JANUARY 24, 2025

Romance for Violin and Piano, Op. 23

AMY BEACH

Born: 1867
Died: 1944
Composed: 1893

Sometimes a piece of music is inextricably linked with a particular performer, and such is the case with Amy Beach's *Romance for Violin and Piano*—she wrote it for the violinist Maud Powell. Powell has been described as "the first great American woman violinist," but more accurately she was "the first great American violinist." She was also a powerful force advocating for women in classical music. Born in a rural town in Illinois in 1867, she quickly showed such promise as a violinist that her family sold their property to underwrite her training. She studied with Henry Shradieck in Leipzig, with Charles Dancla in Paris, and finally with Joseph Joachim in Berlin. Powell gave the American premieres of the violin concertos of Tchaikovsky and Sibelius, as well as the American premiere of Dvorak's *Violin Concerto* under the supervision of the composer; she also appeared as soloist with the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Gustav Mahler. Powell championed music by women and minority composers, including Beach and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and she made a number of recordings for the Victor Talking Machine Company. Those recordings, readily available on YouTube, make clear how fine a violinist she was.

Powell was responsible for assembling the Women's Musical Congress for the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, during which she encouraged young American women to make their careers as violinists, a field then dominated by men. Beach wrote her *Romance for Violin and Piano* specifically for Powell and for this occasion, and the two of them gave the first performance at the Fair on July 6. The audience responded so enthusiastically that the entire piece had to be encored; during the second performance, the violin part fell off Powell's music stand, but she completed the piece from memory.

In music, a romance does not have specific formal meaning—it refers generally to a piece of music of expressive character. Beach's *Romance* opens with a brief piano introduction that hints at the shape of the piece's main theme. The violin quickly takes up that gentle rising-and-falling shape and soars with it. Sometimes the writing is gentle and expressive, but at other moments this music soars into the violin's highest register and blazes with intensity—at one point in the score, Beach asks that the playing be *con passione*. Eventually this animation subsides, the yearning character of the opening theme returns, and the *Romance* fades into silence on the violin's quietly sustained high C-sharp.

Trois Morceaux, Op. 31

CÉCILE CHAMINADE

Born: 1857
Died: 1944
Composed: 1885

I. Andantino
II. Romanza. Andante
III. Bohémienne. Allegretto

In a world that has been most unwelcoming to female composers, Cecile Chaminade was one of the first women composers to achieve international success. The child of musical parents, Chaminade learned to play the piano as a child, began composing at age 8, and embarked on the first of her many tours as a pianist at 18. She made repeated visits to England and even performed in the United States, where "Chaminade Clubs" were created to play and hear her music. Chaminade was a vastly prolific composer—she wrote over 400 works—and she did not work in obscurity. She was the first woman composer to be awarded the Legion of Honor, in 1913, and she was a financial success as well: her *Scarf Dance* reportedly sold over five million copies. But music in the twentieth century passed Chaminade by, and most of her compositions have suffered the faint praise of being labeled "salon music": tuneful, agreeable, not very difficult, and intended for domestic performance. By the time of her death at age 86, Chaminade's music had virtually disappeared from concert life.

Though she composed mostly for piano, Chaminade also wrote an opera, several works for orchestra, and chamber music, including two piano trios. She composed her *Trois Morceaux* in 1887, just as she turned 30. These three short pieces are beautifully written for the piano and for the violin: not only was Chaminade a superb pianist, but she also played the violin quite well. Generally in three-part form, the three pieces do not require detailed comment. The gentle opening section of the *Andantino* gives way to a central episode marked dolce, and a return to the opening material concludes very quietly (Chaminade's marking here is *dolcissimo*). The *Romanza* takes its character from the violin's opening theme, though when this returns after the center section, it has become more extroverted. The

concluding *Bohémienne* is the most virtuosic of the three movements, and it demonstrates Chaminade's thorough understanding of the violin—it is full of doublestopping, fast runs, pizzicato passages, and great leaps across the violin's range. An *Allegro* coda brings the piece to a nicely understated conclusion.

String Quintet in F minor

ALEXANDER BORODIN

Born: 1833
Died: 1887
Composed: 1853-54

I. Allegro con brio
II. Andante ma non troppo
III. Menuetto
IV. Finale. Prestissimo

Alexander Borodin led a sharply divided life. By profession he was a physician and research chemist who later helped found a medical school for women; his work on aldehydes was groundbreaking in its day and is still cited. But his passionate hobby was music, and he spent what little free time he had trying to compose: he once said that he had time to compose only when he was sick, and his friends—knowing this—would playfully wish him ill health so that he could spend more time with music. This combination of passions made for a very intense and productive life, and unfortunately a short one: Borodin died of a sudden heart attack while attending a fancy dress ball at age 53.

Borodin entered the Medico-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg at age 17 and spent his days studying to become a doctor. But his spare time went to music, and he soon joined a group of young musical enthusiasts in St. Petersburg organized by his friend Ivan Gavrushkevich. There Borodin was a passionate listener and sometimes a performer: Borodin was an amateur cellist, and occasionally participated in performances. It was during these years as a medical student that Borodin composed his *String Quintet in F minor*—he was 20 years old, and he never quite finished the piece. He came back and revised it in 1859, but when he set aside the manuscript, he apparently still intended to make changes, and he had not completed the coda of the finale. And thus the manuscript sat for a century until the Russian musicologist O. A. Yevlachov "completed" the final movement and published the *Quintet* in 1960.

Borodin's *Quintet* is scored for string quartet plus an additional cellist, which is the same instrumentation of Schubert's great *String Quintet* of 1828. Perhaps some of Borodin's intention was to compose a chamber work in which he could participate as the "extra" cellist, though there is no record of any performance during Borodin's lifetime. In any case, the dominant influence on this music is not Schubert, but Mendelssohn, and listeners will sense that influence in the flowing melodic lines and high energy of Borodin's *Quintet*. This music is all the more remarkable for having been written by a 20-year-old who composed it in his spare time, even as he was struggling to learn how to compose (and how to become a doctor).

The *Quintet* is in four movements that span nearly half an hour. The opening *Allegro con brio*, longest of the four movements, is in the expected sonata form, based on two themes. The first of these is shared by the first violin and first cello, which will be the leading voices throughout the *Quintet*; the second theme, a sturdy rising figure, is announced by the cellos. The development is long and animated, and the young composer springs a nice surprise at the end: after all this energy, the movement winks out on a quiet coda played entirely pizzicato.

The *Andante ma non troppo* is in variation form, with the lovely principal melody shared again by first cello and first violin. Borodin was reportedly planning to add further variations to this movement, but did not get around to doing that. A minuet leads to the vigorous *Finale*, full of driving energy: Borodin marks it *Prestissimo* and specifies that it should be played *marcato*. Along the way come gentler moments, including a calm, lyric episode near the end. Borodin's manuscript lacks the end of this movement, but Yevlachov's completion is based on Borodin's own material and sounds reasonably authentic.

Perhaps Borodin's complete manuscript will show up some day. For the moment, the published version gives some sense of how fabulously talented its 20-year-old composer was, even if he could only work on music in his few spare moments.

Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born: 1833
Died: 1897
Composed: 1864

I. Allegro non troppo
II. Andante, un poco adagio
III. Scherzo. Allegro
IV. Finale. Poco sostenuto — Allegro non troppo

Brahms began work on the music that would eventually become his *Piano Quintet in F minor* during the summer of 1862, when he was 29 years old and still living in Hamburg. As first conceived, however, this music was not a piano quintet. Brahms originally composed it as

a string quintet—string quartet plus an extra cello—and almost surely he took as a model the great *String Quintet in C Major* of Schubert, a composer he very much admired. But when Joseph Joachim and colleagues played through the string quintet for the composer, all who heard it felt it unsatisfactory: an ensemble of strings alone could not satisfactorily project the power of this music. So Brahms set out to remedy this—he returned to the score during the winter of 1863–64 and recast it as a sonata for two pianos. Once again the work was judged not wholly successful—it had all the power the music called for, but this version lacked the sustained sonority possible with strings that much of this music seemed to demand. Among those confused by the two-piano version was Clara Schumann, who offered the young composer a completely different suggestion: "Its skillful combinations are interesting throughout, it is masterly from every point of view, but—it is not a sonata, but a work whose ideas you might—and must—scatter, as from a horn of plenty, over an entire orchestra . . . Please, dear Johannes, for this once take my advice and recast it."

Recast it Brahms did, but not for orchestra. Instead, during the summer and fall of 1864 he arranged it for piano and string quartet, combining the dramatic impact of the two-piano version with the string sonority of the original quintet. In this form it has come down to us today, one of the masterpieces of Brahms' early years, and it remains a source of wonder that music that sounds so *right* in its final version could have been conceived for any other combination of instruments. Clara, who had so much admired her husband's piano quintet, found Brahms' example a worthy successor, describing it as "a very special joy to me" (Brahms published the two-piano version as his Opus 34b, and it is occasionally heard in this form, but he destroyed all the parts of the string quintet version).

The *Piano Quintet* shows the many virtues of the young Brahms—strength, lyricism, ingenuity, nobility—and presents them in music of unusual breadth and power. This is big music: if all the repeats are taken, the *Quintet* can stretch out to nearly three-quarters of an hour, and there are moments when the sheer sonic heft of a piano and string quartet together makes one understand why Clara thought this music might be most effectively presented by a symphony orchestra.

The *Quintet* is also remarkable for young Brahms' skillful evolution of his themes: several of the movements derive much of their material from the simplest of figures, which are then developed ingeniously. The very beginning of the *Allegro non troppo* is a perfect illustration. In octaves, first violin, cello, and piano present the opening theme, which ranges dramatically across four measures and then comes to a brief pause. Instantly the music seems to explode with vitality above an agitated piano figure. But the piano's rushing sixteenth-notes are simply a restatement of the opening theme at a much faster tempo, and this compression of material marks the entire movement—that opening theme will reappear in many different forms. A second subject in E Major, marked *dolce* and sung jointly by viola and cello, also spins off a wealth of secondary material, and the extended development leads to a quiet coda, marked *poco sostenuto*. The tempo quickens as the music powers its way to the resounding chordal close.

In sharp contrast, the *Andante*, *un poco Adagio* sings with a quiet charm. The piano's gently-rocking opening theme, lightly echoed by the strings, gives way to a more animated and flowing middle section before the opening material reappears, now subtly varied. Matters change sharply once again with the C-minor *Scherzo*, which returns to the dramatic mood of the first movement. The cello's ominous pizzicato C hammers insistently throughout, and once again Brahms wrings surprising wealth from the simplest of materials: a nervous, stuttering sixteenth-note figure is transformed within seconds into a heroic chorale for massed strings, and later Brahms generates a brief fugal section from this same theme. The trio section breaks free of the darkness of the scherzo and slips into C-Major sunlight for an all-too-brief moment of quiet nobility before the music returns to C minor and a da capo repeat.

The finale opens with strings alone, reaching upward in chromatic uncertainty before the *Allegro non troppo* main theme steps out firmly in the cello. The movement seems at first to be a rondo, but this is a rondo with unexpected features: it offers a second theme, sets the rondo theme in unexpected keys, and transforms the cello's healthy little opening tune in music of toughness and turbulence.

Clara Schumann, who had received the dedication of her husband's quintet, was instrumental in the dedication of Brahms'. Princess Anna of Hesse had heard Brahms and Clara perform this music in its version for two pianos and was so taken with it that Brahms dedicated not only that version to the princess but the *Piano Quintet* as well. When the princess asked Clara what she might send Brahms as a measure of her gratitude, Clara had a ready suggestion. And so Princess Anna sent Brahms a treasure that would remain his prized possession for the rest of his life: Mozart's manuscript of the *Symphony No. 40 in G minor*.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger

JANUARY 25, 2025

Violin Sonata No. 1 in A minor, Op. 105
ROBERT SCHUMANN

Born: 1810
Died: 1856
Composed: 1851

I. Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck
II. Allegretto
III. Lebhaft

Schumann's relation with the violin was never wholly comfortable. A pianist, Schumann found the prospect of writing for stringed instruments intimidating, and he appears to have been threatened most of all by the violin–he wrote a number of pieces of chamber music for viola and for cello before he was finally willing to face writing for the violin. Then that music came in a rush–during the final years of his brief creative career Schumann wrote three violin sonatas, a violin concerto, and a fantasy for violin and orchestra.

