

July 24, 2025

PRE-CONCERT RECITAL

Cello Sonata in F Major, Op. 6

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born: 1864

Died: 1949

Composed: 1880–1883

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Andante ma non troppo
- III. Finale. Allegro vivo

One of the most prodigiously gifted composers in history, Strauss wrote his first work at 6 and had another composition published by Breitkopf and Härtel at 17. But his doting father, the principal horn player in the Munich opera orchestra, insisted that young Richard have a thorough, and quite conservative, training. And so, while wildmen like Wagner and Liszt may have been the fashion, the boy was taught to revere Mozart and to accept classical forms and principles. Strauss would never lose his love of Mozart, but he would put classical forms behind him when he launched into the series of tone poems that burned his name across the sky when he was 24.

Until that time, however, the young man struggled to master the forms his father held so dear: among his early compositions are symphonies, marches, and serenades. During these same years he took on the more demanding discipline of chamber music, completing a String Quartet when he was 16, a Piano Quartet at 20, and the famous Violin Sonata at 22. Among these chamber compositions was a Cello Sonata, begun in 1880 (when Strauss was 16) and completed in 1883, while the composer was a 19-year-old student at the University of Munich. The Cello Sonata unites classical form with a young man's passion: this sonata is in classical three-movement form, but at moments it demands a virtuosity that looks ahead to the mature Strauss.

CONCERT

Three Madrigals for Violin and Viola, H. 313

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

Born: 1890

Died: 1959

Composed: 1947

- I. Poco allegro — Poco vivo
- II. Poco andante — Andante moderato
- III. Allegro — Moderato — Allegro vivo

We remember Bohuslav Martinů as one of the greatest Czech composers of the twentieth century, yet Martinů spent very little time in his Czech homeland, choosing instead to live as an exile in Paris, the United States, Italy, and Switzerland. Martinů had his early training in Prague, and he became a good enough violinist to join the Czech Philharmonic. But he sought a richer environment, and in 1923 he moved to Paris, which would be his home for the next seventeen years. The Nazi occupation drove Martinů to flee to the United States, where he spent the next decade. Martinů found life in the United States alien, but he was welcomed here as a composer: he taught at leading music schools, and the symphonies he composed in the United States were premiered by the Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, and Philadelphia Orchestra. At the end of World War II Martinů hoped to return to Czechoslovakia, but the communist takeover there eventually made that impossible. In the meantime, he suffered a catastrophic accident.

Invited by Koussevitzky to teach at Tanglewood in 1946, Martinů was enjoying his summer there when on the evening of July 25 he stepped off an un-railed balcony in the dark and fell a story to the concrete driveway below, crushing part of his skull and spinal cord. He was unconscious for two days and in the hospital for five weeks. His recovery was slow: he suffered from headaches and dizziness, and he had to re-learn to walk. He could not travel, so could not return to Prague. Instead, he moved to New York, where he tried to recover his strength and his health. Martinů was usually the fastest of workers, but now his pace slowed, and over the next several years he composed primarily for chamber ensembles. Perhaps the smaller scale and

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more personal nature of chamber music offered the composer the best avenue of expression during these difficult years.

While he was recovering, Martinů heard the brother-and-sister duo Lillian and Joseph Fuchs perform Mozart's Duos for Violin and Viola, and—inspired by their playing and by Mozart's writing for those two instruments—he composed his Three Madrigals for Violin and Viola in December 1947 in New York City. The title “madrigal” may seem a strange one for purely instrumental music, but Martinů was particularly fond of English madrigals and their polyphonic writing, and he used that title for some of his choral works and for a number of instrumental pieces as well. But listeners should not expect Martinů's Three Madrigals to sound like Mozart or like English madrigals. This is very much Martinů's own music, full of driving energy and requiring two first-class performers who must master such challenges as complex double-stopping, wide skips across the range of their instruments, and rapid exchanges.

The opening Poco allegro is a sonata-form movement based on its firm propulsive opening and a falling second subject. The development is extremely animated, and the movement drives to its close on a coda marked Poco vivo. The sound-world of this music changes completely in the second movement. Martinů mutes both instruments here, and they produce a shimmering sonority, full of trills and swirling motion. Mutes come off for the second half of the movement, marked Andante moderato; this lovely slow section draws the movement to a quiet conclusion. The brilliant finale, marked simply Allegro, is full of busy energy. Along the way, Martinů generates a huge sound with both instruments playing double-stops and pressing forward dramatically. A brief Moderato episode brings a measure of calm before the opening tempo resumes, and the movement races to its close on ever-quicker tempos.

Martinů completed the Three Madrigals in December 1947, and the Fuchs duo had to learn it very quickly. They gave the premiere in New York City on December 22 of that month.

