

A Survey of the Piano Trio Repertoire: “H” Composers by David Barker

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Note

Because it has taken so long to prepare this – the demands of running the site make spare time for other projects very scarce – I will concentrate in future on compiling the discography (though the Haydn section of this survey will follow next week).

Henry Hadley (1871-1937, USA) wrote two trios; only the second has a recording, on an Albany disc with other American trios of the same era and ilk, that being Brahmsian, melodic and a little sentimental. The four movements have their moments of interest, generally at the start, but don't really have the development to sustain interest.

Our [reviewer](#) divided the four trios of **Daron Hagen (b. 1961, USA)** into two very distinct camps. The first two, from the 1980s, are hard-edged, somewhat dissonant, more academic, and strongly influenced by his teacher David Diamond. The third and fourth, written two decades later, contrast greatly, having their origins in American folk hymns. Having now sampled them myself, I certainly concur with this assessment, and it won't surprise you that the latter pair appeal much more to me, though I can see the qualities of the first two.

Prominent American composer **John Harbison (b. 1938, USA)** ([review](#)) shows a similar evolution in his trios to his compatriot Daron Hagen. The early one is very hard going, the second, apparently inspired by Haydn (I'll have to take Harbison's word for this), is more accessible but didn't engage me greatly.

I would love to be able to tell you about the 1934 trio of **Roy Harris (1898-1979, USA)**, but it seems the only recording is no longer available. This is doubly a shame as it features as pianist the fine Italian composer Alfredo Casella, and was made in New York in the year of the work's composition. Therefore, I will also list it in my Wishlist.

The sole trio of **Lou Harrison (1917-2003, USA)** comes late in his life - 1989. It followed a number of traumatic events in his life, and is, in most part, gentle, wistful and melodic. The second movement, dedicated to his recently deceased friend, Virgil Thomson, is the most anguished. The third movement comprises separate solo sections for the three instruments. I will also mention his Varied Trio, which does not fit into this survey, as the third instrument is not cello, but percussion. Both are worthy of your attention.

The Andantino & Variations of **Johann Peter Emilius Hartmann (1805-1900, Denmark)** is a genial work, but no more. The same recording, by Tre Musica, has been released by Da Capo three times with different couplings. The first, with other Danish “Golden Age” trios, is of most interest to the piano trio aficionado.

The trios of **Emil Hartmann (1836-1898, Denmark)**, son of the above JPE, and **Peter Heise (1830-1879, Denmark)** have been recorded but once, on the same Classico release, along with that of Christian Barnekow. Given the enjoyable nature of each – gentle Romanticism is perhaps the best description – this is a most desirable CD (except that it is no longer in physical form, only as a download).

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809, Austria) – published separately

It's hard to know what to expect from a trio called “A Cube of Silence”, by **Lars Hegaard (1950-, Denmark)**. It wasn't so modernist to make it unlistenable, but when the second movement fails to live

up to its cantabile marking, then the rest becomes fairly tiring. Our [reviewer](#) described it as elusive (definitely) and intriguing (not to me).

The trio of **William Heilman (1877-1946, USA)** would seem to be his only recorded work, or at least among those currently available. It has a similar feel to that by Henry Hadley discussed above, but strikes me as more interesting, though it does tend to lack contrast. Written in 1923, it must have seemed very much behind the times.

Our [reviewer](#) was very enthusiastic about a disc of chamber music by **Barbara Heller (b. 1936, Germany)**, containing two trios, with a sum total of just over five minutes. Not really to my taste, so I will leave you to read his review.

We have a [review](#) of the two trios, written in 1957 & 2000, of **Robert Helps (1928-2001, USA)**, which means I can place it here, rather than in the "Discography only" list. Quoting from the review, the music is described as "often Schoenbergian in feel, but also reminiscent of other composers straddling modernism and neo-tonality".

Fini Henriques (1867-1940, Denmark) may not sound Danish, though his first name is Valdemar, but he was born and educated in the country, and he was one of its more prominent musicians in his time. The only recording of his Children's Trio from 1904 is on an early Dacapo recording titled "Danish Golden Age Piano Trios". Some Googling suggests that this is rather stretching the conventional definition of the Golden Age, which is the first half of the 19th century. That notwithstanding, the work is pleasant and undemanding, though rather lacking much in the way of melodic inspiration. I was unable to identify what the name is supposed to signify.

I couldn't audition the MDG recording of the trio of **Adolf von Henselt (1814-1889, Germany)**, but did find a professional quality live performance on [Youtube](#), showing the work to be a very fine one, and deserving of more than the single recording. The performers on the MDG are well known, so it suggests that it would be a worthwhile investment.