The *Violin Sonata in A minor* was the first of these. Schumann composed it very quickly—between September 12 and 16, 1851—during a period of personal stress. The previous year he had become music director for the city of Düsseldorf, and by the time he wrote this sonata his tenure there had already become mired in clashes with local authorities and in his own suspicions of plots against him. Schumann himself reported that when he wrote this sonata, he was "very angry with certain people," though the music should not be understood as a personal reaction to artistic squabbles. Instead, Schumann's first engagement with the violin produced a compact sonata in classical forms.

The sonata is in three movements that offer Schumann's customary mixture of German and Italian performance markings. The opening *Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck* ("With passionate expression") bursts to life with the violin's forceful, surging main idea over the piano's shimmer of constant sixteenths. This busy motion is punctuated by great swooping flourishes that lead to gentle secondary material; it is the opening theme, however, that dominates the development, and Schumann rounds off the movement with a lengthy coda that drives to a dramatic close.

Relief arrives in the central *Allegretto*, which treats the violin's innocent opening melody in rondo form. Tempos fluctuate throughout, with the music pulsing ahead, then reining back; some of these episodes become animated before the movement winks out on two pizzicato strokes. Marked *Lebhaft* ("Lively"), the finale returns to the tonality and mood of the opening movement. The violin's steady rush of sixteenth notes makes this feel at first like a perpetual-motion movement, but it is in fact another sonata-form movement, complete with a jaunty little secondary tune and an exposition repeat. This movement shows subtle points of contact with the first movement that run beyond their joint key of A minor and impassioned mood: the rhythm of the sonata's opening theme underlies much of the finale, and near the close that theme actually makes a fleeting appearance. But the finale's forceful main subject quickly shoulders this aside and drives the sonata to an almost superheated close.

Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 1
SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR

Born: 1875
Died: 1912
Composed: 1893

I. Allegro con moto
II. Larghetto
III. Scherzo
IV. Allegro molto

Born in London, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was the son of an Englishwoman and a doctor from Sierra Leone. His father, a descendant of slaves from North America, returned to Africa before Samuel was born, and his mother named the child after the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, reversing the poet's final two names in the process. Samuel was raised by his mother and her family, who were quite musical: they taught him to play the violin and encouraged him to make a career in music. So talented was Samuel that at age 15 he entered the Royal College of Music, where he studied with Charles Villiers Stanford. After graduation, he supported himself by composing, conducting, and teaching.

Coleridge-Taylor was very interested in his heritage as the descendant of African American slaves, and he dedicated himself to improving the condition of people of African descent everywhere. He made three extended tours of the United States, where he became acquainted with African American and Native American music, and he would eventually incorporate some of this into his own music. While in the United States he conducted the United States Marine Band and was invited to the White House by Theodore Roosevelt. Coleridge-Taylor composed three cantatas based on Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, and the first of these, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, became immensely popular in both England and the United States, though performances today are rare. He was a prolific

composer, but he died at age 37 of pneumonia that was partly the result of overwork.

Coleridge-Taylor composed his *Piano Quintet in G minor* in 1893, when he was an 18-year-old student at the Royal College of Music in London. The young composer himself was the pianist at the premiere on July 6, 1893, on a concert that was made up entirely of his works. This music earned rave reviews, and then it disappeared for a century. Coleridge-Taylor listed it has his Opus 1—his first official work—but the next known performance did not take place until 2001, after the individual parts were discovered in the archives of the Royal College of Music and the score was reconstructed from them.

The *Piano Quintet* is fully characteristic of the young Coleridge-Taylor: it has memorable themes (he had a remarkable melodic gift), it overflows with energy, and it is full of subtle harmonic shifts. The *Allegro con moto* almost explodes to life: it opens with big chords, and instantly the strings—playing in octaves—sound the bold first theme in unison. It is a most impressive beginning, and while gentler secondary material soon arrives, the energy level will remain high, both here and throughout the *Quintet*. An active development and full recapitulation power this movement to its firm conclusion.

The *Larghetto*, set in 3/8, opens with a brief duet for cello and piano before the rest of the strings enter. This movement is notable for its excursions into unexpected keys, all of them accomplished very gracefully. Though it begins as a lyric slow interlude, this *Larghetto* is full of an abundance of energy, and it drives to a powerful climax.

The *Scherzo* is similarly hard-driving, but its trio section brings a welcome moment of relaxation—it rocks along comfortably before the da capo repeat of the opening. The *Finale* goes back to the manner of the first movement: strings in octaves sound the opening idea, and the music becomes unusually conflicted. And then—a complete change: things come to a stop, and Coleridge-Taylor offers a spirited fugue on a subject derived from the trio section of the previous movement. This builds to a climax, and the *Quintet* whips to its close on a brief coda marked *Con fuoco* ("with fire").

String Quartet No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11, "Accordion"

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born: 1840
Died: 1893
Composed: 1871

I. Moderato e semplice
II. Andante cantabile
III. Scherzo. Allegro non tanto e con fuoco
IV. Finale. Allegro giusto

In the summer of 1869, Tchaikovsky—then a 29-year-old professor at the Moscow Conservatory—made an extended visit to his family's summer estate in Kamenka in the Ukraine. There he spent a relaxed summer with his sister and brother-in-law, and there he came in contact with the folk-music of the region. This would show up in his own music three years later when he incorporated some of these folk-themes in his *Second Symphony*, known as the *"Little Russian"* ("Little Russia" was the somewhat imperial Russian nickname for the Ukraine). But another tune from the region showed up more quickly in his own music.

While in Kamenka, Tchaikovsky overheard a workman–a carpenter or a baker (accounts vary)—whistling a haunting melody that was sung with the words "Vanya sat on the divan and smoked a pipe of tobacco." Back in Moscow two years later, Tchaikovsky planned a concert of his own music as a way of supplementing his faculty income. For that occasion he composed his *First String Quartet*, and as he worked on the quartet Tchaikovsky remembered the tune he had heard whistled in Kamenka. He used it as the principal theme of the quartet's slow movement, which he marked *Andante cantabile*, and that little tune would go on to become one of the most popular melodies in history.

The *Quartet in D Major* is in traditional forms–sonata-form outer movements and ternary-form inner movements—and some have suggested that in this music Tchaikovsky was striving to demonstrate that he could handle classical structures. The opening *Moderato e semplice* is built largely on two ideas: a chordal opening and a slightly-swung second subject. Tchaikovsky subjects both themes to an energetic development, and the movement drives to a vigorous close.

In the *Andante cantabile* muted strings play the workman's haunting tune, which alternates measures of 3/4 and 2/4. This gives way to a graceful (and equally lyric) middle section, announced in the quartet by the

first violin over pizzicato accompaniment. The main theme returns, apparently to round matters off, but Tchaikovsky appends a reminiscence of the center section before the music fades into silence.

The D-minor scherzo, marked *Allegro non tanto*, powers ahead on a firmly-dotted 3/8 meter. In its trio section, the upper voices dance above a murmuring cello bassline; a recall of the opening section leads to the sudden close. The *Allegro giusto* finale is in sonata form, with a first theme that eventually soars and a more lyric second idea announced by the viola; once again, Tchaikovsky's development is full of energy. The music draws to an unexpected silence, then races to its close on a coda that is almost orchestral in its excitement.

Tchaikovsky's concert—presented at the Moscow Conservatory on March 28, 1871—was a great success, and its slow movement was the sensation of the evening: the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev, who was in the audience, was moved to tears by it. Tchaikovsky would eventually understand that the string quartet was not a medium well-suited to his expressive needs, and he would do his best work in the ballet and the concert hall. The *Andante cantabile*, however, achieved international fame, particularly in Tchaikovsky's own arrangement of it for string orchestra. This concert allows listeners the opportunity to hear the string quartet that was the original setting for that famous movement.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger

JANUARY 26, 2025

Cypresses for String Quartet, B. 152

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born: 1841
Died: 1904
Composed: 1865

I. I know that on my love to thee
II. Death reigns in many a human breast
VIII. In deepest forest glade I stand
XI. Nature lies peaceful in slumber and dreaming
IX. Thou only dear one, but for thee

In 1865 Dvořák, then 24 years old and living in Prague, took several students to help support himself. He fell in love with one of them—Josefa Čermáková, the daughter of a goldsmith—and for her he wrote a cycle of eighteen songs on texts by the Moravian poet Gustav Pfleger. This cycle of songs, which Dvořák called *Cypresses* (or *Evening Songs*), was not a great success. Dvořák's biographer Karel Hoffmeister described Pfleger's texts as "somewhat tearful and effeminate," Dvořák neither published the cycle nor assigned it an opus number, and the young lady had no interest at all in the composer. But the experience appears not to have been a total loss, for Dvořák eventually married Josefa's sister Anna. The composer remained close to Josefa, and her death thirty years later caused him to rewrite the closing moments of his *Cello Concerto* in her memory, inserting a passage that contains some of the most beautiful, moving music ever written.

If *Cypresses* in its original form had little success, it is remarkable how this music seems to have haunted Dvořák throughout his life. He drew four songs from the cycle and published them immediately as his Opus 2; he revised eight more and published them as *Love Songs, Opus 83* in 1888; he used a melody from another in an aria in his little-known opera *King and Collier*; he used another as one of his *Silhouettes*, a set of twelve piano pieces published in 1879; and, as noted, he used a theme from yet another in his *Cello Concerto* of 1895.

But it was in 1887, when he was 45, that Dvořák made the most significant use of his early cycle. In the space of one month that spring (April 21–May 21) he arranged twelve of the songs for string quartet. Though he did not publish this arrangement (it did not appear until 1921, nearly twenty years after his death), Dvořák took great pains with the string version: he rearranged the order of the songs and gave most of the melodic material to either the first violin or the viola (his own instrument). The result is a set of lyric miniatures for string quartet, a cycle of twelve brief pieces that might almost be called quartet-songs. Almost unknown to modern audiences, the set of *Cypresses* is not just a charming addition to the quartet literature but offers continuing life to music that remained important to its composer throughout his own life.

Violin Sonata No. 1 in D minor, Op. 75

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Born: 1835
Died: 1921
Composed: 1885

I. Allegro agitato — Adagio
II. Allegretto moderato — Allegro molto

Saint-Saëns wrote his *First Violin Sonata* in 1885. At age 50, he was at the height of his powers. In that same year he wrote his *Wedding Cake Waltz*, and the following year he would write two of his most famous works: the *"Organ" Symphony* and the *Carnival of the Animals*. Although Saint-Saëns did not play the violin, he clearly understood the instrument–already he had written three violin concertos and the famous *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*; the *Havanaise* would follow two years later.

The structure of the sonata is unusual. It has four movements, but the first and second are connected, as are the third and fourth, dividing the sonata into two extended parts. Saint-Saëns' marking for the opening movement—*Allegro agitato*—is important, for this truly is agitated music. Beneath its quiet surface, the movement feels constantly restless. Its opening theme, a rocking tune for violin, alternates meters, slipping between 6/8 and 9/8; perhaps some of the music's air of restlessness comes from its failure to settle into a constant meter. The lyric second idea—a long, falling melody for violin—brings some relief, and the dramatic development treats both these themes. While the second movement is marked *Adagio*, it shares the restless mood of the first. The piano has the quiet main theme, but the music seems to be in continuous motion before coming to a quiet close.

