



## **Junction Trio**

### **April 20, 2024**

#### **PROGRAM NOTES**

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

#### **JOHN ZORN**

(B. NEW YORK, 1953)

#### **Philosophical Investigations (2022)**

A composer, improviser, and multi-instrumentalist, John Zorn was a key figure in the flourishing of the New York “Downtown” music scene in the 1970s. In 1975, Zorn founded the “Theatre of Musical Optics,” a series of recurring solo performances in his apartment in which he “manipulated physical objects as if they were musical notes” to produce “music without sound.” Zorn’s compositional style is eclectic, heavily influenced by a range of styles including jazz, klezmer music, cartoon music, and avant-garde classical music. Zorn founded his record label Tzadik in 1995, and is heard on over 400 recordings. In 2005, Zorn opened The Stone, an intimate music venue in Greenwich Village that hosts experimental music performers, compensating them with all of the revenue generated from admission sales.

Zorn composed *Philosophical Investigations* for the Junction Trio and describes the piece as “maybe being more about philosophy than music.” The title of the piece refers to Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s text that was published posthumously in 1953. In this book Wittgenstein proposes a new way of looking at language, which is presented in approximately 700 short

observations. Zorn's aphoristic phrases resemble Wittgenstein's thought-provoking tidbits.

## **CHARLES IVES**

(DANBURY, CONNECTICUT, 1874–NEW YORK, 1954)

### **Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano (1904-1911, rev. 1914-1915)**

Charles Ives grew up in a quaint New England town listening to patriotic band music and playing the organ in Protestant churches. His father, George Ives, served as a bandleader in the Civil War and Danbury's jack-of-all-musical-trades. George encouraged his son to adopt an adventurous approach to music in which dissonance and sonic clashes factored prominently. Charles took a brief hiatus from musical risk taking when he attended Yale University and studied with Horatio Parker, an impeccable craftsman who composed in a more conservative Romantic style. After graduating in 1898, Ives worked as an actuary and served as the organist at Central Presbyterian Church in New York until 1902. After resigning from his organ post, Ives subsequently abandoned his aspirations to earn his livelihood as a professional musician. He composed at night in isolation and owned a successful insurance firm.

Ives's wife, Harmony, revealed that the Piano Trio is partially based on Ives's reminiscences of his college days. The first movement is lugubrious and meandering as the cello and piano trudge along together playing atonal melodies. After about a minute the music becomes more rhythmically active, building to a restatement of the first melody, now played by the violin. The cello is silent, as the violin and piano repeat the opening section. The texture broadens as the cello returns, and the entire ensemble plays the opening section a third time. Ives demonstrates how the same melody can assume new qualities when it is reharmonized and resituated in different registers.

Ives began work on the second movement of the piece in 1904, while anxiously awaiting the sixth "Yale '98" reunion. The

movement bears the title “This Scherzo is A Joke” and is full of humor and high jinks. An additional subtitle, “Medley on the Fence...Campus,” also appears on one of the sketches for this movement, and Ives’s penchant for musical quotation is exuberantly on display here. He quotes fragments of many American folk songs, including Stephen Foster’s “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Marching Through Georgia,” as well as fraternity songs, most notably the Delta Kappa Epsilon tune “A Band of Brothers in DKE.” While the outward tone of the movement is boisterous fun, the musical quotations also allude to more serious topics. For example, psychoanalyst and music scholar Stuart Feder writes that “the memory of George Ives is acknowledged in the many tunes of his times which are quoted.” Feder also points out that Ives shifts to a spiritual contemplativeness by quoting the hymn “In the Sweet By-and-By” in the slow Adagio sections.

The finale is the longest movement in the Trio. The opening section returns to a slower tempo and soaring melodies. This music recurs throughout the movement, but encounters other tunes, such as “The All-Enduring,” a song that Ives composed for the Yale Glee Club in 1896, which the ensemble rejected, and Thomas Hastings’s “Rock of Ages” in the coda.

## **ROBERT SCHUMANN**

(ZWICKAU, SAXONY, 1810–ENDENICH, 1856)

### **Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 63 (1847)**

In 1847, Robert Schumann experienced several personal tragedies, including the deaths of his sixteen-month-old son, and his friends, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel and Felix Mendelssohn. He retreated inward and responded with a slew of imaginative compositions. At this time, Schumann composed several chamber music compositions to explore how he could incorporate denser contrapuntal textures into his mature style, which already contained unique melodic and rhythmic properties. This robust texture is heard in the opening of his first piano trio as the three instruments are constantly overlapping and exchanging musical

material. The first movement, marked “With Energy and Passion,” features an expansive scope in which turbulence builds and subsides. The downbeat is often obscured, creating an uneven footing that may cause listeners to feel as though they’re being tossed about in a storm.

In the scherzo, Schumann manipulates a simplistic but powerful musical motive, an ascending scale, sonically suggesting the feeling of climbing. However, this climber repeatedly rappels from the apex, impelling the ascending gesture to relaunch. Schumann continues to fixate on linear ascents and descents in the central trio, now producing a dreamy blurring of the individual parts, in contrast to the sharply detached steps in the outer scherzo sections. The slow movement begins with a lonely violin solo in the key of A minor, unquestionably a lament, possibly Schumann himself grieving his losses. A modulation to the key of F major ushers in a more optimistic outlook as the strings engage in a bubbly dialogue. However, this dialogue circles back to the opening lament, suggesting that this sorrow can be temporarily forgotten, but will not subside altogether.

Interestingly, the finale, marked “With Fire,” commences immediately in the key of D major. Often after a sad third movement, Romantic composers would ease their way into the finale’s obligatory major mode by way of a slow introduction or a slick modulatory scheme. Schumann clearly rejects these options, boldly resolving to move forward. Instead, passages in the minor mode periodically threaten to obstruct the main theme’s progress, which is stated in an array of major keys. This oscillation between exhilarating highs and despairing lows in the finale, and throughout the entire piece, has led scholars and critics to cite it as an example of a work that perhaps artistically depicts Schumann’s bipolar disorder and struggles with depression.

*Program notes by Jessica Payette, Associate Professor of Music at Oakland University.*