



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
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# THE ART OF PIANO TRIO PLAYING

Revealing challenges and finding solutions in the process of forming  
interpretation in a piano trio  
with violin and cello

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#### ABSTRACT

The master's thesis *The Art of Piano Trio Playing* consists of three parts which are the written part, the concert recording, and the composition part. The written part presents challenges and phases that a musician may run into and need to go through during the process of building interpretation in a piano trio. The main focus in the written part is in Uljas Pulkkis's piano trio and the transcribed master class given by the composer. The second part is a live-recording of the Pulkkis's piano trio performed by Elias Lassfolk (violin), Johanna Jaakkola (cello) and Pirkko Heikkinen (piano). The composition part includes excerpts from piano trio that I composed and it concludes the project.

Key words: piano trio interpretation, chamber music, group dynamics, composition, intonation, tuning

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## 1. Introduction

The piano trio form aroused my curiosity already during my Bachelor's studies in Turku Music Academy, Finland. I realized how much a pianist can learn from the strings in phrasing and in creating different nuances. In the beginning of my Master's studies in the University of Gothenburg at the Academy of Music and Drama, I started to search information about piano trio form. After some initial research, I found Basil Smallman's work *The History of Piano Trio*.

As I studied the history of the piano trio form, I listened piano trios starting from the early Mozart trios to contemporary piano trios and started to play in a piano trio as well. I realized that the process of building interpretation in a piano trio is different than in solo playing and I wanted to know what caused the difference. Through these actions concerned with both literature research and actual engagement with the music, the topic of my Master's thesis started to take shape.

The main aim of my thesis is to determine and find solutions to the challenges that the musician runs into during the process of forming interpretation in a piano trio. To achieve my aim, I needed to increase my knowledge towards the violin and cello in order to deepen my understanding of the essence of piano trio as a chamber music form.

My thesis is mostly based on Keijo Aho's *The Art of Chamber Music* and David Blum's *The Art of Quartet Playing*. For historical reasons, I consider the string quartet as a justified baseline for piano trio and use it in this purpose in my thesis. This is due to the realization that already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, piano trio shared the position of the most popular chamber music form together with the string quartet (Smallman 1990,14). Keijo Aho's work is a pedagogical seminal work about chamber music.

In my thesis, I examine the process of building interpretation mostly through a piano trio composed by a Finnish composer Uljas Pulkkis. Along the master class given by Pulkkis, I got a possibility to add the composer's point of view to my research.

Besides the theoretical sources, playing in a piano trio and writing the process diary, I use composing as a method. By composing and the piece, I put the conclusions of my research under a test and demonstrate my knowledge about the piano trio form.

My work is directed to the musicians who want to make their working in a piano trio as efficient as possible. I hope it will be useful also to the teachers who teach piano trios and generally, for people who want to know more about piano trio.

## 2. Forming Interpretation in a Piano Trio

In this chapter I present challenges, solutions and general issues that I consider to be relevant to pay attention to during the process of forming interpretation in a piano trio with violin and cello. What I mean by interpretation is the result of a process of making decisions connected to a musical piece. In my work, I will not go deep into the ontology of interpretation, for it is not in my focus and it would require a research of its own. Due to my previous education, my point of view in this research is primarily pianistic and pedagogical. The material in this chapter is based on my process diary and theoretical sources.

One of the main goals of my work has been to increase my understanding of string instruments. To reach this goal, I communicated actively with the string players that I played with, and tried to reach an understanding with the help of documenting our shared process.

When I was searching sources for my research I did not succeed to find any principal work about piano trio interpretation. In comparison, there are plenty of books about piano trio's contemporary, the string quartet. David Blum's *The Art of Quartet Playing* turned out to be an excellent source of information concerning the challenges that the string players may run into when they are forming interpretation in a quartet. From a historical point of view, string quartet is a counterpart to piano trio; in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these two shared a title of the most popular chamber music form and are still today holding a strong position in chamber music field (Smallman 1990, 2). Therefore it is justifiable to compare the two forms to each other.

Keijo Aho's work *The Art of Chamber Music* supported and broadened my pedagogic perspective in piano trio playing. It also included general knowledge about group dynamics that I consider useful and important for both pedagogues and performing artists.

### Seating

The seating in a piano trio is usually built up in a way that the violinist is sitting on the right side of the pianist and the cellist opposite of the violinist, next to the grand piano. I consider that a delicious habit from the time of accompanied sonata, when the usual part of the violinist was to play the melody line and the cellist was mostly doubling the bass line. (Smallman 1990, 17) By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the roles of the three instruments in piano trio began to be varied and independent which in my opinion, could have led to questioning of the traditional seating in the piano trio (Smallman 1990, 25). Even though the questioning had happened to some extent, still, in practice in all the piano trio performances I have seen the traditional sitting formation has been in use.

In string quartet playing there are many formations of seating that are commonly in use, out of which the following two are the most frequent:

1. The European Way: violin 1, violin 2, viola, and cello
2. The American Way: violin 1, violin 2, cello, viola

The two more rarely used ones are:

3. Violin 1, viola, cello, violin 2
4. Violin 1, cello, viola, violin 2

(“Thursday Thoughts and Musical Chairs”. A webpage of the Larchmere Quartet. <<http://larchmerestringquartet.com>>. 23.4.2014.)

What is really remarkable here is that the position of the first violin is the same in all the formations. If this rule of immovability of the first violin’s positioning would be adapted to piano trio’s formation, practically it would mean that there is only one possibility of seating formation. From my perspective, that could explain the strong routine of piano trio seating.

Keijo Aho writes about the seating in a piano trio:

Finding a sitting formation that feels comfortable to every player of the piano trio is, in most of the cases, a challenge. Often the cellist is sitting in front of the grand piano in a way that she/he can see the pianist and the pianist can see the fingers and the bow of the cellist. The positive sides of this formation are that the sound of the strings is heading towards the audience and all the players can easily see the violinist. The negative sides are that the sound of the piano is heading straight towards the ears of the cellist. Therefore it can be difficult for the cellist to hear the violinist and the pianist can find it difficult to hear the strings.

(Aho 2009, 197-198)

My observations of the piano trio seating led to a conclusion that the formation should be constructed according to the piece or repertoire, concert hall and the instrument of the pianist. If the formation is not optimal, it may lead to false balancing and inoperative communication during playing. Most of all, it can cause or increase the feeling of insecurity on stage which can have a huge impact on the performance. Thereby, I consider seating as an integral and important part of forming interpretation in a piano trio.

With the fellow students I played with, we practiced our repertoire in different seatings. With the first piece that we played, which was Dmitry Shostakovich’s trio Op. 8, we ended up seating in the traditional way on stage. At the time, we had only very recently formed our group and questioning the strong tradition of piano trio seating was not on our to-do list. When we were playing Uljas Pulkkis’s trio, we had already played some time together. Having gathered some experience, I realized that the most comfortable seating for Pulkkis’s piano trio was when the violinist was sitting next to the grand piano and the cellist opposite the violinist. In this seating, the bow of the violinist is easily seen from behind the piano because naturally the violinist holds the bow higher than the cellist. Every player could also hear each other as clearly as in the traditional seating.

In my opinion, the modified seating enables more flexibility in moving than the traditional one. Often the musicians are moving during the intensive performance and in the traditional seating, from time to time, I found it challenging to be able to see the violinist. After we experimented with the new seating arrangement, I also asked the string players for their opinion. Their observation was that regardless of the way the players sat, they have to be close enough to each other to be able to hear the other members of the trio.

An important notice that we made was that the positioning of the player that sits next to the grand piano is the quintessence of piano trio seating. The seating can be functional only if the

player in the above-mentioned position is not sitting too far from the pianist's position. In my opinion, the seating was the most optimal when both of the strings were sitting next to the pianist in a way that their legs were collinear to the pianist.

The string players mentioned that if the f-holes of the instrument are facing back on stage the sound of the instrument might lose part of its intensity and would thus not reach the audience well enough. The same phenomenon is present in string quartet seating. The Guarneri Quartet points out two solutions to the problem: one has to play a bit above the written dynamic level and in solo parts, one can make a slight turn so that the f-holes are pointed more directly to the audience. (Blum 1986, 17)

With my trio, we recorded our playing in different formations and did not notice significant difference in the quality of sound of the strings. That strengthened our opinion about the piano trio seating: "There definitely are many ways to do it!"

With an upright piano, the seating would become more problematic because of the height of the piano. In this case, I would assume that the piano should be positioned diagonally on the stage and again the strings would be placed on the right side of the pianist.

## **Intonation and Tuning**

By intonation, in this case, I mean player's realization of pitch accuracy in music. The piano defines the pitch of piano trio. Because of the tempered tuning of the piano, the strings have to balance between natural and tempered playing, which requires precise observation in intonation. (Aho 2009, 202) In string quartet, the pitch of A (above middle C) might be varied from the general 440 (Hz) up to 444 or 445. (Blum 1986, 28)

The difference of harmonic series between the strings and the piano can be minimized by using a special tuning technique: the strings play their tuning tone quietly and next to the fingerboard and the pianist plays the tuning tone in *mezzo forte* nuance. This tuning technique brings the harmonic series of the instruments more close to each other. The strings also have to tune the fifths between the strings a bit higher than normally to match the piano. (Aho 2009, 202)

Keijo Aho presents two approaches to intonation in his work *The Art of Chamber Music* (2009). The approaches are called melodic- and harmonic intonation and are originally determined by the Spanish cellist Pablo Casals. Melodic intonation is based on the tension between the leading note and the tonic. Harmonic Intonation is based on the frequencies of the harmonic series of the tonics and it is used mostly when playing different harmonies, double stops or chords. (Aho 2009, 126, 202)

The members of the Guarneri Quartet describe melodic intonation as horizontal intonation, which they define as the sense of melodic direction in the individual line. Harmonic intonation they consider vertical. They describe it as a tool that enables the musician to be in tune with the other members of the quartet. These approaches to intonation are very important in quartet playing and demand instant adaptability and a highly responsive ear. (Blum 1986, 27-28)

The two approaches to intonation deserve special attention also in piano trio playing. Intonation can be practiced in a way that all the three instruments play the passage practiced at the time together in a slow tempo. The strings can also practice some passages together but as the piano defines the pitch, it is important that the pianist helps the strings in their intonation practice.



The Guarneri Quartet's ways of rehearsing intonation are similar to how we practiced it in my piano trio: They practice it by playing softly, slowly and in different combinations (Blum 1986, 27, 34).

In piano trio intonation, the biggest challenge occurs when major thirds are written on the score. If the major thirds of the strings' are doubled in the piano part, the strings have to be very careful with their intonation. If the pianist plays other tones of the chord instead of the major thirds, the strings can play the third in a natural pitch. The same phenomenon concerns the minor thirds as well. According to Keijo Aho, a minor third that is not on pitch distracts the listener less than a flat major third. (Aho 2009, 203)

## **Pedaling and Vibrato**

When we (the members of the trio) discussed our possible interpretational decisions, we discovered that the use of the sustain pedal of the piano and vibrato in string playing have something in common when it comes to the notation and the use.

I have learned during my musical education that one has to trust one's instincts, especially when it comes to pedaling. If there are no pedal markings in the score, one can still use some pedal, for example, to change the atmosphere or to create a *legato* line. Similarly, the string players in my trio said that use of vibrato is mainly supposed to be automatic, even though vibrato can have a huge impact on the intensity and color of sound. If a composer does not want to include vibrato or pedal in a piece, then *senza pedale* or *senza vibrato* must be marked in the score. Also, the violin player brought up an interesting metaphor about vibrato which I think could describe both the essence of vibrato and pedal as an effect: "Vibrato as a tool is like an artist's palette. It includes all the colors of the world."

Also the members of the Guarneri Quartet talk about vibrato in David Blum's work *The Art Of Quartet Playing*: "It's hard to define the essence of a vibrato. Of all aspects of string playing it's the most difficult to analyze or teach." (John Dalley, second violin)

"After giving due attention to the intrinsic differences between the instruments, I'd say that every one of us constantly looks for variety in coloration and will experiment with every type of vibrato." (Michael Tree, viola)  
(Blum 1986, 35, 42)

It is important to discuss the different possibilities of using the sustain pedal and vibrato with the trio members. If the use of the pedal and the vibrato is well planned, the scale of nuances in piano trios timbre can be widened.

Because the instrument of the pianist is usually changing along with the concert place, the exact pedaling can become a big challenge. Due to my experience, the variety of pedals in the different grand pianos is huge; sometimes the sustain pedal has only two positions which are on or off. Even the amount of pedals is a changing factor; there are grand pianos with only two pedals and more over in those instruments in which there are three of them the middle pedal can either be a *sostenuto* pedal or a muting pedal.

In most of the cases, the pedals of the piano (from left to right) are: the soft pedal (*una corda*), the *sostenuto* pedal or the muting pedal and the sustaining pedal. By using the soft pedal, the timbre of the sound can be modified to be softer. It also decreases the volume of the sound. By

using *sostenuto* pedal, selected notes can be sustained, while other notes remain unaffected. A purpose of muting pedal is simply to lower the volume of the instrument and it is mostly used during practicing. (Kentner 1991, 26-27)

The most useful pedals in piano trio interpretation are the soft pedal and the sustain pedal, from which the sustain pedal requires lots of attention, skill and practice.

From my pedagogical point of view, the challenges of teaching sustain pedaling are connected to the big differences in pedals of the different instruments. A good general rule is that by using the pedals one is supposed to add something in one's playing, not to make it blurry. The way of using the pedal as well as the amount of pedaling has to be adjusted also according to the acoustics of the concert hall. That means, the pianist has to be able to make major changes in pedaling on a very short notice and in a very short period of time.

During my studies of piano pedagogics in Turku Music Academy, Finland, we had so called teaching exams two times in one academic year. In one of the exams, I was teaching sustain pedaling and I was wondering why the student's pedaling sounded blurry and mine did not, even though we seemed to be pedaling exactly in a same way. It turned out that I had instinctively adjusted the amount of pedal between the changes by lifting it up just a bit, so that the student could not even see the movement of my foot.

The members of the Guarneri Quartet bring up pedagogical aspects of vibrato that in my opinion, can be applied to teaching sustain pedaling as well: "Teachers don't sufficiently stress that vibrato is a musical device –a tool that should constantly be adjusted to the demands of the music and not just poured over everything like maple syrup over a stack of hotcakes" (Michael Tree, viola)

"Once the vibrato is brought under technical control the real challenge begins. Even the most gorgeous vibrato can become monotonous if it is not used creatively. - - The ability of widen or narrow the vibrato, to alter its speed, and to make such a change even in the course of a single notes gives life and character to interpretation." (Arnold Steinhardt, first violin)

From my pianistic point of view, the excellence of vibrato as an effect is in its diversity: a string player can change the speed and intensity of vibrato even inside of one single note. Also the intensity inside a musical phrase can be increased without changing the dynamics. Vibrato defines the personal sound of each player. (Blum 1986, 36-38)

## **The Role of the Pianist**

In my opinion, the role of the pianist in a piano trio is special because in most of the cases, the pianist is the only one who sees the full score during playing. As a result to that, the pianist's general view of the piece is often more developed compared to the strings' one, especially in the beginning of the practicing process. If the pianist is the only one who first notices the things that would need to be developed, to bring these things up, she/he has to take the role of a leader or at least a role of a chairperson in the trio. According to Keijo Aho, the pianist is the engine of piano trio and should get used to taking responsibility of the trio's practicing (Aho 2009, 201).

If the pianist does not feel comfortable taking the role of the leader, are there any possibilities of sharing the responsibility among the trio members from the beginning of the practicing process?

According to my experience, it is possible to share the responsibility in shaping interpretation process among the trio members. When we were starting to practice the Pulkkis's trio, I took copies of the score and gave them to the string players. I enlarged the score by making the copies in A3 -size so that they could read their parts properly from it. During the very first rehearsals, we practiced in such a manner that every one was playing from their score. In my opinion, that was one of the reasons why we could learn such a challenging piece in a rather short time. When we were playing from the score, the string players could simultaneously see their parts in relation to the whole structure of the piece. In a short while they started to bring up ideas also connected to my part, which I found not only very enjoyable but also a significant step forward in our mutual process.

## **An Ideal Group**

During my musical education, I have played in different chamber music groups with many people. Some of the groups seemed to work very well and some of them fell apart after a few rehearsals without any special reason. I wanted to figure out which are the factors of the ideal chamber music group and how can the musicians control them? Because the main focus of my work is in music, I will not go deep into the theories of group dynamics in my research. I will present information in regards to the functionality of a chamber music group that I consider useful for the musicians that are playing with other musicians, for example in piano trio.

Theodore Mills defines group in terms of group goals in his work *The Sociology of Small Groups*: "To put it simply, they (groups) are units composed of two or more persons who come into contact for a purpose and who consider the contact meaningful (Mills, 1967, 2)."

According to Mill's definition, piano trio can be defined as a unit composed of three persons who come into contact for a purpose of playing and performing music together. We discussed the importance of goals with my trio members and all agreed that if the piece that is played is not planned to be performed it decreases the work motivation inside the trio. If the group members are not motivated to work together, most likely the group will fall apart. Therefore, the importance of goal setting in chamber music group should not be underestimated.

Keijo Aho has defined the factors that have an effect on the functionality of a chamber music group and has settled upon the following set: clear goals, clear roles, trust and support, good communication, participative decision-making, supportive leadership, constructive conflicts and self-critics. (Aho 2009, 50-61)

Aho describes a typical sequence of chamber music group development by five phases, which he calls forming, rebellion, conformity, synchronized individuality and decomposition (Aho 2009, 31-34).

In the forming phase, the members of the chamber music group are getting to know each other and perceive their behavior in relation to the other members of the group. In case a teacher is working with the group, the members of the group perceive their behavior in relation to the teacher as well. Typical for this phase is a feeling of uncertainty among the group members, which can reflect to their playing as well. Trust and support towards the other members of the group can be shown simply by arriving to the rehearsals on time. Also contacting the trio members in terms of suggesting a possible rehearsing time is an act that increases the feeling of confidentiality in the group. (Aho 2009, 31-32, 59)

As the members of the group get to know each other better they start to consider the group important and safe. A teacher can support the group by helping in goal setting and by encouraging the group members to invent a name for their group. According to Aho, inventing a name for the group supports the group in their process of forming identity. (Aho 2009, 31-32)

In the rebellion phase, conflicts start to occur. In most of the cases, the conflicts are connected to the differences in prioritizing the chamber music in relation to other activities. A teacher can encourage the group members to self-critics, so that they can understand their influence on the conflict. In this phase it is important that the conflicts are solved immediately, in their early stage. Otherwise they can have a negative effect on the functionality of the group. (Aho 2009, 32-33)

In the conformity phase, the conflicts are solved and the group members are practicing a lot together. Because the challenges in this phase are connected to the sincerity of the group members, a teacher has to be particularly logical and supportive in her/his teaching. (Aho 2009, 33)

If the phase of synchronized individuality is reached, the group is working as effectively as a professional chamber music group. A teacher is not necessarily needed anymore, at least in terms of regular meetings. However, in this phase, it is possible for a teacher to really challenge the group during the lessons. (Aho 2009, 33-34)

In the decomposition phase, the group falls apart. This can happen after a few weeks or 20 years of co-operating. The first possibility for the group to fall apart is usually after the first repertoire is performed. Starting a new practicing process can become such a psychological barrier for the group members that the group no longer manages to continue working together. If the practicing process of the new repertoire is started before the old repertoire is performed, this crisis can be prevented. A teacher can also talk about the possibility of an approaching crisis in the beginning of the practicing process. (Aho 2009, 34)

As I examine the working of my trio through Aho's pattern of chamber music group development, I recognize many elements that were present in our practising, especially in the forming phase. When we started working with my trio, we negotiated about practical things such as who is making the reservation of the classroom for our rehearsal. It ended up so that commonly the violinist was making the reservation for the room and I was usually the person who contacted the trio members and suggested possible rehearsing time. At some point we started to swap the tasks among the trio members. I consider important to share these tasks in order to gain a feeling of shared responsibility in the group.

Our working in the trio was quite independent; we felt that we needed to have a lesson with the teacher approximately every third week. Usually, someone of the group members took the role of a chairperson during our rehearsals. In most of the situations it was the violinist or I. As we continued our co-operation the role of the cellist began to be more active as well.

When giving feedback about the playing to the members of the trio, it is important that the feedback is encouraging. Often we had different opinions about how a certain passage of the piece should be played. We tried all proposed options evenhandedly, talked about the positive and negative sides of them and made the decision together, sometimes by voting. To gain objectivity towards our playing, we used a recorder.

Aho defines the process of building interpretation in a chamber music group as a creative process of comparing. The more comparative and contrary musical phenomena the musicians find from their parts the better they can process and understand them in relation to the big picture. (Aho, 2009,69)

## Balancing

Balancing in piano trio is strongly connected to the analysis of the roles of the instruments in different passages of the piece. Due to my experience, it is not necessary to go into very detailed harmonic analysis to be able to define the roles of the instruments. Nevertheless, analysis in terms of recognizing different sections and cadenza passages is helpful in this process.

In Balancing, a good general rule is to support the material that is planned to be brought out from the score. For example, if the cello has a melody line that is supposed to come out clearly, the pianist and the violinist can avoid playing too loudly on the same level with the melody line and bring up the opposite part instead. If the melody line is placed on high pitch of the cello, the pianist and the violinist can concentrate on creating a bass line and a middle voice that supports the cellist. In my opinion, this way of working is the core of the whole process of building interpretation in piano trio. As mentioned before, Keijo Aho calls the process creative comparing (Aho 2009, 69).

Aho presents two approaches to balancing: balancing in a chamber music group is defined either by the instrument that has the lowest volume of sound or by the smallest nuance of the instrument that has the highest volume of sound. In a string quartet, the sound of the viola is considered to be the softest and lowest in volume. Therefore it has a crucial role in string quartet balancing. (Aho 2009, 79) The second approach can be applied to balancing in a piano trio: the balance is built according to the lowest nuance of the piano.

It is important that the pianist does not try to play too silently and therefore lose the brilliance from the sound of the piano. Producing a delicate *pianissimo* is one of the biggest challenges in piano playing. If one of the trio players starts to play with an uncertain sound, it affects the other players as well. With a successful balancing piano trio appears on its best then it can transmit a sensation of three soloists communicating with each other.

An interesting phenomenon occurred when we played to the teachers of each three instruments of the trio. Each teacher wanted his instrument to be emphasized in the trio's balancing. The teaching situation might partly explain the phenomenon but it can also be seen as a reminder that balancing is also a matter of taste.

The acoustics of the concert hall affects how the players experience the balance in the venue. With my trio, we checked the balance in a way that one player at the time went to listen to the other two to back of the concert hall. Usually it was me who was worried about the volume of the piano being too loud in relation to the strings. However, the concert halls in which we played, were constructed in a way that it was possible to find an ideal balance even though the lid of the piano was fully opened during the concert.

The players of the Guarneri Quartet do not make changes in their playing because of the acoustics of the concert hall. Often, they do not even practice in the concert hall before the concert. They justify their behavior with two points: the balance can sound different in the different parts of the concert hall and the acoustics usually changes a bit in relation to the amount of audience. The quartet creates its balance on stage and relies on that. The players listen to each other during the performance and if they change the way of their playing because of the acoustics of the hall, the changes are made more by intuition than consciously. (Blum 1986, 17-18)

What comes to piano trio playing, it is necessary to play in the concert hall before the concert especially for the sake of the pianist. That is because of the variety of different grand pianos that the pianist needs to cope with: it takes a bit time to get used to the new instrument and to be able to produce a wide range of nuances with it. So even though the group does not consciously try to make changes to their playing because of the acoustics reasons, the strings could support the pianist by observing the sound of the instrument in relation to the strings and to the concert hall together.

Due to our experience, if the strings have *pizzicatos*, *glissandos* or *harmonics* in their piano trio score, they need to be played with emphasized clarity to reach the ideal balance with the piano. According to the string players, the ideal balancing with a piano is reached by lifting up the volume of the nuances a bit higher that is written on the score in order make them match with the piano. Playing the extremities in nuances is also a good tool for finding the ideal balancing.

Piano trio balancing differs from solo piano balancing in a way that the different nuances and changes in the piece are often prepared by some other player than the pianist. In so called segmented passages, each player of the trio has to pass musical motives or nuances to other players. When playing these passages, I felt that I had to react to the changes in the piece more in advance than in solo playing. According to Michael Tree from the Guarneri Quartet, the segmented passages should be played in a way that all players of the quartet are playing all of the segments mentally, even though they really are playing only their owns (Blum 1986, 85).

The picture below is an excerpt from Uljas Pulkkis's *Piano Trio*. In this passage the strings are preparing the tempo, atmosphere and nuance for the pianist. Before the pianist starts to play, he/she should mentally be in motion and in tempo with the strings.

The image displays a musical score for a piano trio, specifically an excerpt from Uljas Pulkkis's *Piano Trio*, covering bars 149 to 152. The score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes the Violin (Vln.) and Violoncello (Vc.) staves, with the Piano (Pno.) staff below them. The second system continues the Vln. and Vc. parts, and the third system shows the Pno. part. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the piano part is silent. Dynamics are marked as mezzo-forte (mf) for the strings and mezzo-piano (mp) for the piano. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C).

Picture 1. Balancing (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 149-152)

The composer has written *mezzoforte* for the strings and *mezzopiano* for the piano, which in my opinion, is an example of well notated balancing in piano trio score.

If the strings would see only mezzo piano written on the score, it would be challenging for the pianist to start the phrase with a sound that is clear and soft enough to match the triplet that the cello plays as an up beat for the piano's passage.

Due to my experience, the ideal balancing in a piano trio can be reached if the roles of the instruments in the piece are clear to the players and the sitting position is formed so that players can hear each other properly during the playing.

## Reading the Score

When the group has decided to add a certain piece in their repertoire, a sheet printed out somewhere from the Internet is necessarily not the best option. Sometimes there are big differences in the different editions of the same piece, and also the markings in the score may differ from the original markings of the composer. Reading the preface that is written by the editor forwards the process of finding a proper edition.

Because there are three different instruments in piano trio, there are three different ways of understanding the score. According to Aho, a general rule of interpreting the score in chamber music is that the players of different instruments should try to imitate each other's playing. In a piano trio, the strings can imitate the pianist in the clarity of sound and reciprocally the piano should avoid sharpness, thus trying to imitate the strings in turn. (Aho 2009, 202)

Sometimes an emphasis of the differences between the instruments can lead to an interesting interpretation. For example, in this passage below, taken from *Shostakovich's Piano Trio Op.8*, we decided to emphasize the contrast between the instruments. We strived for this impression by making the pianist play the chords with as much lightness and sharpness as possible to increase the contrast between the instruments. In our edition, there were *staccato* markings in the pianist's part that are lacking from the picture below.



Picture 2. Contrast (Shostakovich, *Piano Trio No. 1. Op. 8*, bars 103-106)

According to David Soyer from the Guarneri Quartet, the nuances have to be perceived in their context. The nuances imply more than just a change in dynamics –they express the atmosphere in the piece. The Quartet often makes a slight *diminuendo* before the passages where it is written *forte* or *fortissimo* as a nuance. With the *diminuendo*, they want to heighten the contrast between the changes of the nuances in the piece (Blum 1986, 78-80).

When we played the passage that is seen in the Picture 2., the violinist had to play the part in *mezzoforte* to match the piano, even if the piano part was played with the *una corda* -pedal. In this passage the *piano* nuance that is written in the violin part, can be seen as a note that describes the atmosphere in the passage.

The length of the note has to be perceived in its context as well. For example, a dot over a note does not necessarily mean that the note should be played short. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, during the times of Mozart and Beethoven, a dot meant separation. Therefore, the length of the note can be modified inside a phrase according to the melodic and harmonic intensity of the phrase. If a same motif appears in different parts of the piece, the length of the notes can be varied in order to add liveliness in the music. (Blum 1986, 66)

*Fermatas* and *sforzatos* have to be adapted to their context as well. In Dmitry Shostakovich's *Piano Trio Op. 8*, there are many *fermatas*. If there was a remarkable change in the atmosphere after the fermata that we wanted to emphasize, we simply made the fermatas last longer. A *sforzato* under a piano nuance is usually played in a different way than a *sforzato* under a *fortissimo*.

Reading and understanding the score becomes easier if it is possible to listen to different interpretations of the piece. Studying general information about the composer and how the piece is related to her/his life and other works is also useful. If the piece is contemporary and a recording is not available, one can try to contact the composer and ask about the things that puzzle in the piece.



### 3. Uljas Pulkkis's Piano Trio

Uljas Pulkkis (born 22.7.1975) is a Finnish composer. In 2002 he graduated with a Master's degree in Music Composition from the Sibelius Academy in Finland. During his composition studies he also studied mathematics and musicology at the University of Helsinki.

Pulkkis has received awards in several international composition competitions, notably the 1st prize in the International Queen Elizabeth Composition Competition in 1999, with a piece titled "*Tears of Ludovico*", and the 1st prize in the Paris International Rostrum for Composers in 1999, with a piece titled "*Enchanted Garden*". Nowadays his works are performed widely in Finland and abroad. "*Piano Trio (2003/2004)*" was commissioned by Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival and was nominated as a compulsory piece in piano trio competition of the festival.

#### Background

I started to work with Uljas Pulkkis's *Piano Trio* in spring 2013 in Gothenburg, Sweden, with Elise-Marie Endresen (violin) and Gabriel Elfberg (cello). I had chosen "Forming interpretation in a piano trio" as the topic of my master's thesis and I wanted to add Finnish contemporary music to my trio repertoire. Additionally, during the autumn semester of 2013-2014 I had studied at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and I decided to continue working with the piece.

In Helsinki, I played Pulkkis's *Piano Trio* with Johanna Jaakkola (cello) and Elias Lassfolk (violin). We worked with the piece intensively with professor Martti Rautio for over three months. During one of our first lessons, he asked us to define the core of our interpretation in the piece: Was our aim to play like three soloists communicating with each other, or did we prefer to create a homogeneous sound landscape? Our interpretation of the piece would probably be something between these two approaches. However, our interpretational approach would have an effect, for example, on articulation, balancing, pedal (piano), and vibrato (strings).

