

**Interview Trio Gallien – Emmanuel Christien (piano), Tristan Liehr (violin), Aurélienne Brauner (violoncello)  
by Cecilia Oinas in February 2018**

**Cecilia (C): Congratulations on winning the 3rd prize in the category piano trio of the FS&MM competition! What are your feelings at the moment?**

Aurélienne: We are very happy because we didn't think we would get so far in the competition as we are quite a new trio. We had our first concert last October. So yes, we are very glad...

Emmanuel: ...and very tired. It was quite a big program to play, two hours of music.

**C: You are all busy music professionals with your own separate careers. How did you end up together as a trio despite of all your other engagements?**

A: Emmanuel and I have known each other for twenty years since we have studied in the same conservatories. And after I met Tristan in the orchestra in Bordeaux, we decided to play together as a trio. So that's the story.

**C: A successful story indeed. And how did you decide to participate in this particular competition?**

A: Tristan (everybody laughs)!

Tristan: I found this competition on the internet. We thought it had an interesting program.

**C: Could you describe a little about what happens when you have a rehearsal session? Do you have a lot of conversation, or do you rather let the ideas be decided while playing through the pieces?**

A: No (laugh). We fight a lot.

T: Yeah, but we also negotiate. And then we play after our discussion.

A: We try to make it clear what we want to do exactly, and discuss a lot of details.

E: If there is not so much time, we try to practice very efficiently. We would like to have more time, but...

**C: How much room is there for spontaneity during the actual concert?**

A: We try to do both.

E: To be very clear... but also to be free in the moment...

T: In the concert we try to be free while still knowing what we want to do... but that is the difficulty.

**C: I agree. To somehow maintain spontaneity and still be structured and organized is difficult. Is there such a thing for you as an ideal piano trio sound, something that you are aiming for? Or does it always depend on the piece?**

A: We try to find a good combination between the piano and the strings. We didn't practice this a lot, but I think it comes quite naturally.

E: I think the trio is very difficult because piano and strings are such different instruments...but it also depends on the work, of course.

**C: What do you think the biggest difference is between duo (such as cello-piano or violin-piano) and trio playing?**

A: It is very different...

E: The building up is different, and it is not the same balance at all.

A: In trio playing, I think everything should flow between the three of us.

E: In duos, the piano sometimes follows the violin or cello, sometimes it is the opposite. In trios the roles are changing all the time. But it is not like in quintets, either. In trios, you have to play very powerfully and still be careful not to cover the strings.

**C: Let's talk about your competition program (Schubert, Takemitsu, Kim, Mantovani, Boulanger, Mendelssohn). You had a really nice program in the final, because it showed quite versatile sides of your playing. How did you end up playing three pieces in the final?**

T: With Mantovani it was evident, because it was a modern piece and it was also inspired by Schubert's *Moments musicaux*. So it fitted well with the theme of the competition.

T: And we chose Lili Boulanger's work because this year is her anniversary, so we thought it was a good idea to play her music, especially since she is not so well-known...

A: Although in France many of her pieces are performed this year.

**C: In Kim's "Stück 2" the trio has to play many of the musical gestures exactly the same time together, and I think it was one of the most difficult tasks in the piece. What was your opinion of Kim's piece?**

A: It was not an easy piece.

E&T: No, not easy!

A: First to understand everything, so many details, so many things ...

T: It took a lot of time at the beginning to practice the parts separately and then when we had joint rehearsals we discovered that there were a lot of things to put together. Also, it was very difficult to feel the common pulse. So yes, it was a challenge.

**C: What kind of characters are portrayed in "Stück 2", in your opinion?**

A: Basically, it consisted of three different parts, marked by the changes in tempo.

T: After the first, more quiet part, we have the rhythmic part in the middle where the piano is played from the inside, and at the end it is again very sparse. We tried to make clear contrasts between them.

A: We would have liked to play the trio for Kim before the competition...it would have helped a lot.

**C: Yes, that's always an advantage when you have a living composer. I recall that you had the fastest middle part among the contestants, so there was a really noticeable contrast when the tempo changed...was it 74...?**

A: 72!

**C: And when you scratched the piano strings with the coins, did you have a 2 euro coin as requested?**

E: Yes! I had it always with me (laughs)!

**C: This piece sets some sort of a record on special playing techniques for the strings (also for piano, but there were "normal" piano sounds too). Are these playing techniques familiar for present-day string players, or was there anything new that you haven't done before?**

T: It was not familiar, but we are used to this kind of playing...

A: In Paris, I have played with Ensemble intercontemporain, so I know a bit of this kind of style.

T: You have to make the small things work though...if they are just sounds over sounds it is not interesting.

**C: And, interestingly, in the Mantovani trio there were almost no special playing techniques.**

E: Yes, it is a bit more traditional. But there are some other qualities, although nothing out of the ordinary inside the piano that everybody does nowadays.

**C: Finally, let's talk a little about Schubert trios. For the second round, you chose the E flat major trio – was it an easy choice or did you also consider the B flat?**

A: It was quite an easy decision because we had already played the first movement of the E flat major trio and we wanted to continue with the other movements.

**C: What would you say the biggest challenges are when you play a trio by Schubert?**

A: Style, to find the right tempi, to understand the accents, since sometimes it is not an accent, but rather a diminuendo. Schubert's style is really special.

E: And the articulation, to be aware of the many possibilities.

A: Intonation.

T: Everything is difficult... because it sounds very natural and evident, but when you play, it's not. So, we have to make it sound simple.

E: The architectural building ... because the movements are very long. We have to know where we are going.

T: And this trio is also difficult because it is powerful, but it must never be too heavy.

**C: Have you played period instruments or do you consider historically informed performance approaches in your own playing? Or do you rather maintain a modern approach?**

A: We try to do old and new at the same time. Also, since the string bows are heavier nowadays we have to be both light and heavy at the same time. I don't know how to explain that... I never played on a Baroque cello, but I would like to try it. I think if you play Schubert on historic instruments it probably changes your way of thinking.

**C: Indeed. So, just one more last question: what are your future plans?**

A: We will continue to play together. We are going to play the Schubert again in Bordeaux..

T: ...in May. And then we have to find some concerts...that's difficult though...

E: Yeah, because we are quite busy but we try to find time to practice together.

**C: Do you live in the same city?**

A: We play in an orchestra in Bordeaux with Tristan.

E: And I live in Paris.

T: It's not very far...

E: ...but it's not possible to just meet for two hours.

T: We prefer longer sessions.

E: One or two days for the entire days.

A: That is one of our challenges.

**C: Thank you very much for this interview! All the best for your future career as musicians and as a trio.**