String Quartet No. 1 in E minor “From My Life”

BEDŘICH SMETANA

Born: 1824

Died: 1884

Composed: 1876

- I. Allegro vivo appassionato
- II. Allegro moderato alla polka
- III. Largo sostenuto
- IV. Vivace

Smetana's life is a story of triumph and tragedy. Though he is acclaimed by all as the father of Czech music, a composer whose operas and symphonic poems on Czech subjects blazed the way for Dvořák, Janáček, and generations of Czech composers to come, Smetana's personal life was full of tragedy, and his death was appalling. He had four daughters, and three of them died in early childhood. Weakened by grief, Smetana's wife died a very young woman. Smetana himself became aware of frightening changes in his own health about age 50. He began to hear a piercing noise inside his head, and this was soon followed by a rushing sound—he described it as the noise of standing under a waterfall—and later the sound of breaking sticks. He went completely deaf and began to suffer hallucinations; these symptoms—the result of syphilis—eventually gave way to insanity, and Smetana died in an asylum in Prague at age 60.

Late in life, and working with great difficulty, Smetana composed two string quartets. The first of these—written in 1876, shortly after he had resigned from all of his musical positions because of his deafness—is autobiographical, as its subtitle “From My Life” makes explicit. Smetana supplied an elaborate program for this music, and it is clear that he intended that this quartet should tell the story of his life.

The Allegro vivo appassionato opens with a long viola theme that Smetana identified with the “love of art in my youth, my romantic mood, the unspoken longing for something which I could not name or imagine clearly”; at another point, he called this figure “a warning as it were of my future misery.” If the first movement is about the composer's love of music and art, the second, marked Allegro moderato alla Polka, tells of another of his loves—dancing. As a young man, Smetana had loved to dance (his wife-to-be had been one of his earliest partners) and for several years he

wrote dance music almost exclusively. Smetana said that the *Largo sostenuto* recalled “the happiness of my first love for the girl who later became my faithful wife.” A long cello solo opens this movement, and the first violin announces the second theme of this moving love song, which seems at times like an extended lullaby.

The finale, marked *Vivace*, is astonishing. It sounds very “Czech”—full of folk-like tunes and high spirits—and at first it seems a conventional closing movement; Smetana identified this music with “knowledge of how to make use of the element of national music, joy at the outcome of following this path.” But near the end, these high spirits come shuddering to a stop, and out of that silence comes the violin’s screaming high E, the “piercing whistle” that to Smetana signaled the beginning of his deafness and deterioration. Over the next few moments, Smetana brings back themes from the earlier movements, but these nostalgic reminiscences cannot take hold, and gradually they disintegrate, leaving the quartet to vanish on three quiet pizzicato strokes. It is a stunning conclusion to one of the most moving quartets ever written.

Piano Trio No. 6 in E-flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: 1770

Died: 1827

Composed: 1808

- I. Poco sostenuto — Allegro ma non troppo
- II. Allegretto
- III. Allegretto ma non troppo
- IV. Finale. Allegro

During the years 1807–08, Beethoven composed some of his most dramatic orchestral music. From early 1807 came the *Coriolan Overture*, the *Mass in C Major* was composed that summer, and during the fall and winter Beethoven was occupied with the *Fifth Symphony*. Once the *Fifth* was complete, he proceeded immediately to the *Sixth Symphony* and worked on that through the summer of 1808. With these mighty works behind him, Beethoven appears to have needed a break. He took leave of orchestral music and turned to the intimate realm of chamber music, composing the two piano trios of *Opus 70* and a cello sonata in the fall of 1808; the “Harp” Quartet followed the next year. Beethoven dedicated the two trios of *Opus 70* to Countess Anna Maria Erdödy and took part in performances of them at her home during the Christmas season in 1808.

The second of the piano trios, in E-flat Major, has been much admired, and with good reason. Some have claimed that in this trio Beethoven consciously wrote thematic material in the manner of Haydn and Mozart and then treated it in his own mature style—the music thus combines the elegance and restraint of an earlier era with Beethoven’s own powerful sense of form and musical evolution. Beyond this, the music is distinctive for its gentleness and for Beethoven’s many structural innovations.

The first movement opens with a stately and poised *Poco sostenuto* introduction, with the three instruments making terraced entrances. This reaches a moment of repose, and violin and cello announce the leaping, graceful main theme of the *Allegro ma non troppo*, which is soon followed by a flowing second idea. The development, marked by a series of swirling trills from all three instruments, is exceptionally gentle, and Beethoven continually reminds the performers that their playing should be *dolce*. The ending is remarkable: instead of a mighty recapitulation, Beethoven brings back the music of the introduction, and the *Allegro* theme gradually dissolves as the movement comes to its quiet close.

Beethoven’s choice of tempos for the inner movements is surprising: instead of making a defined contrast between a slow movement and a fast one, he instead writes two *Allegretto* movements. The hopping four-note figure heard in the piano at the very beginning of the first *Allegretto* will dominate this genial movement, either whispered in the background, stamped out vigorously, or simply implied. The third movement is marked *Allegretto ma non troppo*, and Beethoven’s performance markings are noteworthy: once again he constantly reminds all three instruments to play *dolce*, and at some points his dynamic indication is *ppp*, a marking he rarely used. The form of this movement is quite original: it is built on its flowing opening idea and a chordal melody offered as statement—and-answer by strings and piano; Beethoven simply alternates these sections as the movement proceeds. Particularly striking here is the contrast between the elegant string lines and the harmonic pungency of the piano’s transition passages. The seemingly easy-going *Finale: Allegro*, in sonata form, is built on a wealth of quite different ideas; Beethoven gradually pulls these together in the lengthy coda.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger