



SUMMER FESTIVAL ON THE EASTSIDE

FRIDAY, AUGUST 13

**Johannes Brahms**

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano in G Major, Op. 78

*Vivace ma non troppo*

*Adagio*

*Allegro molto moderato*

Lily Francis, violin

Anna Polonsky, piano

**Anton Arensky**

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in D minor, Op. 32

*Allegro moderato—Adagio*

*Scherzo: Allegro molto*

*Elegia: Adagio*

*Finale: Allegro non troppo—Andante—Adagio—Allegro molto*

Scott Yoo, violin

Ronald Thomas, cello

Anna Polonsky, piano

**Antonín Dvořák**

Quintet for Piano and Strings in A Major, Op. 81

*Allegro ma non tanto*

*Dumka: Andante con moto—Vivace—Andante con moto*

*Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace*

*Finale: Allegro*

Stefan Jackiw, violin

Joseph Lin, violin

Richard O'Neill, viola

Robert deMaine, cello

Orion Weiss, piano

## **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Major, Op. 78 (1878–1879)

Before achieving fame as a composer Brahms spent his last adolescent year touring as a gifted pianist with another young musician, the Hungarian violinist/Gypsy fiddler Eduoard Remenyi. At the same time, he became acquainted with Joseph Joachim, one of the 19th century's pre-eminent violinists and, in his day at least, a respected composer. Brahms and Joachim became lifelong friends, a relationship interrupted temporarily by the violinist's marital problems and comments by Brahms that angered and hurt Joachim. When Brahms wrote his sole Violin Concerto he turned to Joachim for advice, *not* about how to write for the violin but rather about the music itself. (As it turned out very few of Joachim's suggestions found their way into the finished concerto.)

Despite his tour with Remenyi and his friendship with Joachim, Brahms did not compose a sonata for violin until his mid-40s; just look at the publication number of his first Sonata for Violin and Piano: Op. 78. He had, of course, ample experience writing for the violin in the context of many chamber and orchestral works, so one need not be surprised by the fluency of writing for that mainstay of classical music and its proper balance with Brahms' instrument—the piano.

This first Sonata, in G Major, carries the sobriquet “Rain,” a reference to an eponymous song he had written earlier. The text suggests a desire to rekindle memories of childhood dreams. Brahms did not explain in words whether his intent was to merely borrow the tune or to further expound musically on the meaning of the text. In any case, the music is essentially lyrical and serenely reflective, despite moments of pointed drama. A characteristic motive can be heard in the first and third movements' initial themes, and also resurfaces in the central minutes of the *Adagio*. In structure, this snippet is basically three repeated notes played as a note, a short pause, a short note followed immediately by a longer note, and serves as a unifying device through the entire work.

The opening *Vivace ma non troppo* begins with the violin offering the “Rain” rhythm to introduce an extended melody that draws fulfillment from the rhythmic kernel. Meanwhile, the piano contributes a solid base of simple block chords until both soloists join in a rhapsodic conversation in the tenth measure. A second theme, rich and lyrical, first appears from the violin; it too makes passing reference to the “Rain” rhythm.

The piano enters alone in the *Adagio*. For eight measures it establishes its apparent dominance in the unfolding of a simple but gently emphatic theme before the violin poses its own insinuating strength in a faintly melancholic melody that moves in barely ascending and descending half-tones. Brahms makes effective use of frequent shifts between minor and major modes, evoking a sense of mystery and emotional ambiguity.

The finale, a lyrical rondo marked *Allegro molto moderato*, fully recapitulates the “Rain” motive from the first movement. Brahms presents the theme three times with contrasting episodes, the second of which “borrows” the main theme from the preceding *Adagio* for further comment. The movement ends quietly, bringing the entire work to a pacific musical sunset.

### **Anton Arensky (1861-1906)**

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in D minor, Op. 32 (1894)

Not exactly a household name—even among musically literate households—Anton Arensky’s music has begun to attract an audience concomitant with his talent. It was not always so. His mentor Rimsky-Korsakov summed up his opinion of his former student thusly: “In his youth Arensky did not escape some influence from me; later the influence came from Tchaikovsky. He will quickly be forgotten.” Not exactly a vote of confidence!

Nonetheless, poor maligned Arensky eventually won a gold medal in 1882 from the St. Petersburg Conservatory and became a professor at the Moscow Conservatory where his students included both Rachmaninov and Scriabin.

A number of Arensky’s chamber works have managed to retain a respected place in the chamber repertoire. He composed his first piano trio (of two; the second dates from 1905) in 1894 as a belated memorial tribute to Karl Davidoff, first cellist of the St. Petersburg Opera and director of that city’s famous conservatory, who died in 1889. As befits its composer’s intent, the mood is elegiac and engagingly lyrical, with understandable nods to Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Marked *Allegro moderato—Adagio*, the lovely first movement emerges from the interplay of three song-like themes. An energetic *Scherzo: Allegro molto* ensues, virtuosic and muscular, its prevailing urgency leavened by a sentimental waltz-like Trio section.

The third movement, *Elegia*, clearly serves to memorialize Davidoff and is the emotional heart of the piece. Both the violin and cello are muted, imparting a sad and inward demeanor. The mood, though, is less painfully grieving than fondly reminiscent and personal, and brightens somewhat during the movement’s midsection.

The *Finale: Allegro non troppo—Andante—Adagio—Allegro molto* leaps forward with an optimistic theme that alternates with material recalling the previous movement. Toward the end of the piece, Arensky slows the tempo and reprises the main theme of the first movement before concluding with a vigorous coda.

### **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

Quintet for Piano and Strings in A Major, Op. 81 (1887)

Aided by early support by Brahms, a grateful Antonín Dvořák ultimately became good friends with his slightly older colleague. Each composer respected the other’s music—no great surprise—yet their views on life were strikingly different in elemental ways. Brahms was an agnostic (who nonetheless wrote a moving requiem—as did Verdi, another unbeliever). Dvořák maintained a deeply felt allegiance to the Catholicism of his birth. Both were touched by the currents of nationalism that blew across Europe throughout the 19th century, though neither succumbed to the xenophobia that infected far too many others.

As a young composer on the ascendant, Dvořák felt the sting of prejudice in his fight to get publishers and promoters to use the Czech version of his first name—Antonín—instead of the “preferred” German—Anton. He and his publisher Simrock had a parting of the ways over this flap, though the publisher eventually came around, partly because the composer had become a cash-cow for Simrock’s firm.

Dvořák’s ample chamber music reflects influences from Brahms’ music as well as from the folk music of the Bohemian countryside. Even when strongly Brahmsian, Dvořák infuses the textures with melodic snippets and harmonies unequivocally Czech, and in the midst of his most unbuttoned Czech rusticity, a rigorous formal schema evokes the mental processes of Brahms.

Dvořák’s Op. 81 Piano Quintet, one of the true thoroughbreds among chamber works from the Romantic era, dates from 1887 when he was living on his brother-in-law’s estate at Vysoká, a country village not far from Prague. A work that almost seemed to write itself, it birthed quickly from the crucible of a composer at the height of his powers. The Quintet is charged by sudden mood shifts that parallel his basic personality. Episodes of melancholy yield to buoyant optimism, anxiety to serenity. Such emphatic shifts are readily apparent in the middle section of the first movement, *Allegro ma non tanto*. Sweet and lyrical, a tune for cello over rippling piano morphs into a vehement alternative version that is forcefully articulated by the two violins. Excursions into minor tonalities underscore the volatility of the emotions. The brilliant development section demonstrates Dvořák’s mastery of classic sonata form and variation, no doubt achieved through his intimate knowledge of Brahms’ scores. The movement closes dramatically as the opening theme is further animated by assertive octaves in the piano part.

The ensuing *Dumka*, a Ukrainian song of lament much used by Dvořák, is formally a *Rondo*, where the sad *Dumka* tune serves as the connective link between contrasting episodes. Here, too, the music explores a wealth of moods often achieved by disguising the recurring theme through changes in overall shape, tempo and texture. A brief, very fast central section is a clever permutation of the doleful main theme.

The *Scherzo* makes use of a traditional Czech *Furiant*, a wild dance whose very title captures the essence of its ardor. Of special note is the calm and utterly beguiling Trio, a musical picture of rural charm.

The *Finale* leaps forward with unstoppable fervor, drawing energy from its dotted main theme; a bit of folk-fiddling adds a dash of local color even as the composer transforms this rustic gesture into a learned but vital *Fugato*, another reflection of his Brahmsian inclination. A final ploy surprises us: Dvořák ends the work in a mood of quiet, dreamlike reverie until, that is, a final burst of positive energy in the final half minute.

**Program Notes by  
Steven Lowe**