The agreeable *Allegretto moderato* is the sonata's scherzo. It dances gracefully, skittering easily between G Major and G minor. At the center section, the violin has a haunting chorale tune over quietly-cascading piano arpeggios; as the movement comes to its close, Saint-Saëns skillfully twines together the chorale and the dancing opening theme and presents them simultaneously. Out of this calm, the concluding *Allegro molto* suddenly explodes—the violin takes off on the flurry of sixteenth-notes that will propel the finale on

its dynamic way. This is by far the most extroverted of the movements, and it holds a number of surprises: a declamatory second theme high in the violin's register and later a brief reminiscence of the lyric second theme of the opening movement. At the end, Saint-Saëns brings back the rush of sixteenth notes, and the sonata races to a close so brilliant that one almost expects to see sparks flying through the hall.

Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 14

CÉSAR FRANCK

Born: 1822
Died: 1890
Composed: 1878-79

I. Molto moderato, quasi lento
II. Lento, con molto sentimento
III. Allegro non troppo ma con fuoco

Few works in the chamber music literature have produced so violent a reaction at their premieres as the *Piano Quintet* of César Franck. Franck, then 57 and a professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory, had written no chamber music for over 25 years when the *Piano Quintet* burst to life before an unsuspecting audience in Paris on January 17, 1880. Few in that audience expected music so explosive from a man known as the gentle composer of church music. Franck's students were wildly enthusiastic, and a later performance is reported to have left the audience stunned into silence, some of them weeping openly. But the acclaim was not universal. Franck had intended to dedicate this music to Camille Saint-Saëns, the pianist at the premiere, but when he approached Saint-Saëns after the performance to offer him the personally-inscribed manuscript, Saint-Saëns is reported to have made a face, thrown the manuscript on the piano, and walked away. Franck's wife hated the *Quintet* and refused to attend performances.

There appear to have been non-musical reasons for these reactions. Four years earlier, a twenty-year-old woman named Augusta Holmès had begun to study composition with Franck. She moved easily in the musical and literary circles of Paris. A striking figure, she attracted the attention and admiration of most of the leading musical figures of the late eighteenth-century, including Wagner, Liszt, Rimsky-Korsakov, and many others. Saint-Saëns, whose proposal of marriage she rejected, confessed that "We were all in love with her." Holmès (she added the accent to the family name) composed on a grand scale: among her works are four operas (she wrote the librettos for all her operas), symphonies, symphonic poems, choral music, and songs.

The details of the relationship between Holmès and her teacher remain unclear, but the premiere of Franck's Piano Quintet apparently brought matters to a head. The general feeling was that the mild-mannered Franck had made clear his love for Augusta in this music, and both his wife and Saint-Saëns knew it. For those interested, the relationship between Franck and Holmès is the subject of a 1978 novel by Ronald Harwood titled *César and Augusta*.

Despite the tensions at its premiere, Franck's *Quintet* has come to be regarded as one of the great piano quintets, along with those of Schumann, Brahms, Dvořák, and Shostakovich. Everyone instantly recognizes its power–this is big music, full of bold gestures, color, and sweep. Franz Liszt, one of Franck's greatest admirers, wondered whether the Quintet was truly chamber music and suggested that it might be better heard in a version for orchestra. Franck's first instruction, *dramatico*, sets the tone for the entire work, and Liszt was quite right to wonder whether this is truly chamber music: Franck asks for massed unison passages, *fortississimo* dynamic levels, tremolos, and a volume of sound previously unknown in chamber music. Beyond the purely emotional and sonic impact, however, this music is notable for its concentration: the *Piano Quintet* is one of the finest examples of Franck's cyclic treatment of themes, an idea he had taken from Liszt—virtually the entire quintet grows out of theme-shapes presented in the first movement.

The opening of the first movement is impressive, as Franck alternates dramatic passages for strings with quiet, lyrical interludes for piano. Gradually these voices merge and rush ahead at the violent Allegro, which listeners will recognize as a variant of the violin's figure at the very beginning. This and other theme-shapes will be stretched, varied, and made to yield a variety of moods. At the end of the movement, the music dies away on Franck's marking *estinto*: "extinct."

The slow movement begins with steady piano chords, and over these the first violin plays what seem at first melodic fragments. But these too have evolved from the opening of the first movement, and soon they combine to form the movement's main theme. Again the music rises to a massive climax, then subsides to end quietly. Out of that quiet, the concluding movement springs to life. Franck specifies *con fuoco*—with fire—and the very beginning feels unsettled and nervous, with the violins pulsing ahead. The main theme, when it finally arrives, has grown out of material presented in the second movement; now Franck gives it to the four strings, and their repetitions grow in power until the theme is hammered out violently. An extremely dramatic coda drives to the brutally abrupt cadence.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger

JANUARY 31, 2025

Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, Sz.110

BÉLA BARTÓK

Born: 1881
Died: 1945
Composed: 1937

I. Assai lento — Allegro molto
II. Lento, ma non troppo
III. Allegro non troppo

Bartók was interested in the piano as a percussive rather than a lyric instrument, and he was drawn in particular to the combination of percussion (that is to say, *struck*) instruments and piano, which produces its sound when hammers strike strings. In Bartók's *First Piano Concerto* of 1926, much of the slow movement is scored only for the pianist and four percussionists, and in the work that many consider Bartók's masterpiece—the *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* of 1936—he combines a string orchestra with a vast percussion section that includes piano. When the Basel section of the International Society for Contemporary Music commissioned a new piece from him in May 1937, Bartók was ready to explore the combination of piano and percussion even further, and he composed the *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* in July and August 1937. The formidable percussion battery of the *Sonata* requires three timpani, xylophone, two side drums (one of them without snares), cymbals, suspended cymbals, bass drum, triangle, and tam-tam. Bartók and his wife Ditta Pásztory were the pianists at the first performance in Basel on January 16, 1938; Fritz Schiesser and Philipp Rühlig were the percussionists.

