

January 31, 2026

CONCERT

Sonata Tam Aris À 5, for Trumpet, Violin, 2 Violas & Continuo No. 4 in C Major, C. 117

HEINRICH IGNAZ FRANZ BIBER

Born: 1644

Died: 1704

Composed: 1670–1676

- I. Allegro
- II. Presto
- III. Adagio
- IV. Allegro

Though he is little known to present-day audiences, Heinrich Biber was one of the finest violinists of the seventeenth century and certainly one of its most original composers. Biber learned to play the violin as a boy, and at about age twenty he was taken into the service of the Prince-Bishop of Olomouc, who maintained a good orchestra at his residence at Kroměříž, about one hundred miles north of Vienna. Biber was there for only a few years, for he moved (without permission) to Salzburg in 1670; he would spend the rest of his life in that city, becoming kapellmeister to the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1684, several generations before the Mozart family would serve the same court.

Biber was not just a virtuoso violinist, he was also an explorer. One of the most striking aspects of his writing for the violin was his use of scordatura: the retuning of one or more of the violin's strings so that new chords, resonances, and sounds are possible. In Biber's sonatas, these retunings could sometimes be so complex that they require violinists to exchange the position of the strings of the violin. When this attention to new sonorities is coupled with the virtuosity of Biber's own playing, the results can be quite striking. Biber wrote a great deal of liturgical music, but he was also interested in pictorial music and composed pieces that incorporate the cries of the night watch or the sounds of animals. Paul Hindemith described Biber as "the most important Baroque composer before Bach."

Biber began to publish his music in 1676, shortly after he settled in Salzburg. One of his first publications was a set of twelve sonatas for strings and several of these include parts for one or two trumpets. Biber gave these works the resplendent title *Sonatae tam aris, qual aulis*

servientes: "Sonatas as much for the altar as for the table," which is to say that this music could be used for either liturgical or secular occasions.

The fourth of these concertos, in C Major, is scored for an ensemble of trumpet, violin, two violas, and continuo. The continuo line might consist of any combination of bass instruments, including theorbo, cello, double bass, organ, and others (at this concert, it is undertaken by cello and harpsichord). The Sonata in C Major is concise—spanning only about five minutes—and it features brief sections at contrasting tempos. Biber writes prominent parts for the trumpet and the violin, and some have called this one of the earliest trumpet concertos. Whatever its form, the Sonata in C Major is pleasing music for any occasion, be it in a cathedral, a town hall, or a coffee shop.

Horn Quintet in E-flat Major, K. 407

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born: 1756

Died: 1791

Composed: 1782

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Rondo. Allegro

Mozart wrote this Quintet for Horn and Strings for the Austrian horn player Joseph Leutgeb. The Mozart family had met Leutgeb, a horn virtuoso of the first order, when he played in the Archbishop's orchestra in Salzburg. Leutgeb moved from Salzburg to Vienna at about the same time Mozart did, and he supplemented his meager income as a horn player by opening a cheese shop in a suburb of Vienna. Mozart's father Leopold, who described the shop as being "the size of a snail's house," lent Leutgeb the money to get the cheese shop started.

While Leutgeb was a fine musician, he apparently was a simple person, and Wolfgang pounced on this. While Mozart's sense of humor does not appear to have been cruel, it was seldom restrained by good taste, and the manuscripts of the horn concertos he wrote for Leutgeb are covered with jokes at the player's expense. In the manuscript to the Horn Concerto in D Major, K.412, Mozart wrote (among other things): "Take it easy . . . animal—oh, how flat you play—ouch—oh dear . . . help!—catch your breath! —get going, get going! . . . what a bleating sheep's trill—finished? thank heaven!" To his

credit, Leutgeb bore up under all this, and several years later, when Wolfgang was having financial troubles of his own, Leutgeb was one of those who lent him money.

The Quintet for Horn and Strings, the first work Mozart wrote for Leutgeb, dates from the fall of 1782, in the first months after the composer's marriage to Constanze Weber. The string accompaniment is not the standard quartet, but instead a quartet with one violin, two violas, and a cello. The viola has a range similar to the horn's, and this quintet's sonority emphasizes the mellow middle range of the horn and violas rather than the bright upper register of the violin. The valved horn was not invented until the nineteenth century, and Leutgeb played the natural (valveless) horn, on which the player produced different notes by varying lip pressure or changing the position of his hand in the bell of the instrument. Considering the demands this quintet makes on the horn player, Leutgeb must have been a superb musician.

Full of gentle, amiable music, the Horn Quintet has been compared to a miniature horn concerto: the horn frequently is given a starring role, introducing themes and dominating the ensemble, while the strings accompany it. The strings open the first Allegro with a brief flourish, and the horn quickly enters with the movement's main subject. Horn and violin trade phrases easily in this genial movement, which emphasizes the lyric possibilities of the horn. Longest of the three movements, the Andante offers a graceful partnership between horn and strings, full of sustained lyrical lines. The concluding Allegro is a rondo-finale; its main theme, heard immediately in the strings, bears some relation to the theme of the Andante. This good-natured figure recurs throughout the finale before the Quintet comes to its spirited close on a series of horn fanfares.

Fantasie in F minor, Op. 103, D. 940

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born: 1797

Died: 1828

Composed: 1828

The Fantasie in F minor for Piano Four-Hands is one of the creations of Schubert's miraculous final year of life, which saw a nearly unbroken rush of masterpieces. Schubert wrote most of the Fantasie in January 1828 but ran into problems and set the work aside for several months, returning to complete it in April.

He and his friend Eduard von Bauernfeld gave the first performance on May 9 of that year, six months before the composer's death at age 31.

Music for piano four-hands is a very particular genre,

now unfortunately much out of fashion. In early nineteenth-century Vienna, however, there was a growing market for music that could be played in the home, where there might be only one piano but several pianists, usually amateur musicians. Such music often had an intentionally "social" appeal—it was not especially difficult, and it tended to be pleasing rather than profound. Much of Schubert's four-hand piano music was intended for "home" performers (he often wrote music for his students to play together), but the Fantasie in F minor is altogether different. This work demands first-class performers and contains some of the most wrenching and focused music Schubert ever wrote. Schubert scholar John Reed has gone so far as to call it "a work which in its structural organisation, economy of form, and emotional depth represents his art at its peak."

The title "fantasia" suggests a certain looseness of form, but the Fantasie in F minor is extraordinary for its conciseness. Lasting barely a quarter of an hour, it is in one continuous flow of music that breaks into four clear movements. The very beginning—Allegretto molto moderato—is haunting. Over murmuring accompaniment, the higher voice lays out the wistful first theme, whose halting rhythms and chirping grace notes have caused many to believe that this theme had its origins in Hungarian folk music. Schubert repeats this theme continually—the effect is almost hypnotic—and suddenly the music has slipped effortlessly from F minor into F Major. The second subject, based on firm dotted rhythms, is treated at length before the music drives directly into the powerful Largo, which is given an almost baroque luxuriance by its trills and double (and triple) dotting. This in turn moves directly into the Allegro vivace, a sparkling scherzo that feels like a very fast waltz; its trio section (marked *con delicatezza*) ripples along happily in D Major. The writing for the first pianist here goes so high that much of this section is in the bell-like upper register of the piano—the music rings and shimmers as it races across the keyboard. The final section (Schubert marks it simply *Tempo I*) brings back music from the very beginning, but quickly the wistful opening melody is jostled aside by a vigorous fugue derived from the second subject of the opening section. On tremendous chords and contrapuntal complexity the Fantasie drives to its climax, only to fall away to the quiet close.

Schubert dedicated this music to the Countess Caroline Esterhazy, who ten years before—as a girl of 15—had been one of his piano students. Evidence suggests that Schubert was—from a distance—always thereafter in love with her: to a friend he described her as "a certain attractive star." Given the intensity of this music, it is easy to believe that his love for her remained undiminished in the final year of his life.

String Quartet in F Major

MAURICE RAVEL

Born: 1875

Died: 1937

Composed: 1902–1903

- I. Allegro moderato — Très doux
- II. Assez vif — Très rythmé
- III. Très lent
- IV. Vif et agité

Ravel wrote his only string quartet in 1902–3, while still a student at the Paris Conservatory, and the first performance was given by the Heymann Quartet in Paris on March 5, 1904, two days before the composer's twenty-ninth birthday. Ravel's quartet is in many ways similar to the Debussy quartet, written in 1893—there are parallels between the structure, rhythmic shape, and mood of the two works—but Ravel dedicated his quartet “To my dear teacher Gabriel Fauré,” who was directing Ravel's work at the Conservatory.

One of the most distinctive features of Ravel's quartet is its cyclic deployment of themes: the first movement's two main themes return in various forms in the other three movements, giving the quartet a tight sense of unity. Some have charged that such repetition precludes sufficient thematic variety, but Ravel subtly modifies the color, harmony, and mood of each reappearance of these themes so that from this unity comes enormous variety.

The first movement is marked Allegro moderato, but Ravel specifies that it should also be Très doux (“Very gentle”). The calm first subject is heard immediately in the first violin over a rising accompaniment in the other voices, and this leads—after some spirited extension—to the haunting second theme, announced by the first violin and viola, two octaves apart. The relatively brief development rises to a huge climax—Ravel marks it triple forte—before the movement subsides to close with its opening theme, now gracefully elongated, fading gently into silence.

The second movement, Assez vif—Très rythmé, is a scherzo in ternary form. The opening is a tour de force of purely pizzicato writing that makes the quartet sound like a massive guitar. Some of this movement's rhythmic complexity comes from Ravel's use of multiple meters. The tempo indication is 6/8(3/4), and while the first violin is accented in 3/4 throughout, the other voices are frequently accented in 6/8, with the resulting cross-rhythms giving the music a pleasing vitality. The slow center section is a subtle transformation of the

first movement's second theme. At the conclusion of this section comes one of the quartet's most brilliant passages, the bridge back to the opening material. Here the pizzicato resumes quietly, gathers speed and force, and races upward to launch the return of the movement's opening theme. This is wonderful writing for quartet, and the scherzo drives straight to its explosive pizzicato cadence.

The third movement—Très lent—is in free form, and perhaps the best way to understand this movement is to approach it as a rhapsody based loosely on themes from the first movement. Beneath these themes Ravel sets a rhythmic cell of three notes that repeats constantly, but it remains an accompaniment figure rather than becoming an active thematic participant. The movement's impression of freedom results in no small part from its frequent changes of both key and meter.

After the serene close of the third movement, the fourth—Agité—leaps almost abrasively to life. Agitated it certainly is, an effect that comes from its steadily-driving double-stroked passages, and this mood continues across the span of the movement. The basic metric unit here is the rapid 5/8 heard at the beginning, though Ravel changes meter frequently, with excursions into 3/4 and 5/4. Once again, material from the first movement returns, and after several lyric interludes the finale takes on once again the aggressive mood of its opening and powers its way to the close.

Ravel's quartet generated a mixed reaction at its premiere in 1904. One of those most critical was the dedicatee, Gabriel Fauré, who was especially bothered by the unorthodox finale, which he thought “stunted, badly balanced, in fact a failure.” But when Ravel, troubled by such criticism, turned to Debussy for his estimation, the latter offered the best possible response: “In the name of the gods of Music and for my sake personally, do not touch a note of what you have written.”

Program notes by Eric Bromberger