If we would choose to produce a sound landscape that would be as homogeneous as possible, practically it could mean that in the beginning of the piece piano would start with an echo-like phrase with a lot of pedal, instead of producing a clearly articulated, slightly angular phrase. During the intro, the strings would also keep the volume of their *mezzopiano* -nuance high enough to enable the *diminuendo* (bars 4 and 5) and after the *diminuendo*, still remain as equal as possible in volume with the piano.

If we chose "three soloists communicating" to be our interpretational basic idea, it would mean that at the end of the intro the strings would make a big *diminuendo* by decreasing the intensity of their vibrato, in order to give space for the entrance of the piano. In this case, the first phrase of the piano could be clearly articulated, lightly pedaled or even played without pedal.

**Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano**  
*dandion opp. 10'*  
 Ulfar Vilho Pulkkis 2003/2004

The image shows the first eight bars of a musical score for a violin, cello, and piano trio. The title is 'Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano' by Ulfar Vilho Pulkkis, dated 2003/2004. The score is in 3/4 time. The top system shows the Violin (Viola) and Violoncello (Vi.) parts. The bottom system shows the Piano (Pno.) part. The piano part is characterized by a sparse texture with few dynamic markings, such as *pp* and *ppp*.

Picture 3. The beginning (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 1-8)

There are no pedal markings written in the beginning of the piano part which, in my opinion, encourages the player to choose the clearly articulated, very lightly pedaled way of playing the phrase. On the other hand I felt that the timbre of the piece most of the time creates an impressionistic atmosphere that requires more pedal. After a conversation with the trio members, we all agreed that according to the score, both of the interpretational approaches are justifiable. We tried both options and concluded that our final interpretation of the piece will most likely be something between them. Still, in the end of the day I was wondering if there was a special reason why the composer put so few expression markings in the score. What kind of interpretation would the composer like to hear? I decided to contact the composer Ulfar Pulkkis to broaden my horizons. With the help of my former chamber music teacher Mikko Luoma, I was fortunate enough to succeed. Consequently, Pulkkis gave our trio a master class, which I recorded and transcribed with the composer's permission. The transcription can be found in the appendix section of this work. In the transcription, I only present what Pulkkis said because I regard it to be relevant for my research.

## Conclusions

At the end of the master class Pulkkis concluded, that a composer wants to hear an interpretation of his/her composition. He added that he only gets delighted if the musicians make exceptions in relation to the expression markings that the composer has written. To him, that is a sign of that the musicians have really put effort on the process of building a unique interpretation of the piece.

Pulkkis's master class corroborates the observations about the piano trio interpretation that I made during my thesis process. According to Pulkkis, the interpretation in piano trio is built through recognizing the roles of the instruments.

The process of determining the roles of the instruments in the piece, not only requires structure analysis of the piece but also creative thinking. By creating associations connected to the musical material in the piece, most likely the different characters can be brought out in the playing as well. An excellent example is the Japonism passage from the Pulkkis's master class: After Pulkkis asked us to think about Japan in this passage, it can be heard from the tape that immediately, we could play the passage in a way that stands out from its musical environment.

Pulkkis defines the essence of piano trio as a group of three soloists communicating together. He encourages musicians to make unique interpretations: If the sheet is considered as an absolute truth, the character of the piece is necessarily not conveyed through the playing. The expression and tempo markings that the composer has written in the score should be considered as hints and always be perceived in their context. A great interpretation includes contrasts and is presented with confidence.

### **Performing Uljas Pulkkis Piano Trio in Sibelius Academy Chamber Music Week, 27.4.2014**

After the master class, we had a few weeks break in our rehearsing. During the break, I transcribed the master class and shortly summarized the content of the master class to the trio members in our first rehearsal after the break. After the rehearsal, we all agreed that our interpretation of the piece was now uniform. Our musical roles were clear through out the piece and every one knew who is leading in different passages of the piece. The core of our interpretation could be described as a communication between the three soloists. During the same week, we played the piece to our teacher Martti Rautio. He said that a remarkable progress is heard in our playing and that our interpretation sounds coherent and interesting.

We performed the piece in Sibelius Academy Chamber Music Week, in 27<sup>th</sup> of April, 2014. The concert took place in *Camerata* Hall, in Helsinki Music Centre. On the concert day, I prepared to the concert in a same way as I would prepare playing a solo concert; I practiced in the morning and then spent the rest of the day by resting at home.

At 16.30 we were supposed to have our half an hour practice in the concert hall. Because of practical problems, we had only 10 minutes to play in the concert hall. We felt that we would have needed more time to try the grand piano and test the acoustics in the concert hall. We ended up seating in a way that the cellist sat next to the grand piano, a bit too far from the violinist. Because we did not hear each other properly, in some passages our balancing is not optimal. Otherwise we succeeded to play as we had planned.

The feedback considering our interpretation was positive. My friends who were in the audience said that our playing sounded and looked communicative and we had a wide range of nuances and atmospheres in our playing. They did not notice any problems in balancing.

The teachers who were also in the audience said that our interpretation of the piece increased their interest towards Uljas Pulkkis's music. They also said that in some passages the strings could have played with even bigger intensity and occasionally the volume of the piano was too loud in comparison to the strings' nuance. About intonation, they said that in the passages where the strings played together, the intonation could have been more uniform.

## 4. Composing a Piano Trio

Composition was one of the methods that I used in my research. By composing a piano trio, my aim was to demonstrate and deepen my understanding of piano trio as a chamber music form and test my hypothesis about the essence of piano trio as three soloists that are communicating together.

The trio is written in Helsinki during the autumn semester 2013, when I additionally studied composition in Sibelius Academy with Heikki Valpola. The material in the trio is based on the exercises from Vincent Persicetti's work *The Twentieth Century Harmony*. The exercises were mostly about how to use different scale materials in composition. As a result, I found a musical language, which lies between modality and tonality. The name of the piece refers to a series of works by a Finnish print-making artist Milla Toukkari, which I found inspiring during the composition process. The name, *A Mélange of Desire* refers to the Toukkari's series of works and to my definition of piano trio interpretation as communication between the three soloists. The starting point of my composing process was the roles of the instruments in the piano trio; therefore, I present excerpts from piece through the roles of the instruments. Unfortunately the piece cannot be released in its entirety together with this thesis because I sent it to a piano trio composition competition. I will be able to attach it to my thesis after the July 2014.

### A Mélange of Desire

The first part of the trio is under a title *Allegretto con brio* and it is based on an exercise from Persicetti's work *The Twentieth century Harmony*. In the exercise, I was supposed to write a short recitative for violin by using fluctuating modes. In the beginning of the *Allegretto con brio*, the violin starts together with the cello in the Lydian mode and moves to the Phrygian mode in bar number five. In this passage, the cello is playing the bass line. The piano enters in bar five.

In the second excerpt (Picture 5.), the cello has the tonal melody line, which the piano is supporting with the accompaniment figure. The violinist is participating to the musical conversation by short comments.