The *Sonata* is not often performed—it requires the unusual combination of two superb pianists and two superb percussionists—but it is one of Bartók's most individual works, combining a brilliant exploration of the sonorities of this combination of instruments with complex music and a beautifully-balanced formal structure. Those coming to the *Sonata* for the first time might best listen for its incredible variety of sound. In detailed notes in the published score Bartók explained exactly the kinds of sounds he wanted, and in an article at the time of the premiere he discussed his intentions: "For some years now I have been planning to compose a work for piano and percussion. Slowly, however, I have become convinced that one piano does not sufficiently balance the frequently very sharp sounds of the percussion. That is why I changed my mind and included two pianos instead of only one . . . Both percussion parts rank equally with the piano parts. The role of the percussion is manifold: often the sound merely colors the piano sound, sometimes it reinforces the more important accents, at other times it carries motifs serving as counterpoint to the piano part, while the timpani and xylophone often play themes acting as main parts."

The *Sonata* is in three movements that move from the dark drama of the opening through the nocturnal second movement to the sunny spirits of the finale. The first movement is as long as the final two movements combined. Its slow introduction, marked *Assai lento*, begins with a quiet timpani roll, followed by a brooding, chromatic, seven-note figure in the first piano. Gradually the music accelerates into the *Allegro molto*, hammered out by the timpani and massed chords from the two pianos. This sonata-form movement offers a wealth of thematic ideas, all derived from its quiet opening figure. It also features a propulsive fugue, marked *Vivo* and built on the upward leap of a sixth, before the music pounds its way to a violent conclusion.

In sharp contrast, the *Lento ma non troppo* is one of Bartók's night-music movements. In ternary form, it opens with quiet percussion, quickly joined by the pianos. The middle section, much more animated, is full of exotic color; in contrast to the opening movement, where Bartók used the percussion largely for emphasis and accent, here he fully exploits the range of sounds possible from those instruments. The opening material, now richly embellished, returns to close the movement out quietly.

The opening of the *Allegro non troppo* sounds very much like the *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta.* Over steady piano accompaniment, the xylophone stamps out the perky main theme of this dance movement, a theme that sounds as if it might have its origin in folk dances (in fact, it was Bartók's own). This movement, in sonata rondo form, swirls through a series of episodes before the surprising coda. Just when one expects a fiery finish, the music dissolves with a playful insouciance, and it is left to one soft snare drum to tap the *Sonata* into silence.

Octet for Strings in C Major, Op. 7

GEORGE ENESCU

Born: 1881
Died: 1955
Composed: 1900

I. Très modéré
II. Très fougueux
III. Lentement
IV. Mouvement de valse bien rythmée

A child prodigy, George Enescu left Romania at age 7 to enter the Conservatory of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, then went on to study at the Paris Conservatory. Along the way, he worked with a spectacular array of musicians: in Vienna he played in orchestras conducted by Brahms, and in Paris he studied with Massenet and Fauré, became friends with Saint-Saëns, and was a classmate of Ravel. He graduated from the Paris Conservatory with a first prize in violin in 1899 at the age of 18, then embarked on a career as violinist and composer.

Enescu's music took two distinct paths at first. There were consciously nationalistic works like the *Romanian Rhapsodies*, composed in 1900–01. But at this same moment, just as he left the Conservatory, the teenaged Enesco set to work on quite a different piece, an *Octet for Strings*. In contrast to the *Romanian Rhapsodies*, which string together a series of Romanian folksongs in an episodic structure, the *Octet* was very carefully conceived and composed as a complex musical structure. The *Octet* grows out of its powerful opening idea, which will reappear in many subtle transformations across its forty-minute span. The process of composition was difficult for the young composer (it took him eighteen months to complete the *Octet*), and Enescu, who planned the piece with great precision, noted that "An engineer who would have thrown over a river his first suspension bridge wouldn't have been so anxious as I was blackening the paper with staves."

An *Octet for Strings* of course calls to mind the other great octet for strings, also written by a teenager: Mendelssohn's *Octet* of 1825, composed when he was 16. But how different these two works are! Mendelssohn's *Octet* is all fleetness, grace, and polish, but Enescu's plunges us into a world of violence, sonority, and conflict. Its premiere in Paris produced varied responses. The French violinist and conductor Edouard Colonne brought his son to the premiere, and at the conclusion the son remarked, "Well, but this is awfully beautiful." To which the father replied, "Of course, it is more awful than beautiful." (Enescu, who had a wonderful sense of humor, loved to tell this story.)

The principal influence on Enescu's *Octet* was not Mendelssohn, but—surprisingly—Berlioz, who wrote no chamber music of his own. Enescu saw a role model in Berlioz, who had been dead for thirty years when he began work on the *Octet*: Berlioz had fought against hidebound French musical traditions and had introduced a nightmare element into his music, one that strongly attracted Enescu (who in fact quotes the *Symphonie fantastique* in the closing moments of the *Octet*). Enescu noted that he wanted to bring the extravagance of the earlier composer to the civilized world of chamber music: "Sometimes I felt myself like a Berlioz in chamber music, if it is possible to imagine the man who used five orchestras composing such a kind of music."

The opening instantly establishes the character of this powerful music. Over steady accompaniment from the second cello, the other seven instruments hammer out the opening theme, a sinuous, angular, and propulsive idea that takes nearly a minute to unfold. This is the seminal subject of the *Octet*, and all subsequent material will, in some way, be related to this theme. This is very densely argued exposition: much of it unfolds canonically, and the writing makes virtuoso demands on all eight players. The second subject, announced by the first viola and marked *expressive and grieving*, seems to strike a different note, but this theme is simply a derivation of the powerful opening idea. After a dynamic development, this extended movement trails into silence on a muted re-statement of the main idea.

Enescu calls for only a brief pause between the first and second movements (long enough only to remove the mutes), and suddenly the second movement leaps violently to life. Marked *Très fougueux* ("fiery, impetuous"), it opens with the same sort of unison explosion that launched the first movement, but now that theme has evolved into something spiky and fierce. Enescu marks this opening statement *agité*, and it alternates with slower, gentler material marked *caressant*: "caressing." The movement develops principally through a violent fugue based on its opening gesture; along the way the principal theme of the first movement makes a reappearance, and the music drives to a huge climax full of massed chords.

