

Trio (1996)

Gian Carlo Menotti

Capriccio

Romanza

Envoi

"Since the Verdehr Trio's aim has been to create a large body of substantial, varied repertoire for the 'Clarinet Trio', I wrote to Maestro Menotti in 1987 and 1988 to try to interest him in writing a new work for us. I was fortunate—in 1989 he agreed to compose a *Trio* for us and Michigan State University. However, with his intensive work and travel schedule for the Spoleto Festivals, he was unable to find the time for the next few years. But he encouraged me, in the kindest way, to call every few months to remind him of the commission, saying that the famous cellist Gregor Piatigorsky had 'kept after him' until he completed the duo for two cellos and piano. In the course of many telephone calls, I had the pleasure of getting to know his son Francis and daughter-in-law Melinda. We became friends over the phone, and they became my allies, reminding the Maestro about writing the *Trio*.

In May 1995, my wife Elsa and I were in Rome, and the Maestro invited us to dinner with him and his son. In the course of this fascinating evening, he said he would be in New York at the time of the Trio's concert for the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in Carnegie Recital Hall, and promised to bring our *Trio* then. True to his word, he brought the manuscript copy of the second movement and during a lovely breakfast at the Carlyle Hotel he presented it to us. He promised the rest by Christmas, but in December he suffered a terrible fall in Spoleto, resulting in surgery, and his son told me in January of 1996 that he was very weak from the operation. I thought it would be impossible for him to continue work on our *Trio*, but with the good news of a remarkable recovery came the surprise that he was working intensively on our *Trio* and wanted us to come to Spoleto to premiere it for his eighty-fifth birthday celebration.

The first movement arrived at Michigan State University School of Music by fax, and we premiered the first two movements on July 7, 1996, in a beautiful old theater at the Spoleto Festival in Italy. The audience was very enthusiastic and Maestro Menotti promised to send us the third movement in time for a concert we had organized to be held in September of 1996 at Michigan State University in honor of his eighty-fifth birthday. However, the administrative duties of Spoleto kept him from finishing the *Trio* until the week of the concert; in fact, the last chord was written on the day of the concert. Nonetheless, the *Trio* was performed in its entirety. We were honored by the Maestro's intense effort and are deeply grateful to him for adding such a beautiful work to the chamber music repertoire. We are also in debt to Francis and Melinda Menotti (to whom he dedicated the *Trio*) for their help and friendship.

The capricious first movement of the *Trio* combines witty dance-like figures with the composer's innate feeling for drama and melodic line. Skillful voice leading and rhythmic vitality highlight the interplay among the three performers. The expressive slow movement, *Romanza*, displays the true genius of the operatic master as emotionally intense melodies ring forth spontaneously. The third movement, a lively fugato entitled *Envoi*, brings the work to a brilliant exciting close."

—Walter Verdehr

More of the story of the trio is revealed through a letter Elsa sent to a friend who was preparing to perform the *Trio* in 2013:

Hi Diana,

Very glad to hear you are doing the Menotti. Yes, it is true the last movement was finished the day of the performance. Enclosed are the program notes. What's not there is this:

Menotti was arriving in East Lansing on Thursday PM, two days before the concert. He promised to bring the completed last movement ("My music is not very difficult to play," he said to Walter over the phone) and was planning to write it all on the plane. But, he forgot his glasses and couldn't see well enough to write the music. So Friday AM Walter took him to Pearle Vision (really I'm not making this up!!), got him some glasses and then brought him to school.

He began to write out the 3rd movement, but had to interrupt to speak to a class. He worked for a while, we brought him food from the Student Union, and then had to interrupt again for him to attend a rehearsal of the orchestra playing his music the next day (including a *Triple Concerto* for 3 winds, 3 keyboard and 3 strings—very nice—you should play it there). Back to the drawing board—as he finished each page, we would take it to copy, and I would write out the clarinet part in my pitch. He got much of it done on Friday but the last few pages were not finished til noon Saturday, the day of the concert. At one point when he wanted to take a break near noon, his son said, "No, finish the damn piece." So he did that by noon. We copied; I finished writing out the part; we rehearsed; we played it for him; we went home to get ready for the concert; rehearsed some more; and played it at the 8 PM concert. And Walter and I both played in the concerto, too. Not too much stress!!

Then the next day came a brunch organized by the Dean of Arts and Letters. I was seated between Menotti and Dean Eadie, both erudite, and I thought, oh lord, what am I--always intimidated by prominent celebrities--going to say to these eminent people. But I didn't have to worry because the Dean and Menotti, both incredibly knowledgeable in all things, music, art, literature, talked the entire time and I just sat back, enjoyed it and relaxed for the first time in several days.

Yes, that was a weekend!!

Elsa

The world premiere of *Trio* (first and second movements only) was on July 7, 1996 at a Celebration of Menotti's 85th Birthday, Concerti Di Mezzogiorno, Spoleto Festival, Spoleto, Italy. The complete work was premiered on September 28, 1996 in the Celebration of Menotti's 85th Birthday at the Wharton Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

Gian Carlo Menotti (1911–2007) was born in Cadegliano, Italy near Lake Lugano, the sixth in a family of ten children. He moved to the United States when he was seventeen and studied composition with Rosario Scalero at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia from 1927 until 1933.

Menotti's reputation was established with the success of his first opera, *Amelia Goes to the Ball* (1937). Later successes include: *The Old Maid and the Thief* (1939), the first opera commissioned for radio; *The Medium* (1946), his first popular success which was later made into a film; the clever and witty *The Telephone* (1947); *The Consul* (1950); *The Saint of Bleeker Street* (1954); and *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1951), perhaps his most renowned work, and the first opera ever commissioned for television. Menotti won a Pulitzer Prize for both *The Consul* and *The Saint of Bleeker Street*.

Menotti wrote all his own librettos, as well as two librettos for operas by his friend Samuel Barber: *Vanessa* (1958) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1966).

Menotti founded the *Festival of the Two Worlds (Festival dei Due Mondi)* in Spoleto, Italy in 1958, and its companion festival, Spoleto Festival USA, in Charleston, South Carolina in 1977. These festivals were intended to bring opera to a popular audience and "to bring young artists from the New World into contact with those of the old." Menotti oversaw the two festivals until his death and brought two worlds closer together through his art.