Hans Werner Henze (1926-2012, Germany) is a little too modernist for my taste so I was quite surprised to find his trio *Adagio adagio* to be quite enjoyable. I described it in [a review](#) of an excellent disc of miniatures as songlike. I haven't heard the other recordings, but I doubt they could better that by the Boulanger Trio. There is also a chamber sonata for trio, but I could not track down its only recording.

The trio of **Philippe Hersant (b. 1948, France)**, a set of variations on a theme of Marin Marais, is one of those works which veers frequently into the realms of modernism, only to pull itself back from the edge into a more accessible, if hard-edged, neo-Romanticism. It does run for more than twenty minutes in one movement, so there is a goodly amount of the modernist stuff. I found it interesting, but not enough to revisit much.

Lovers of the Brahms trios will find much to enjoy in the two by **Heinrich von Herzogenberg (1843-1900, Austria)**, written in 1877 and 1884. Of course, they do not reach those dizzying heights, but more than occasionally Herzogenberg takes us to a high place where one can see the summit, as represented by the Brahms. There are three recordings of each, from Antes Edition, CPO and MDG. The latter is new, and I haven't been able to listen to it. However, [our reviewer](#) was quite satisfied with the performances, and in accord with my opinion on the musical qualities. Of the other two (which I have heard), the ATOS Trio on CPO is far superior in performance and sound to the Arensky Trio on Antes. The latter is significantly slower in both works (2-3 minutes overall) and this results in a loss of momentum, especially when Herzogenberg's inspiration wanes. The second trio may be better in a technical sense, but I prefer the melodies in the first. Since all three recordings have both, you aren't required to choose before purchase.

Jennifer Higdon (1962-, USA) is one of her country's best composers of contemporary, but tonal, music, and it is to be regretted that her only contribution to the piano trio canon is a pair of short movements, titled *Yellow/Red*. While the music doesn't bring those colours to mind for me, it is very fine indeed: I will recycle my description from a review: "Yellow is gentle and meltingly lyrical, and Red is certainly fiery and dramatic". It has four recordings, two of which (Naxos and Albany) are all-Higdon, the others (Cedille and an artist-produced effort) collection of trios by contemporary women composers. None of the versions would disappoint should you choose them, but I would place the Lincoln Trio on Cedille slightly above the star-studded lineup on Naxos (Anne Akiko Meyers and Alisa Weilerstein). That said, the predominantly hardline modernist couplings on the Cedille disc ([review](#)) don't appeal to me greatly; the companion works on the Muses Trio's self-published disc, with a fine performance of the Higdon, appeals more to me.

Only the fourth of the six trios by **Ferdinand Hiller (1811-1885, Germany)** has been recorded. It is one of two to be given the title *Serenade*, and is as you might surmise on the light end of the scale. At 25 minutes, it requires better powers of concentration than mine to pay close attention throughout. The very dry acoustic afforded the recording is not helpful, nor is the presentation of it by Thorofon as a single movement, when there are in fact six indicated in the score. I have included the others on my Wishlist more in hope than expectation.

Matthew Hindson (b.1968-, Australia) is another highly respected and performed currently working composer. His trio from 2008 is comprised of three very different movements: the first in his signature tempo of *Moto perpetuo* is angular and driven, the second *Repetitions*, is redolent of a smoky jazz basement, and the third, *Epic Diva*, is described in the booklet notes as inspired by electronic dance music. That will probably have most of you moving to the next paragraph, but for me, the dance rhythms had a Latin flavour, and the popular music it brought to mind was Burt Bacharach. So diverse are the moods in the three movements that there is bound to be something you really like and something you really dislike.

Ernst Theodor Amadeus (ETA) Hoffmann (1776-1822, Prussia) – yes, the Hoffmann of *Tales of ...* and *The Nutcracker!* Did you know he wrote music as well? This Grand Trio is described by one of our reviewers as "a major discovery" and "delightful listening" by another. I certainly agree that it has considerable charm, and it is good to see that a work by an unsung composer (at least in this field of endeavour) has garnered five recordings. Not surprisingly given their birthdates, the work has most in common with Beethoven, but a very genial Beethoven.

I have been able to listen to four of the recordings; the CPO being the odd one out, but it has been [reviewed](#) favourably here. The Profil Edition disc was given a Recording of the Month accolade by our [reviewer](#). You should be aware that Profil's Margaux Trio employs a fortepiano, though I have to admit that it is one of the better sounding examples of that instrument. I can't say the same for the violin, though. Of the three modern instrument performances I've heard, the Jean Paul Trio is clearly the best (Ars Musici), with the Bamberg Trio (Musicaphon) a quite good alternative. Both offer Beethoven trios as discmates. Don't trouble yourself with Trio à cordes Francais (Charlin): very uningratiating sound and tonally suspect.