This fury subsides, and the music proceeds without pause into the third movement, marked *Lentement*. This opens with a series of slow, muted chords (once again derived from the seminal theme), and soon the first violin sings the grieving main idea (one of Enescu's recurring markings in this movement is *velouté*: "velvety"). Gentle as its opening may be, this movement too rises to a conflicted climax, recalling themes from the opening movement as it proceeds. The finale, which begins without pause, is a sort of grand waltz, full of energy and sweep. The movement drives aggressively to its closing pages, which bring a surprise: the music slows, and the first violin sings a phrase that appears to be derived from the theme of the Beloved in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. After all the violence of the *Octet*, this episode—however brief—seems to offer a moment of relief, of purity. And then the furies return to drive the *Octet* to its surprisingly fierce conclusion.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger

FEBRUARY 1, 2025

Viola Sonata
REBECCA CLARKE

Born: 1886
Died: 1979
Composed: 1919

I. Impetuoso
II. Vivace
III. Adagio — Agitato

Rebecca Clarke, who died in New York City in 1979 at the age of 93, was both English and American. Born in a suburb of London to an American father and a German mother, Clarke studied composition with Charles Villiers Stanford and the viola with Lionel Tertis at the Royal College of Music. She became one of the first women members of a professional orchestra in London when she joined the Queen's Hall Orchestra in 1912, and she also composed. Clarke spent much of her career in the United States, where her brothers lived; she was in this country when World War II broke out in 1939, and she decided to stay. In 1944 Clarke married James Friskin, the distinguished piano pedagogue who taught for many years at Juilliard, and she lived in New York City for the rest of her long life. Most of Clarke's own music comes from early in her career, and much of this—largely chamber and vocal works—remains unpublished.

The *Viola Sonata* is Clarke's best-known and most frequently-recorded composition. Information in the review of its first performance suggests that she began work on it in Hawaii in 1916 while on an international tour and completed it in 1919 in Detroit. Clarke entered this sonata in a competition sponsored by the distinguished American patron of the arts Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge for a work for viola and piano. There were 72 entries, and the six-member panel (which judged the works anonymously) split its vote evenly between Clarke's *Sonata* and Ernst Bloch's *Suite*. Coolidge, who was a close friend of Clarke, broke the tie by voting for the Bloch, specifically to avoid the appearance of favoritism. Nevertheless, the Clarke *Sonata* was warmly acclaimed at its premiere at the Berkshire Festival in Pittsfield on September 25, 1919.

Clarke heads the published sonata with a quotation from the French poet Alfred de Musset that translates roughly: "Poet, take up your lute; the wine of youth ferments this night in the veins of God." The sonata is in the expected three movements, with two big-boned outer movements framing a brief scherzo. Clarke's *Sonata* combines a sort of bardic violence with moments of rhapsodic contemplation, and that proves an impressive mix. The sonata virtually explodes to life (Clarke marks the beginning *Impetuoso*), but within moments this energy has subsided into a dreamy pastoralism that we might associate with Ralph Vaughan Williams (who was in fact a champion of Clarke's music). Piano alone has the second subject, marked *langoroso*, and the movement unfolds across a long span. Along the way, listeners may sense another influence: the wistful, haunting melodies and wide harmonies frequently recall the late music of Claude Debussy (who completed his final work, the *Violin Sonata*, and died while Clarke was writing this sonata). After an active development and many mercurial changes of mood, Clarke brings the movement to a shimmering, soft close.

The scherzo, in which the viola is muted throughout, also recalls Debussy, specifically the scherzo of his *String Quartet*. Clarke's movement, with its dancing harmonics and pizzicatos, is almost elfin in its quickness and charm. The very ending, where the music seems to disappear in front of us, is particularly effective. The last movement seems at first to return to the dreamy side of the first movement, and in fact Clarke recalls themes from that movement. The finale once again alternates episodes of quite different character, and in its center comes a remarkable passage in which the piano sings gently over a sustained ponticello tremolo from the viola. Gradually the movement gathers strength on a recollection of the sonata's opening theme and drives to a dramatic close on a resounding E from both viola and piano.

String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92
SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born: 1891
Died: 1953
Composed: 1941

I. Allegro sostenuto
II. Adagio
III. Allegro

When the Nazis swept into western Russia in the summer of 1941, the avowedly classless Soviet government quickly evacuated some of its more valued citizens to what it hoped would be places of safety. Along with the composers Kabalevsky and Miaskovsky, Prokofiev was sent to Nalchik, a city in the Caucasus about one hundred miles west of Groznya. Here he continued work on what would be his great project of the war years, an opera based on Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and inspired by Russian heroism in the face of invasion from the west. And at the same time he took on quite a different project. Nalchik was the capital of Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous SSR, and

here Prokofiev came in contact with Kabardinian folk-music. The local arts committee chairman encouraged Prokofiev to make use of this material: " . . . you have a goldmine of musical material here that has remained practically untapped. If you take advantage of your stay here to work up this material you will be laying the foundation of a Kabardinian music." Prokofiev did make use of Kabardinian themes: on November 2, 1941, he took time away from his work on the opera to begin what would be his *Second String Quartet* and had it done by December 3. The first performance took place in Moscow the following year.

This is an unusual piece of music for several reasons. First, it shows absolutely no trace of the war. Hearing it, one would never guess that the German armies were bearing down on Nalchik or that Prokofiev had to be evacuated to Tbilisi while working on it (in fact, the Nazis occupied and leveled Nalchik, and the arts administrator who had suggested this work was killed). Second, Prokofiev was generally uninterested in folk-music; not for him was the subtle incorporation of folk idioms that so attracted Bartók, Vaughan Williams, and others–the Second Quartet is one of Prokofiev's very few works to show any connection to folk material. And third, Prokofiev seemed to take delight in fusing the Kabardinian folk-tunes with one of the most rigorous of classical forms, the string quartet. It seems an unlikely match, yet it works.

