

MUSIC ACCORD

ANDRÉ PREVIN

Piano Trio No. 2 (2011)

Program Notes

André Previn — composer, conductor, pianist, author — is among the most prodigiously talented musicians of our time. Born in Berlin in 1929 to a family of Russian-Jewish descent, he studied piano at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik until his parents were forced to flee Germany by the Nazis in 1938. The Previns then settled briefly in Paris, where the nine-year-old André continued his studies at the Conservatoire with Marcel Dupré, before moving permanently to Los Angeles; the young musician became an American citizen in 1943. Though Previn was a student of Max Rabinowitsch in piano, Joseph Achron and Ernst Toch in theory, and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco in composition, his earliest professional experience, gained even before he finished high school, was as a jazz pianist and an orchestrator for MGM Studios, where a distant cousin, Charles, was music director. Previn joined the staff of MGM upon his graduation and composed his first film score, *The Sun Comes Up*, in 1948. He also built a reputation at that time as a jazz pianist and recorded a number of successful albums. In 1951, he began studying conducting with Pierre Monteux, then Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony, and soon left MGM to work as a free-lance orchestrator of film scores, receiving thirteen Academy Award nominations and winning Oscars for *Gigi* (1958), *Porgy and Bess* (1959), *Irma la Douce* (1963), and *My Fair Lady* (1964), and to develop his career as a concert pianist and conductor. He guest conducted widely following his podium debut in St. Louis in 1962 and was appointed Music Director of the Houston Symphony Orchestra in 1967. The following year, he was named Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, a post he held until 1979; he has been the orchestra's Conductor Laureate since 1993. Previn has also served as Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (1976-1984), Los Angeles Philharmonic (1985-1989), London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (1985-1991), and Oslo Philharmonic (2002-2006). In 2009, he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of Tokyo's NHK Symphony Orchestra.

André Previn has guest conducted leading orchestras throughout the world, and served as Artistic Director of London's South Bank Festival (1972-1974) and the 1981 British Music Festival in Pittsburgh, New York, and Washington, D.C. and as a faculty member at the Berkshire Music Center. He is one of the most-recorded musicians in history, with over well 200 releases and ten Grammy Awards. Though Previn's appearances as a pianist have been limited because of the scope of his work as a conductor, he has been heard regularly in chamber music and as soloist-conductor in concertos by Mozart. He has returned to jazz in recent years, recording with guitarist Joe Pass and bassist Ray Brown, and touring Japan, Europe, and North America with the André Previn Jazz Trio. Previn's works as an author include *Orchestra*, *André Previn's Guide to the Orchestra* and *Music Face to Face*, a series of conversations with British pianist, composer, and broadcaster Antony Hopkins. In 1991, Doubleday released his memoir, *No Minor Chords — My Early Days in Hollywood*, chronicling his years as composer, arranger, and orchestrator at the MGM Studios. In January 1996, André Previn was awarded an Honorary Knighthood (KBE) by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. His additional distinctions include the Kennedy Center Honor for Lifetime Achievement (1998), *Musical America's* "Musician of the Year" (1999), Glenn Gould Foundation Prize (2006), and Lifetime Achievement Awards from the London Symphony Orchestra, Gramophone magazine, and Grammy Recording Academy.

André Previn has composed in both popular and concert genres: scores for the musicals *Coco* and *The Good Companion* and the films *Bad Day at Black Rock*, *Subterraneans*, and *Two for the Seesaw*; a Symphony for Strings; a half-dozen concertos; *Overture to a Comedy*, *Principals*, *Reflections*, and *Diversions* for orchestra; numerous chamber and piano works; a theater piece for actors and orchestra titled *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, with words by Tom Stoppard; and song cycles for Kathleen Battle, Barbara Bonney, Janet Baker, and Sylvia McNair. On commission from the San Francisco Opera, he created an opera based on Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The opera, with a libretto by Philip Littell and soprano Renée Fleming as Blanche Dubois, was given its premiere by the San Francisco Opera in September 1998; its recording on Deutsche Grammophon won a Grand Prix du Disque. His second opera, *Brief Encounter*, was premiered by Houston Grand Opera in May 2009. His recent concert compositions include: the Double Concerto for Violin and Viola, premiered in April 2009 in New York by Anne-Sophie Mutter, Yuri Bashmet, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's under the composer's direction at an all-Previn concert honoring his 80th birthday; a Clarinet Sonata (2010) for Boston Symphony Orchestra clarinetist Thomas Martin; a Cello Concerto, premiered by Daniel Müller-Schott and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in June 2011; and the Triple Concerto for Horn, Trumpet, Tuba, and Orchestra, premiered by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and its principal brass players in March 2012.

Previn composed his Piano Trio No. 2 in 2011 for the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio on a commission from Music Accord, a consortium of ten major chamber music presenters that has commissioned more than twenty new works from leading American composers since its founding in 1997. The Trio No. 2 opens with tentative rising figures in cello and violin answered by sustained chords in the piano. The motion soon becomes more continuous and leads to a wide-ranging theme in the strings. The rhythm abruptly turns more insistent with a repeated-note piano figure that accompanies an intense, small-interval theme initiated by the violin. Contrast of mood and melody is provided by a lyrical strain introduced by the violin and counterpointed by the cello. Following an increasingly animated passage and the return of the piano's repeated-note motive to support first a syncopated cello melody and then muted, flying-scale figurations in the violin, the lyrical melody becomes the subject of a brief developmental episode. The

repeated-note music is heard one final time before the movement closes with a reference to its opening measures. The slow second movement is in two large formal paragraphs. The first is based on a long, expressive, arching melody first sung by the cello alone before being joined by violin and piano. The second section, begun after a quick climax, takes as its theme a melody of falling, three-note phrases led by the violin. Fragmented echoes of the expressive opening theme provide the movement's coda. The finale is in a free three-part form (A-B-A), with a modern analogue of the skipping rhythms of a traditional jig at beginning and end, and a cross-rhythm, triple-meter section with a long, graceful violin theme at the center.