Here's my "major discovery" from this part of the alphabet: the very French-sounding trio by **Dulcie Holland (1913-2000, Australia)** is beautifully crafted and well performed by the Apollo Trio. Wirripping is not a well-known label, even in Australia, but is readily available from northern hemisphere online stores. As a bonus, you get the beautiful Ross Edwards trio and some other Australian miniatures.

Vagn Holmboe (1909-1996, Denmark) is regarded as the greatest Danish composer since Carl Nielsen. My limited exposure to his music has been through his symphonies; the predominant theme in his chamber music is string quartets of which there are in excess of twenty. There are just two for piano

trio. The first, bearing the generic title, may not be exactly overloaded with melodies, but I do like its rhythms, and the folk music-influenced slow movement. The later work, titled Nuigen, is a harder nut to crack. If you do want both works, then there is only one option, on Dacapo, a label closely linked to the composer.

The chamber music output of **Gustav Holst (1874-1934, Britain)** is very small indeed. His trio is an early work, and its salon gentility is a million miles away from his mature works. It has a single recording, on the now defunct ASV label, and has not reappeared on Presto's reissue service. We do have a [review](#) on the site, and I commend Christopher Howell's comments to you.

While **Arthur Honegger (1892-1955, Switzerland)** is best known for his orchestral music, he did leave a substantial body of chamber music, as evidenced by a 4 disc set on Timpani of the complete oeuvre. However, the single and early piano trio is a very small contributor to that, coming in at around 5 minutes. It is, however, a piece that is worthy of your attention, with a wide range of moods, rhythms and textures squeezed fairly successfully into a small space. Of the four recordings, the best is on the Timpani set with Devoyon, Kang and Wallfisch, but if all you wanted was the trio, it is a big investment (though not of course if you are streaming). Of the others, all on single discs, the most interesting couplings are on the Claves disc (Raff, Bloch and Martin) but Trio Nota Bene has adopted an overly fast tempo throughout, speeding through in under 4 minutes, turning *Allegro vivace* into Presto, and losing the Frenchness of the work in the process. The Prospero Trio on Centaur gives a rather staid performance, and while I quite like the Hungarian players on Hungaroton, I have to say that they have imparted a central European feel to the work, making it rather more Brahmsian than French. It is a rather mystifying inclusion in a disc that is mostly songs and trios by Sándor Veress.

I don't think even the most devoted adherent of the music of **Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000, Armenia/USA)** would say that his chamber music was his métier. Nevertheless, given his prodigious output, it is not surprising that we find three works for piano trio. The early, generically titled, work was dedicated to Sibelius, and is quite conventional but worth a listen, even if you aren't a Hovhaness aficionado. Our [reviewer](#) mentions it in passing when discussing a collection of chamber music. There is also a pair, *Tumburu* and *Varuna*, from his maturity. The former is what I expect from this composer - Asian-influenced melodies, atmospheric and calming - but the latter is quite surprising, almost jazzy in the first movement, aggressive and spiky in the second. I can't say I liked it; *Tumburu* was much more my style.

Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837, Austria) was my first unsung discovery through the wonderful concerto disc by Stephen Hough on Chandos. It's fair to say that I haven't found any works or performances to match those since, but I continue to enjoy the music of this Beethoven associate. He wrote seven trios, which tend to have a rather dominating piano part, not surprising given his virtuosity on the instrument. They are full of charm and grace; there is minimal drama, but then Beethoven also reserved some of his most sunny music for his trios. If I was pressed to say which was the best of the seven, I'd probably go for No. 4, but No. 1 would not be far behind.

If your fancy is the fortepiano, then you have two options for the full set of seven: Voces Intimae on two Warner discs and a group on Brilliant Classics. Performance-wise, you have a very easy choice: the former wins hands down. They were originally released on Thorofon ([review](#)) before Warner bought the rights ([review](#)). The Brilliant Classics ensemble is anything but: they give very mundane, dreary readings which suck the life out of these works. It seems that the Warner discs are no longer in print, but can still be tracked down, or streamed through services such as the Naxos Music Library.

Of the fortepiano-led releases with one or two trios, the best credentialed is the group led by Andreas Staier on Harmonia Mundi, coupled with either two Beethoven trios or a second disc with some Beethoven violin sonatas. I think it may be the best individual performance of any of his trios, regardless of instrument type, and the sound of the fortepiano is perfectly acceptable, even to

someone like me. An interesting release by The Music Collection from ASV, reissued by Presto, has Trio No. 1 with Hummel's excellent quintet and viola sonata. The keyboard used is described as "of the time" but named just as a piano. If it is a fortepiano, then it sounds very rich. That's two in a row I've found very listenable – perhaps my antipathy is lessening! That thought disappears when I listen to an older Naxos release, featuring Trios 2 & 3 as well as other of his chamber music. The fortepiano is very tinkly, and I'm afraid I can't be very positive about the performances either. Our [two reviewers](#) were a little more complimentary, but not much.

