



DELTA PIANO TRIO

May 21, 2018 The Cross-Eyed Pianist

Delta Piano Trio is Gerard Spronk (violin), Irene Enzlin (cellist) and Vera Kooper (pianist)

Who or what inspired you to take up the violin/cello/piano and pursue a career in music?

Gerard: I was born into a musical family. My father is a cello teacher, so when I grew up there was always music in our house. When I was very small my father gave me a cello, but, being the energetic child I was, I didn't have the patience to sit still. All I wanted to do was play outside, so that was the end of my cello career! When I was a little bit older I did start the violin and never stopped. I don't remember consciously making the choice of a career in music. I always loved playing and it gradually became more important... The violin attracted me. Maybe the instrument fits my personality better, or it has something to do with the high energetic sound, that I'm still attracted to. Somehow violin was a fit. I think the little kid made the right choice.

Irene: My elder sister started playing the violin when she was 8 and I was 3 years old. Apparently I bugged my mother a lot about wanting to do the same thing, but the teacher thought I was too young. Which now I'm so happy with, because it meant I ended up playing cello as there was a teacher

specialized in teaching small children just around the corner from our house. And I just never stopped playing and learning. The same goes for trio. We came together by chance, as three Dutch musicians in Salzburg, and we just never stopped.

Vera: My first conscious musical memory is of a house concert of Romanian folk music that my mother took me to when I must have been about 5 years old. I was sitting on a pillow on the floor, right in front of the musicians and remember being completely mesmerized by the sounds and the energy of the music. My mother is music lover and amateur pianist. One day she was practicing "Asturias" by Albeniz, a fiery Spanish piece, in our living room and I remember wanting nothing more than to learn how to play that piece (and then play it as fast as possible)! She taught it to me by ear and soon after I started taking piano lessons. From that moment on I knew that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

Who or what have been the most important influences on your musical life and career?

Gerard: Music was always very present in my family. When I hear certain pieces I remember when I first heard them on CD. My father is Dutch and my mother Swiss and when we drove to our family in Switzerland in the summer holidays we would always listen to Grumiaux and Haskil playing Mozart sonatas. When I hear these sonatas now it brings me back to these long car trips, listening and staring out of the window. I think inspiration and musical influence are everywhere; we react to the music we hear around us.

Irene: Meeting incredible musicians. One of my biggest inspirations is Clemens Hagen, who was my teacher for four years when I studied in Salzburg. Other examples would be our current teachers in Basel, Anton Kernjak, and Rainer Schmidt. These three are examples of such pure and honest musicians, where nothing but the music matters, and I respect them more than anything, both as musicians and people.

Vera: It's difficult for me to limit myself for this question. The list of composers, musicians, teachers, recordings and concerts is just too long. The best part is that the list is still growing every day.

What have been the greatest challenges of your career so far?

Gerard: Life is full of challenges. I think there are generally a lot of misconceptions about classical musicians. People often ask "You have a concert today, so the rest of the day you must be free?" They don't realize

that with every concert come hours and hours of practicing and rehearsing. Of course, as musicians we take the things that come with it. Playing an instrument until you reach a certain level of mastery requires a lot of practice. We all go through ups and downs and the hard work is not always fun. But in the end it's the music that wins. And when we are on stage we forget everything else.

Irene: The planning. Traveling is great fun, particularly if you're with friends who are practically like family, but organising yourself can be a nightmare. I am not naturally a very well-organised person, and still have to watch not to lose documents, miss trains, or get off at the wrong stop (and make the others get off too!) because I was reading a book or listening to something really good. Can't say it hasn't happened recently, but I'm really trying very hard to have it happen less.

Vera: My greatest Delta-challenge is finding Irene's passport, making sure she gets on the right train and wakes up for the right stop! My second greatest challenge is time-management. There is so much I want to do, try, learn, play, see, read and listen to and there are so few hours in a day! It's a constant struggle against time.

Which performance/recordings are you most proud of?

Gerard: Performances are the most wonderful thing. It's quite a special thing in modern life that the audience and musicians get together in one hall and are quiet for 1,5 hours with only music that is. This experience can be profound. Not always, but it's always the musician's task is to find these moments. Our job is to become an instrument of music and allow these moments to happen. No room for being proud.

Irene: Performances can sometimes have something electric. Sometimes the atmosphere of the venue and the audience can give a mixture that can be so inspiring that you feel like you're on some sort of high, and it seems to just spiral off almost beyond your control. And on top of that, in chamber music, you always get this from each other as well, so the combination of all those factors can give something really special. If you look for a perfect concert, you will never find it. But the concerts where you felt like something really happened do leave a mark, though even within the trio we feel them differently. One of these concerts for me was at the Salzburg Chamber Music Festival, quite in the beginning of our time together as a trio. We shared the concert with the Borodin Quartet, and were playing Shostakovich's 2nd piano trio, a piece that has become very special to us. I still remember the feeling

when starting this usually awkward beginning of harmonics, which suddenly made sense that night.