(Notes by Dr. Richard E. Rodda)

Reviews

André Previn's Piano Trio No. 2, heard in its Boston premiere, showcased more of the ensemble's versatility. Co-commissioned by the KLR Trio and the Celebrity Series, the three-movement work is a curious and accessible mix of musical styles and moods. Describing the 20-minute trio, Kalichstein noted that "Previn writes about himself, about wonderful tunes, Shostakovich darkness, and wit." The opening movement contains all of these elements. Previn's melodies hint at the popular songs of Tin Pan Alley, but the music quickly turns dark, gathering tension through diatonic and chromatic dissonance. The musicians performed with snap precision and lyricism.

The somber second movement opened with Robinson's cello in a mournful cantabile phrase, which Laredo answered in counterpoint. As the texture grew increasingly thinner, Robinson and Laredo traded falling motives with lullaby-like charm while Kalichstein accompanied with soft rippling chords. As the movement concluded, Previn's music became increasingly chromatic, even coldly distant. Through it all, KLR effectively handled the emotional restraint without losing focus.

Previn's wit was on display in the brief, jazzy finale where his music assumed a hard-driving style—a mix of Gershwin's rhythm and Bartok's dense harmony. Syncopated chords seem to pop out at random in the churning cascade of sixteenth notes, all of which KLR handled deftly.

— Aaron Keebaugh, Boston Classical Review

André Previn's Piano Trio No. 2 was a work commissioned by KLR and premiered last May at Lincoln Center, here given its Chicago premiere. The twenty-minute, three-movement work is every bit as eclectic as Previn himself, who has encompassed the various roles of a Hollywood film composer and arranger, jazz pianist, symphonic conductor and contemporary music composer over his

Piano Trio No. 2

Composer: André Previn

Instrumentation: vn, vc, pno

Premiering Artists: Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio

Duration: 18'

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http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2419&State_2872=2&ComposerId_2872=1249

[Artist Contact](#)

Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio official site

<http://www.kalichstein-laredo-robinson-trio.com/>

long career.

Happily, the Second Trio celebrates all of these aspects of Previn's art. The work is surprisingly chromatic, sometimes flirting on the edge of tonality but always resolving diatonically.

The ideas are fast and furious, rarely lingering, and moving from Ivesian tone-clusters in the upper piano register to overtly sentimental violin lines that have traces of Bartók and Shostakovich. Scriabin-like piano musings morph into advanced harmonic bebop, sometimes with the strings used percussively.

What is refreshing about the piece is that while authentically dwelling within the worlds of contemporary music and the popular idioms of jazz and show music, it mercifully inhabits these worlds without attempting to bridge them via crossover and always with a mischievous sense of humor.

—Dennis Polkow, Chicago Classical Review

...André Previn's 2011 Piano Trio No. 2 — a Boston premiere — was a perfect fit: relaxed conversation whether the topic is serious or sunny. Previn might not venture outside his comfort zone, but that zone is larger than most; the music's dominant feature is pure fluency. Styles meet and greet with effortless etiquette. The borders between European classicism, expansive Americana, and Hollywood shamanism are crisscrossed with cosmopolitan ease.

Like much of Previn's recent music ("Music for Boston," premiered by the Boston Symphony last summer, for instance, or "Octet for Eleven," written for the BSO Chamber Players), the Trio can seem rather formally loose, but the stream of consciousness is unusually smooth. Previn is particularly efficient with simple thematic recapitulations, as in the slow movement, when Robinson's long, angular opening cello solo returned with Kalichstein's accompaniment making manifest the melody's latent cinematic arc.

— Matthew Guerrieri, The Boston Globe

The composer, a longtime friend of Laredo and Robinson, wrote his Trio for them, as well as a new Double Concerto, to have its world premiere in two weeks with the CSO in Music Hall. Previn is noted as a sensational jazz pianist, as well as a Hollywood film composer, conductor and composer of serious music. His Piano Trio No. 2 was sheer joy. The first movement was alternately sonful and edgy, with an intensity that reminded one of Shostakovich (as pianist Joseph Kalichstein noted in his comments to introduce the work). Previn really knows how to write a tune, and the slow movement, which opened with a stunning, deeply interior theme for the cello, was an example of that gift. I loved how the violin and cello traded themes against deep and sometimes pungent chords in the piano. Kalichstein's touch was like a warm cushion. The finale, marked "Fast," was witty, light and jazzy. At one point, it flowed into a melody of absolute charm. The trio gave it a warm and joyous reading. - Janelle Gelfand, Cincinnati

About Music Accord

Comprised of top classical music presenting organizations throughout the United States, Music Accord is a consortium that commission new works in the chamber music, instrumental recital and song genres. The Consortiums goal is to create a significant number of new works and to ensure presentation of these works in venues throughout this country and, if the occasion arises, internationally. Music Accord awards commissions principally to performers who are US citizens or reside in the US and assists these performers in selecting composers who are United States citizens or who reside in the United States.

