speak of Fauré, means to speak from the most intimate and hidden regions of the French psyche, to analyze our personal art of feeling and of self expression.' Paul Ladormy

Gabriel Fauré wrote his Piano Trio in 1923, at the age of 78, a serene piece that reflects many of the developments of his late period of composing. By this point, he had already been suffering for more than 20 years from a painful decline in his hearing, a condition which, together with his responsibilities as Director of the Conservatoire de Paris until the age of 75, greatly reduced his compositional output in later years. Although his reputation outside of France is based almost entirely on one work, his Requiem, within France he is held in the same degree of reverence as Ravel, one of his students at the Conservatoire, and Debussy. Fauré was the first French composer to separate himself from the model of German Romanticism. He created clear structure outside of the strict, Classical Sonata form and the free-form tone poem, introduced a modest, understated coloration and expression, and developed a new and, for the time, daring harmony that transformed French music for the generations to follow him.

In his late works, Fauré's earlier immersion in Gregorian melodies and forms comes to the fore. Harmonies are no longer merely functional; with the use of modal tonalities and variegated, subtle modulations, Fauré invents a new, rich and many-shaded palette of expressiveness. This greater variety of harmonic color is coupled with a simplified structure: the Classical Sonata form – in which themes are separated clearly and developed in isolation from one another – is here replaced by themes that flow into each other, developing upon one another. This work shows Fauré at the height of his melodic powers, the richness of his expanded harmonic palette heightening the dramatic development to the beautiful melodies that infuse the piece throughout.

The first movement begins with the piano laying down a misty backdrop for the cello entry with the melancholy first theme. In rondo form, the main theme is repeated through the movement in a loose way. The longing second theme is introduced by the piano that gets interlinked with the first theme, the momentum from the joining themes sweeping the music forward to the fateful passage ending the movement.

The Andantino middle movement has rightfully been called the 'heart of the Trio'. Its richness is that of a full psychological portrait. The movement is loosely structured in 2-part song form. Like the first, it begins with a gentle piano accompaniment, the violin this time introducing the lovely, wistful first theme. The simplicity of the first theme has its contrast in the B-section, consisting of long-spanned build-ups arching across the movement. The tension peaks twice in two very different climaxes: the first climax finds no way out of the tension, dissolving into awkward chords, while the second opens out to an exultant song in F-Major, the emotion of the long build-up transforming into a deep, contented outpouring. The movement finally ends with a peaceful joining together of both themes and all instruments.

The third movement returns to the drama and rondo form of the first movement, this time in a playful, dance-like character. Starting with unisono strings playing a short, dramatic motif, the piano quickly responds with a running, syncopated, jazzy theme. The movement is full of interruptions and interjections, surprising changes in tone and tune – until finally an exuberant motif takes over, bringing the movement to a joyous, culminating close.