Vera: What comes to my mind is our second CD, "The Mirror with Three Faces" with works by Lera Auerbach and Dmitri Shostakovich. This CD has been a very personal project for the three of us and we were involved in every aspect and step along the way. We made our own choices and took risks. I think we can be proud of that.

Which particular works do you think you play best?

Gerard: I would like to continue my previous answer. Being an instrument to the music is the most important thing. So the pieces I play best are the pieces where those things can happen. It has to do with lots of circumstances. Pieces work differently for different audiences. A concert is always an interaction between musician and audience. It really depends on moment which piece will work best. The same goes for us as musicians. Sometimes for months on end Bach could fascinate me, but after a while it could become Brahms, Mozart or Beethoven. We never know in advance what piece works, but when it happens in a concert the audience and performer will know!

Irene: That's very hard to say. There are works I like working on more, because they speak to me. Shostakovich trio no.2 and Auerbach's trios definitely are amongst them. With some pieces you feel like you understand them intuitively, and only have to work on perfecting this understanding and how to communicate it to the audience. Other pieces require different sort of work.

Vera: Pieces I perform best are pieces whose musical language I intuitively understand. With language I mean style, but more importantly the emotional content. There are many pieces I love, but still haven't found the right way to perform. When I perform them it still feels like speaking a language with an accent. Getting rid of that accent requires a lot of work, time and patience.

How do you make your repertoire choices from season to season?

Gerard: One of the nicest things of being a chamber music group is that we're free to programme whatever we like! We never have to programme pieces we don't love. The challenge is to find a programme that is interesting and that will work well in concert. Sometimes you'll end up choosing famous piano trio's and other times you find repertoire that is still unknown, but deserves to be much more famous. We try to combine those two categories. The most important thing is that we know what to say with the music.

Irene: We all have pieces we really want to play. In fact, we have enough of them for the next 10-20 years I'd say. But some people are more stubborn than others, and some pieces fit better with the ideas we have. We try to programme classics as well as actively search for new pieces to play, that are as powerful as the more famous repertoire. Lera Auerbach was one finding that I think has worked out very well. Whenever we play her pieces, people will come up after the concert and talk about that particular piece, which I think shows that we should never stop finding good new music to discover with the audience.

Vera: I agree with Irene, we have a list of repertoire wishes that could fill three lifetimes! But we try to be reasonable and find a good balance every season. During the months of the season you live with the pieces and build up a relationship with them. I'm always sad when at the end of a season we stop playing a certain piece for a while. It feels like saying goodbye to a friend!

Do you have a favourite concert venue to perform in and why?

Gerard: It's always very hard to predict in advance what the atmosphere of a concert venue will be like. The best venues are those where there is a willing audience, allowing us to be inspired.

Irene: This is very cliché, but we once played at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and maybe also because we are Dutch, but this almost felt like a homecoming, with a really great and enthusiastic audience. I usually also really like small venues with an intimate atmosphere and a regular audience of music lovers, with often very interesting stories to tell!

Vera: This may be a bit of patriotism, but if I had to choose one concert hall it would be the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. Every time I go there, it feels special. Maybe my childhood memories of hearing so many great concerts there also play a part. Going to the Concertgebouw was always an event I would be looking forward to for months and this childish excitement still hits me every time I am there.

As a musician, what is your definition of success?

Gerard: When after a concert at least the heart of one listener is touched.

Irene: If you feel like you have done all to give everything you could possibly give to everyone who wants to listen.

Vera: To have the freedom to explore.

What do you consider to be the most important ideas and concepts to impart to aspiring musicians?

Gerard: Never become stagnant. Always keep learning. Music always has to be alive. As soon as we are contented with our performance, the music dies.

Irene: To learn to understand the language so you know how to communicate with endless possibilities.

Vera: Work hard and be curious.

What is your most treasured possession?

Gerard: My time. And I seem to lose it again every day!

Irene: My books. The stories that are being told in them are a big part of life for me, and also of inspiration.

Vera: My ears and my hands. Although I am not sure if I possess them... Probably it's the other way around...

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Gerard: Choosing not to worry about anything.

Irene: Balance. I think finding the right balance within everything we do for work, and between work and personal life would mean perfect happiness. Neither one can go without the other.

Vera: Seeing a smile on the face of a person I love.

The Delta Piano Trio hails from The Netherlands but met in Austria, where they soon discovered a wonderful personal and music rapport; a unique and infectious friendship which is communicated in the joy and intimacy of their performances. The Delta Piano Trio has performed extensively in Europe, Russia, Israel, China, South Korea and the United States, including concerts at the Salzburg Chamber Music Festival, the New York Chamber Music Festival, and at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Trio has also won prizes at numerous international competitions.

Delta Piano Trio's second CD with works by Lera Auerbach and Dmitri Shostakovich is available now

www.deltapianotrio.com

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