There are three complete sets with modern instruments: the Gould Trio (Naxos), Triangulus (Meridian) and Trio Parnassus (MDG). I've always found the latter to be more praiseworthy in their choice of repertoire than in their playing, but I tend to be in the minority view there. These are very early recordings (1980s); [our reviewer](#) described them as "performances that cannot be improved upon". Since MDG is a label that has not jumped on the streaming bandwagon, I will have to take his word for it. The other set, released across two separate discs, is by the ever-reliable Gould Trio, and as always, they provide very satisfactory readings, without ever suggesting that they have found all that the music has to offer ([review](#)). The Meridian recordings are also not available to sample, nor have they been reviewed on this site, so I cannot make any comment.

Two big-name trios give us a selection on single discs: the Beaux Arts Trio on Philips (1, 3, 4 & 7) and the Borodin Trio on Chandos (1, 5 & 7). The former is famous for its refinement and their Haydn set, which is ideal for this repertoire, so if you can still track this down, it is definitely worth it. I associate the latter with brooding Romantic repertoire, with readings that are at times overly heavy and slow, almost the diametric opposite of Hummel's soundworld. This expectation is mostly met: the slow movements especially are leaden.

Trio Parnassus has also released a recording of a live performance (I believe) on SWR Music of Trios 5 & 6, and I was as complimentary about their playing as I have ever been ([review](#)). It is, however, only available as a download, just over forty minutes in length, completely devoid of documentation, and yet is not budget-priced. There is better value and even better playing from the Mirare disc by the Chausson Trio (also discussed in the Haydn section). Their performance of Trio No. 2 is easily the best that I've heard. The Australian Trio with Nos 1 & 4 rounds out the survey with solid performances, which will disappoint no one, nor excite anyone either ([review](#)).

The life of **William Hurlstone (1876-1906, Britain)** was sadly cut short by pneumonia. His trio, written a couple of years before his death, shows the strong influence of Brahms, not surprising given that Stanford was one of his teachers. It is sunny and genial throughout, which is probably its main shortcoming: the lack of some necessary contrast. It has attracted three recordings, all of which can be recommended; the choice will depend on your interest in the couplings. The Lyrita has two of his orchestral works which I never find an entirely satisfactory combination, whereas the Dutton concentrates on chamber music. The Divine Art release takes a different tack, with three other unsung composers ([review](#)): I made it one of my Recordings of the Year in 2013.

There is some uncertainty as to how many trios **Henry Huss (1862-1953, USA)** wrote: one source says three, another two. The only recorded one is not numbered to confuse matters. It is named the "Munich" in recognition of his studies in that city with Josef Rheinberger. It is very Brahmsian, which will not be a surprise, and at almost 40 minutes, certainly goes on too long. However, it does have its merits, and is worth at least one listen.

The music of **Ketil Hvoslef (1939-, Norway)** isn't to my taste, but we do have a [review](#) of his single, quite late, trio, which was described as one of his most memorable chamber works.

Miriam Hyde (1913-2005, Australia) studied at the RCM with Gordon Jacob and Arthur Benjamin. However, her one movement Fantasy Trio – not a Cobbett prize entry – is more French in its sensibility.

Its only recording is the Divine Art release mentioned in the Hurlstone section. For the hunter of the unsung, it is strongly recommended.

Included in discography only

- Ernesto Halffter (1905-1989, Spain): Hommages
- Haflidi Hallgrímsson (b. 1941, Iceland): Metamorphoses
- Jonathan Harvey (1939-2012, Britain): Trio
- Joaquim Homs (1906-2003, Spain): Dos Impromptus
- Katherine Hoover (1937-, USA): Trio
- Toshio Hosokawa (1955-, Japan)

Wishlist

Henry Hadley: Trio 1, op. 26

Reynaldo Hahn: Trio in f (1896)

Roy Harris: Trio (1934)

Hamilton Harty: Fantasiestücke, op. 3 (ca 1901)

Gustav Helsted: Trio in e, op. 6 (1886)

Friedrich Hermann: Sonatine in d, op. 28/2

Wilhelm Hill: Trios 1 & 2, opp. 12 & 43

Ferdinand Hiller: Trios 1-3 & 5, Serenade 2, opp. 6-8, 74 & 186

Charles Horlsey: Trios 1-3

Hans Huber: Trios 1-5

Jean Huré: Serenade, Suite sur des chants Bretons

Henry Huss: Trios 1 & 2, opp. 8 & 34

Miriam Hyde: Variations on 'Waltzing Matilda', op. 40c

Acknowledgements

The following recordings were obtained for this survey as downloads:

eClassical: [Hummel \(Naxos v2\)](#) ~ [Haydn & Hummel \(Mirare\)](#)