**A Mélange of Desire**  
Dedicated to A.T. Pirkko Heikkinen

Allegretto con brio

Violin *mp*

Cello *pizz. mf*

Piano

Picture 4. Allegretto con brio (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegretto con brio*, bars 1-7)

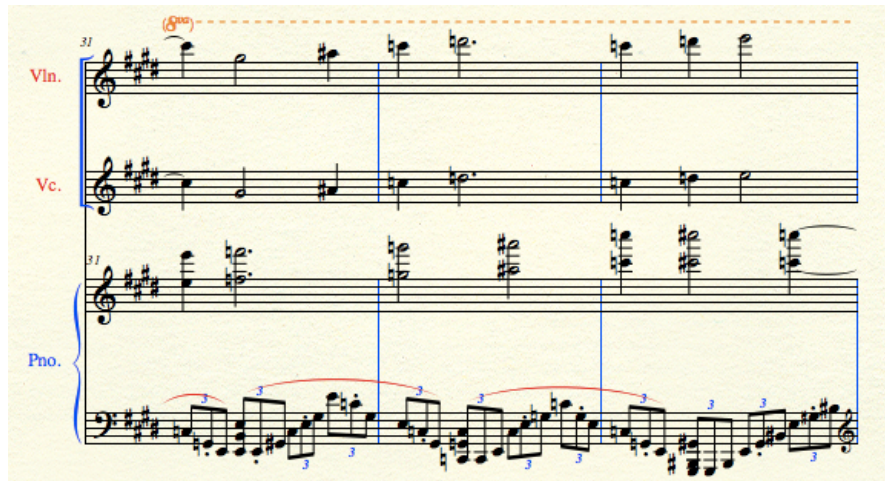
Vln. *mp*

Vc.

Pno.

Picture 5. Comments of the violin (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegretto con brio*, bars 10-12)

The third excerpt is from the top moment of the part. The strings have an intensive melody line that is based on whole tone scale and the piano is creating the harmonies with the left hand. The right hand plays an independent line, which is disturbing the expressive melody of the strings. At times the melody line of the piano is in harmony with the strings.



Picture 6. Intensive melody line (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegretto con brio*, bars 31-33)

The form of the *Allegretto con brio* part is cyclic. In the recapitulation, the violin concludes the musical conversation by its comments and all the three instruments are finishing the part together in a heroic atmosphere.

In the second part, which is under a title *Lento*, my aim was to put the strings in a role of a singer. The pianist is creating the atmosphere in the piece and supporting the strings in their “singing”. The rhythm of the melody is written through a poem called *Tuutiessa* (engl. While Sleeping). The poem is written by a Finnish poet J.H. Erkko.

In the beginning of the part, the pianist is supposed to play the chords that are written for the right hand inside the piano with fingers. By this effect, my aim was to imitate Finnish traditional instrument called Finnish zither.

After the intro of the piano, the cello starts its part with a melody line. A modified version of the same melody appears later in the violin part. The part culminates in a passage where the piano has a cluster and the strings have a strong gesture in *fortissimo*. After a duet of the violin and the cello, a short outro concludes the part.

Lento

Violin

Violoncello

Piano

mp

play with fingers inside the piano

mp

Picture 7. Finnish zither (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Lento*, bars 1-6)

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

ff

ff

mp

a cluster

22

Picture 8. The culmination (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Lento*, bars 19-21)

Picture 9. Outro (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Lento*, bars 37-42)

The tempo marking in the third part is *Allegro*. As a contrast to the second part, the atmosphere in this part is intensive and vivacious. The part starts with the intro of the strings. Piano enters in bar number two with percussive comments. The strings start their melody line in bar number three. In this passage, piano imitates timpani in a symphony orchestra.

Picture 10. Allegro (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegretto*, bars 1-6)



After the previous passage, the roles of the instruments are changing: The piano plays the intro of the strings and after that the strings have tremolos that support the piano. In this passage, the piano is processing a motive from the melody that the strings had before by modulating it.

This musical score shows three staves: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score begins at bar 13. The Violin and Viola parts play sustained chords, marked with a green *p* (piano). The Piano part starts with a melodic line marked *mp* (mezzo-piano), which is a modulation of a motive from the strings. Red and blue brackets highlight specific melodic and harmonic elements across the staves.

Picture 11. Developing (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegro*, bars 13-15)

This musical score shows four staves: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.), with a double Piano part. The key signature is three sharps and the time signature is 3/4. The score begins at bar 19. The Violin and Viola parts play tremolos, marked with a red *f* (forte). The Piano part plays a complex rhythmic pattern, marked with a green *f* and the instruction *con 2da*. Red and blue brackets highlight specific melodic and harmonic elements across the staves.

Picture 12. The atmosphere changes (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegro*, bars 19-22)

In the third excerpt the atmosphere is suddenly changing. My aim was to create an atmosphere that is flowing and tense at the same time. The strings are supposed to produce waves with their playing which is similar to the Pulkkis's Piano Trio. Both of the strings are playing in high pitch that creates a tense atmosphere. The piano texture is written like it was a wave: The sixteenth notes are flowing from the high pitch to the lower pitch and back. The tension in the piano texture comes from the harmony that consists of minor thirds and augmented fourths.

The fourth excerpt is a duet of the cello and the violin, which leads to culmination of the piece. Both of the strings have double stops in this passage. The function of the piano is to support the strings and add color to the timbre of the trio.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Violin (Vln.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The violin part (top staff) begins at bar 34 with a dynamic marking of *p* and plays a melodic line with some double stops. The cello part (middle staff) also starts at bar 34 with a dynamic marking of *p* and plays a similar melodic line. The piano part (bottom staff) begins at bar 34 with a dynamic marking of *p* and features a complex texture of sixteenth notes and chords, including minor thirds and augmented fourths. The score ends at bar 36.

Picture 13. A duet of the violin and cello (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegro*, bars 34-36)

The fifth excerpt is from the culmination of the piece. The piano has percussive chords. The thrill the strings have in this passage, should sound like a fire alarm.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Violin (Vln.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The violin part (top staff) begins at bar 51 with a dynamic marking of *ff* and plays a melodic line with some double stops. The cello part (middle staff) also starts at bar 51 with a dynamic marking of *ff* and plays a similar melodic line. The piano part (bottom staff) begins at bar 51 with a dynamic marking of *ff* and features a complex texture of percussive chords and sixteenth notes, including triplets. The score ends at bar 53.

Picture 14. Cross staff notation (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegro*, bars 51-53)

After the culmination, piano starts with a motive from the beginning of the part. The strings join the piano in canon. The passage leads to the recapitulation where again, as a contrast to the melody of the strings, the role of the piano is percussive. The trio ends in a heroic atmosphere.

This musical score excerpt, labeled 'Picture 15', covers bars 73 to 78 of the piece. It features three staves: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. At bar 73, the piano part begins with a melody marked *p* (piano) and *tempo primo*. The strings are silent until bar 76, where they enter in canon with the piano part, marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The piano part continues with a steady accompaniment.

Picture 15. Kanon (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegro*, bars 73-78)

This musical score excerpt, labeled 'Picture 16', covers bars 85 to 90. It features the same three staves: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature remains three sharps and the time signature is 4/4. At bar 85, the strings play a complex, rhythmic passage with triplets. The piano part provides a percussive accompaniment with accented chords. At bar 88, the strings reach a climax marked *ff* (fortissimo), while the piano part continues with a strong, rhythmic accompaniment.

Picture 16. The end of Allegro (Heikkinen, *A Mélange of Desire*, *Allegro*, bars 85-90)

## Coaching in Notation

After I had composed the trio, I felt that I needed more clarity to my notation. I wanted the notation to express my idea of the interpretation of the piece as clearly as possible. As a second supervisor of my thesis, Joel Eriksson helped me to discover the appropriate way of notating my piece.

Eriksson pointed out two approaches to notation; Either the composer can write what she/he wants to hear, or what she/he wants the musicians to do. My choice was aiming to write what I wanted to hear. We also talked about instrumentation; piano trio is a flexible chamber music form because all the instruments have an ability to produce wide range of nuances inside a wide pitch range. As an example of the contrary, Eriksson mentioned the low register of the flute that is inevitably lower in volume than the upper register.

