

Serenade for Three (1993)

Peter Schickele

“My brother started studying violin when he was nine, and I started playing clarinet and piano when I was a young teenager, so perhaps one of the reasons I was so delighted by the commission that resulted in *Serenade for Three* is that the piece recalls (in much more sophisticated form, I feel safe in saying) the sounds that wafted through 1354 N. 12th St., Fargo, North Dakota, during the late forties. My brother ended up switching to viola, and I to bassoon, but I’ve always had a fondness for the clarinet/violin/piano combination, and it was high time I wrote something for it.

The first movement of the *Serenade* is a headlong series of dances set off by a robust refrain. The four sections (and three keys) of the lyrical second movement are tied together by the note E-flat which repeats in raindrop fashion throughout.

The finale features an interesting bit of incest. Peter Schickele writing variations on a theme by P.D.Q. Bach. The theme in question comes from the title character’s aria in *Oedipus Tex*, an opera/oratorio in one cathartic act. I’ve always had a weakness for cornball cowboy music, which in the P.D.Q. Bach work gets combined with certain eighteenth-century classical figurations; the style in the *Serenade* finale is more wide-ranging: in addition to country fiddling, there’s also some boogie-woogie piano. A rabble-rousing finish.”

—Peter Schickele

The world premiere of *Serenade for Three* was on March 1, 1993 in the Filene Recital Hall, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York. The work was commissioned by the Verdehr Trio and Michigan State University

Peter Schickele (born 1935, Ames, Iowa) is a composer, musician, author, and satirist who is internationally recognized as one of the most versatile artists in the field of music. Schickele was brought up in Washington, D.C. and Fargo, North Dakota where he studied composition with Sigvald Thompson. He graduated from Swarthmore College in 1957, having had the distinction of being the only music major (as he had been earlier the only bassoonist in Fargo). By that time he had already composed and conducted four orchestral works, a great deal of chamber music, and a number of songs. He subsequently studied composition with Roy Harris and Darius Milhaud, and at the Juilliard School, with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. Then, under a Ford Foundation grant, he taught in Los Angeles and at the Aspen School of Music before returning to teach at the Juilliard Extension School in 1961. In 1965, he gave up teaching to become a freelance composer/performer and, at the instigation of some colleagues, to develop his long friendship with the American public as “Professor” Peter Schickele, apostle of the legendary composer P.D.Q. Bach.

Although acknowledged as one of the great satirists of the twentieth century, Schickele composed in excess of one hundred serious works for symphony orchestras, choral groups, chamber ensembles, voice, movies, and television. His commissions are numerous and varied, ranging from prominent symphony orchestras (The National Symphony, St. Louis Symphony), to well-known chamber ensembles (The Audubon and Lark String Quartets), to distinguished instrumentalists (YoYo Ma and Emmanuel Ax) and popular folk singers (Joan Baez, Buffy Sainte-Marie). His diverse output also includes music for documentaries, television commercials, several *Sesame Street* segments, both the music and lyrics for the musical *Oh! Calcutta*, and four feature films, among them the prize winning *Silent Running*.

Schickele produced over one hundred seventy-five episodes of his weekly, syndicated radio program *Schickele Mix* which was heard nationwide over Public Radio International. The program won ASCAP’s prestigious Deems Taylor Award and the Gold Award for Programming Excellence from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. He also recorded over a dozen albums featuring

P.D.Q. Bach, four of which won Grammy awards. For many years, he made annual tours with concert programs featuring his own music as well as that of his alter-ego.

Schickele and his wife, the poet Susan Sindall, reside in New York City at an upstate hideaway where he concentrates on composing. They have a son and a daughter who are involved in various alternative rock groups, both as composers and performers.