Finding an exact way of notating my trio turned out to be a challenge because the material in the trio is a mixture of tonality and modality. Eriksson pointed out that in melodic passages, one must respect the leading note. I had notated the leading note enharmonically wrong in several passages. He also taught that the decisions in notating have to be made in relation to the whole score; Sometimes one has to decide which part defines the notation. According to Eriksson, one of the biggest challenges in notation is articulation. Musical styles and national traditions have an effect on the players' understanding of articulation marks.

During the meetings, I learned many things about string instrument notation. For example, when writing for the strings, a tremolo can be notated in many ways. In the intro of the *Allegro* (Picture 10), the notation of the cello's tremolo is expressing to the player that the tremolo is supposed to be equal with the material that the violin has. As an example of the contrary, the tremolos in the Picture 11 are notated in a way that they are supporting the piano texture by creating a background harmony. I also learned that as the slurs in piano notation are implying legato articulation, for the string players they also mean that the notes should be played in one bow.

## 5. Epilogue

My knowledge about piano trio increased significantly during the thesis process, which was the primary goal of my research. In my thesis, I have approached the piano trio form from the perspectives of a performing artist, a pedagogue and a composer. I played and performed many pieces with a piano trio during the last two years and after every rehearsal, I wrote down observations and ideas connected to our process. In my opinion, the biggest challenges in the process of building interpretation in a piano trio are social: if the communication in the group is not active, the interpretation of the piece cannot become uniform.

Theoretical sources helped me to broaden my pianistic and pedagogical horizons and find a perfect baseline for piano trio from string quartet. David Blum's *The Art of Quartet Playing* increased my understanding of the violin and cello, which was also one of the goals in my thesis process. One of the biggest challenges in my process was connected to the source *Art of Chamber Music*: because Aho's work was published in Finnish, I had to translate the text from Finnish to English to be able to make quotations from it.

Uljas Pulkkis's master class offered a possibility to include the composer's opinion about the interpretation of the *Piano Trio* in my thesis. It also increased self-confidence within our trio. I am sure that in the future our interpretations will be even more communicative and intensive.

By composing a piano trio I took my knowledge of the piano trio form to a practical level. Communication between the instruments as a starting point of the composing process worked out very well. I got positive feedback concerning my composition both from the trio members and from my second supervisor Joel Eriksson.

The continuation of my project is to perform *A Mélange of Desire* with my trio and read a principal work about instrumentation. In the future, I want to be able to express my musical ideas as clearly as possible. In the next piano trio that I write, I want to be more experimental in regards to the roles of the instruments. For example, I could put the violin to the role of a bass and write harmonics for the piano.

I hope that my thesis can be considered as a handbook of piano trio. I also hope that it can be useful for musicians and pedagogues, who are playing in a piano trio or are teaching a piano trio.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisors Anders Tykesson and Joel Eriksson for their support in this project. I also want to thank my friend Eliazer Cramer for proofreading my text. Particular thanks are due to Milla Toukkari for mentoring and painting the cover picture.

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## 8. Appendix

### Master class with Uljas Pulkkis 3.12.2013 in Helsinki

Before I started recording we had introduced ourselves and talked a bit about the background of the piece. After this we started playing the piece and after a while, Pulkkis cut off the playing and started to speak:

In the beginning of the piece, the strings, please bring up the changing notes by playing a light accent on them. So the rhythm will be clearer and the beginning of the piece does not fizzle out. In my opinion, otherwise it sounds too Impressionistic and improvised.

In regards to the dynamics: Give space to the piano after the so-called intro and play this pianissimo very quietly. If it seems that you cannot play it this way, the cello can leave out the upper note of the from the double stop and correspondingly, the violin can leave out the lower note. In bar 29, there is a crescendo to forte. When you played in piano nuance, in bar 28, it was almost as loud as forte in bar 28. So please exaggerate the dynamics to get more briskness into your playing.

Then something about the different characters in the piece: For example, in bar 78, where strings have harmonics, the character is clearly impressionistic. Shortly after, in bar 84, there is a totally different character with massive chords in the piano part. When you reach bar 78, you could think about something different and perhaps slow down the tempo a bit.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano. The first system covers bars 78-80, and the second system covers bars 80-81. Each system includes staves for Violin (Vin.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin and Violoncello parts feature harmonics in bar 78. The Piano part has a complex, rhythmic texture with many notes and rests, and a large chord in bar 84. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

Picture 17. Japonism (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 78-81)

This passage is an imitation of European Japonism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After that, the character suddenly changes again. That is to say, in this piece many different affects are presented in a short time interval. If you recognize and name them, they will be heard in your interpretation. If you do not, the piece will sound like it is just floating somewhere, like three musicians are improvising together in different styles. Find the places in the piece where you



want to change the character and agree that you all make a sudden change in style. Then the same thing again and again through out the whole piece. Please play the first eight bars with the light accents and remember to give space for the piano. (playing)

It was much better now, there was some posture in your playing. Please try from tempo 116, bar 20, where strings have pianissimo. Here the strings are an echo; they kind of catch the tones of the piano. There you don't have a melody line. This place is an imitation of acoustics in a big concert hall. After the crescendo, in bar 26, where *mezzo forte* is written, the role of the strings is more active. In fact the echo texture starts a bit earlier, for example, in bar number 16. The strings are also supposed to catch the important notes of the piano. Now please play starting from tempo 116 (bar 19). (playing)



Picture 18. Echo texture (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 16-23)

In bar 29, there is a very strong gesture in piano texture. Please play it as if it was the first time when you really arrive somewhere. That is also the first cadenza in the piece, a remarkable place. Take a little breath there. The strings have a whole note there so the pianist does not have to rush, It is supposed to be majestic like, “ now we have arrived.” And then it starts again...maybe you don't have to try it now.

A very important place is where the harmonics occur (Picture 17.), please try to do the change of character now. You can start from bar 72, and when you reach bar 78, completely change the character. You can think about Japan or something! When that is over, in bar 82, the German “*Sturm und Drang*” kind of mood continues. (playing) Lets take it again, straight from bar 82. When the character changes, the strings cannot start like this (singing), but should play like this (singing), bravely! First the atmosphere is delicate and then (snapping fingers), suddenly it is

something totally different. Now start from bar 78 and make a sudden and aggressive change of character in bar 82. (playing)

In this passage, where every body plays in *forte*, did you agree who has the melodic line of primary importance or do you just play the same nuance together? For example, in bar 106, the cello has accents that I wish could be heard. Later, the same thing occurs with the violin in bars 109 and 110. The piano also has accents starting from bar 107. That line should be clearly continuing. In general, this texture should be clearly structured. It is not just like an avalanche of tones. The most important bars are: the cello in 116, the violin in 109 & 110, and the highest notes in the piano's texture. I know that after the general pause in bar 92, it is challenging to find a good starting place because there is lot of rhythmical disparity in your parts. In fact, I think that you play that part very well because you seem to have a good sense of tempo there. But later, suddenly your playing starts to sound like a sausage again.

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Picture 19. Rhythmical disparity (Pulkki, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 103-106)

Here there are not so many dynamics written so the performer is responsible to determine and show the important things that are happening in the piece. I think it is little the things that make the audience notice that the players have really thought about things; that the players want some particular things to be heard and their interpretation sounds clearly constructed like: “ now it is the cello's turn, now violin's and now piano's.” Please play starting from bar number 103 or 102. (playing)

This passage that starts in *mezzo forte* and ends in *forte fortissimo* (from bar 135 to 142), sounded like the nuance is the same all the time. So again, please over estimate the nuances. If *mezzo piano* is written, you can imagine it to be pianissimo. I think, it will then sound right. Next, anticipate the important things in the passage where long notes and melodic lines are taking turns, even though I didn't write this in the score. For example, do a little *crescendo* with the long notes, like you were creating waves.

Don't play in a static way like the pixels of a computer, it is music that is alive! Anticipate your playing. For example in bar number 129, the violin has a melody line. Before that there is a long note with which you can do a little *crescendo* and the cello could support the *crescendo*, so that it would become obvious to the listener that soon something important is going to happen soon. The same idea follows in bar 135. Before that, the strings can make a little *crescendo* and then it is calming down again. I wonder how many of those waves there are, three or four?

Keep the dynamics very low to emphasize the *fortissimo* in bar 142. The note that the piano has there is supposed to shock the listener, really a proper *fortissimo* played as the tone was (snapping fingers) snapping and resounding in a concert hall, it is loud! Please play this passage from Tempo 118; quietly, waves and then a magnificent *fortissimo*. (playing)

Picture 20. Long notes and melody lines (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 126-135)

There was a bit of a sense of rushing there. Play it like you have all the time in the world. For example, when you reach the long note in bar 133, play it, listen to it and enjoy it instead of thinking what is coming next. It is a peaceful passage, elsewhere there are many things happening all the time. Pirrko you played this *fortissimo* in a bar 142 too early, not much though, maybe a sixteenth note too early. You don't have to rush there, rather slow down a bit (singing). It is like a big orchestra playing in *tutti*. Please play from bar 131 and remember to keep the volume down before the *fortissimo*. (playing)

In bar 146, strings make a little accent on the changing tones. The sound of the cello is naturally loud here. The violin is supposed to play the main role so please give space for the violin. I think the violinist could play in *mezzo forte* and the cellist could keep the *pianissimo* that is written in the score. Otherwise it sounds unbalanced. Play the passage again please. (playing)

In regards to the double stops, please don't be afraid of the intonation. Otherwise it sounds like it is not lightning up properly. Play with confidence and concentrate on the higher note. To avoid restlessness in bar 148, please don't change the bow (talking to the violinist). Now your playing also sounded shy. Even if the character is quiet, it is not shy. Please play the same passage again, and then we can move forward. (playing) For example in bars 151 and 153, if the

start of a tone is shy or uncertain, the listener starts to worry about the performers. So rather play without hesitating, even make a little accent just to avoid passing on the feeling of uncertainty. If the passage is technically difficult, the violin can leave out the lower note and cello can leave out the upper note of the double stop. Just play like you know exactly what you are doing! Please start from the entry of piano, bar number 152. (playing)

I didn't stop you now because I heard your enthusiasm. In bar number 163 the violin suddenly becomes active again, please play it differently than the passage before. Then in bar 164, where piano plays triplets with accents on the top notes, even though *mezzo forte* is written, give some space for piano. That is a solo for the piano. I think those accents should be heard better, they were a bit lame now. It seems that when I wrote this ten years ago, I didn't put any expression markings there. Still, decrease the volume a bit so that the audience can hear the piano part. Same thing in bar 172, more space for the piano. Strings, when you have the accents play them and then go back to the lower nuance. The comments that the piano has there should be played loudly. When you reach this place where the piano has big chords, the passage starting from bar 183, practice it until it is like a rolling texture. I heard a little difference in dynamics among strings there. I know that it is a challenging passage because you are playing different chords that are supposed to sound like one rolling pattern, like if a pianist was playing *arpeggios*. Let's try from bar 164. Play a little more quietly, give space for piano and after accents immediately go back to the lower nuance. (playing)

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Picture 21. Rolling texture (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 183-186)

Emphasize the bass line of the piano in bars 168 and 169, it underlines those bars a bit. I think the violin was a bit too loud there; melodic material causes you to play loudly. (playing) Did you notice that the passage where the strings have arpeggios is similar to the very beginning of the piece, just the roles of the instruments have changed? The piano has the material that the strings had before and vice versa (bar number 190). I don't know if you want to play the passage in the same way than the beginning of the piece, anyways it is important to notice that the roles have changed. Now the rolling texture starting from bar 183 was good. The comments that the piano had a bit earlier starting from bar 174, should be played with great certainty. I don't know if you had read it wrong or not but you played a few wrong notes for example in bar 204. The second chord is E minor with added note B sharp.



Picture 22. Roles changed (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 189-195)

Then in regards to the arpeggio in bar 188, do you play the bass note before the first beat or do you play it at the same time with some particular tone? I think that it would be good if you had a sense of pulse there. This passage should be very precise, the strings have a rolling pattern and the piano has rhythmic chords. You can play the bass note, for example, a quarter note before the first beat. Please play from bar 183, where the string's arpeggios start. (playing)

Pirkko, can you please play the chord on the first beat instead? (playing) So to conclude: In bar 196, play the chord on the first beat and the bass notes starting from bar 208, as loud as you dare, just to make sure that chord lights up.

When you reach bar number 221, where the melody culminates, slow the tempo down there rather than afterwards. Now when you played I felt like: "Now this is rolling." Instead of: "Now we reached the highlight." Play more in emancipated way! Maybe five (metronome) steps slower tempo and especially a feeling of peace in your playing. The piano part in this passage is quite easy so please play it in a way that sounds fluffy. I was also thinking that maybe it would help if you wrote down the chords on the score. There are triads with added notes, for example, E minor with added b-flat or something like this. I know that it quickens the learning process if you write them down. Even though you work with music all the time, when you see a written chord you immediately know which notes you are going to play. It increases your self-confidence.

In regards to the climax of the piece, starting from bar 221, please prepare it in a way that makes it sound like a top moment. Even though this piece is not very long, it consists of a lot of

different material. Make a little *diminuendo* before the passage so when you arrive, it really sounds like it is the highlight moment dynamically and melodically, a great ending!

Please, start from the passage where the piano has the bass notes, bar 216. Remember the *diminuendo* before the top moment. (playing)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano. The first system covers bars 219-221, and the second system covers bars 222-224. Each system includes staves for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The piano part features complex chordal textures and rhythmic patterns, while the string parts provide harmonic support and melodic lines. The score is marked with dynamic instructions such as *ff* and *mf*, and includes performance markings like asterisks and dashed lines indicating specific musical directions.

Picture 23. High intensity (Pulkkis, *Trio for Violin, Violoncello & Piano*, bars 219-224)

Please write *mezzo forte* in bar 218 and after that make a new *crescendo*. Pirkko, be careful with the pedal there, change it often enough. And everybody, please take a little breath before bar 221. Before the cello and the violin play the G, where the piano has the chords (singing), make it clear to everyone that this is the most important and intensive moment of the piece. Please play straight from bar 218. (playing) Now try to exaggerate! It was better, it sounded like you really reached something. Now exaggerate the change in tempo (singing). Take a very slow tempo when you reach bar 221 and then continue in the same tempo than before. Play in a way that it sounds like an interpretation! Please take again from bar 218. (playing)

Again, give space for the piano in bar 230. It is a challenging passage, let the people hear it! So the strings could do a *diminuendo* in bar 230. Now the climax was great, that's the way it should be done. And as mentioned before, the lowest string of the cello is naturally so loud, so please be careful of the balance. In bar 239 it is the strings' turn again, play with a stronger sound there. Now take it from bar 228 and remember to give space for the piano in bar 130. (playing)

Be careful with the sound at the end of the piece, it should be confident. The piano part is supposed to sound translucent and sparkling, play stronger with the right hand. You can practice it by playing only the first note of each triplet with the left hand. When you start to feel comfortable you can slowly add more notes to the left hand. The most important thing is that the passage sounds easy. (playing)

Picture 24. The ending (Pulkkis, Trio for Violin, violoncello & Piano, bars 234-241)

Good. The ending was pretty good now. It was quiet but I still could hear every note clearly. There is simultaneously a minor chord and a major chord. It is also very important that the last tones of the violin are lighting up beautifully. Good job, thank you!