The *Second Quartet* in three movements. The opening *Allegro sostenuto*, in sonata form, uses Kabardinian folk-songs as its themes, and the sound of these hard-edged melodies (based on shifting meters) must have exerted particular appeal to a composer who had delighted in outraging Parisian audiences during the 1920s with his own hard-edged scores. Still, these themes are treated with a good deal of classical rigor here: Prokofiev brings the exposition to a full stop with a grand cadence and then proceeds directly into a closely-argued development that treats both his main themes. By way of contrast, the *Adagio* is based on love-songs from the region. Its exotic opening section, built on ornate themes stretched across a 12/8 meter, gives way to a slightly faster central episode where the first violin dances above pizzicato accompaniment from the other voices. This section too grows ornate before the opening material returns to wind the movement down to its quiet close. The episodic last movement, based primarily on the Kabardinian dance-tune *Getigezhev Ogorbi*, is remarkable for the variety of sounds Prokofiev generates: *ponticello* bowing, sections played with the wood of the bow rather than the hair, strummed pizzicatos, some passages played entirely up-bow. One curious feature: at one point, the music comes to a stop, the three upper voices vanish, and the cello has a lengthy cadenza that leads to the florid and agitated central episode. Gradually the opening material returns, and the *Second Quartet* proceeds firmly to its sudden close.

Suite for Two Violins, Cello, and Piano Left-Hand, Op. 23

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD

Born: 1897

Died: 1957

Composed: 1930

I. Präludium und Fuge. Kräftig und bestimmt
II. Walzer. Nicht schnell, anmutig
III. Groteske. Möglich rasch
IV. Lied. Schlicht und innig, nicht zu langsam
V. Rondo — Finale. Variationen

Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1961) came from one of the most urbane families in turn-of-the-century Vienna: his brother was the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Paul studied piano with Theodore Leschetizky, teacher of Paderewski and Schnabel. The young pianist made his professional debut in Vienna in December 1913 and seemed on the verge of distinguished career. And then, disaster: World War I began eight months later, and Wittgenstein—serving on the eastern front—was wounded so badly during the first month of fighting that his right arm had to be amputated. He returned to Vienna after spending the war in a prisoner camp in Siberia.

Anyone might have been crushed by such a fate, but Wittgenstein came home determined to create a piano repertory for the left hand. He turned the family fortune to the creation of such music, and the list of works he commissioned is distinguished. Most famous of these is Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, and Strauss, Britten, Prokofiev, and others wrote works for Wittgenstein. One of the composers to whom Wittgenstein turned for a concerto was the prodigious Erich Wolfgang Korngold, whose opera *Die tote Stadt* had been premiered simultaneously in Hamburg and Cologne in 1920, when the composer was only 23. Korngold composed a massive and very difficult *Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor* for Wittgenstein, who gave the premiere in 1923. The pianist was pleased with the concerto, and five years later he came back to Korngold and asked for a chamber piece. For this commission, Korngold composed an unusual work for unusual forces: a *Suite for Two Violins, Cello, and Piano Left-Hand*.

Completed in the spring of 1930, it was first performed in Vienna on October 21, 1930, by Wittgenstein and members of the Rosé Quartet (led by Arnold Rosé, Mahler's brother-in-law). Wittgenstein liked the piece and performed it frequently on his tour of the western United States in 1934.

Wittgenstein had every reason to be pleased with this music. The *Suite* is a large-scale work (its five movements span nearly forty minutes), and the writing for the left hand is so brilliant and wide-ranging that anyone just *hearing* this music would imagine that it requires both hands. Further, Korngold's late-romantic idiom, which ranges from a Viennese elegance to a Mahlerian *grotesquerie*, makes for some very appealing music–only the unusual forces required have kept this music from being performed more often and so from being better-known.

The opening movement gets off to an aggressive start. Piano alone has the long opening statement (Korngold marks it "Powerful and determined") before the strings make their own decisive entrance. The main part of this extended movement is a fugue, introduced by the cello with successive entrances from piano and then the violins. Along the way come a rhapsodic interlude and a cadenza-like passage for solo piano before the movement drives to its soaring conclusion.

The next two movements are sharply contrasted. The second movement is a sequence of waltzes (filtered through a late-romantic perspective), while the aptly-named *Groteske* is a scherzo in ternary form–its skittering, nervous outer sections frame a somber central episode. The fourth movement, called *Lied*, is just that: Korngold based this movement on his song *Was du mir bist?*, which he had composed the year before. This movement is a lyric meditation on the song, and Korngold asks that the performance be "simple and expressive." The powerful finale is a rondo in the form of a set of variations. Korngold marks it "vehement," though the music feels more exuberant than violent. The basic theme-shape, an amiable subject announced by the cello at the beginning, evolves across the span of this movement.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger

FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Suite for Violin and Piano

WILLIAM GRANT STILL

Born: 1895
Died: 1978
Composed: 1943

I. African Dancer
II. Mother and Child
III. Gamin

William Grant Still grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, where his mother was a schoolteacher. Still left college to pursue a career in music, and after service in the navy during World War I—moved to New York, where he worked with W.C. Handy, Paul Whiteman, and Artie Shaw. He also studied composition with two teachers who could not have been more unlike each other: the conservative Boston composer George Chadwick and the visionary Edgard Varèse. In New York, Still played the oboe in theater orchestras and was attracted to the ideals of the Harlem Renaissance, but in 1930 he moved to Los Angeles, which would be his home for the rest of his life. In Los Angeles, he worked first as an arranger of film scores but later devoted himself entirely to composition and conducting. Still was a trailblazer in many ways. He was the first African American to conduct a major orchestra (the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl in 1936) and the first to have an opera produced by a major opera company (*Troubled Island*, by the New York City Opera in 1949). His catalog of works includes nine operas, five symphonies, numerous other orchestral works, and music for chamber ensembles and for voice.

Still was passionately committed to African American causes throughout his life, and his *Suite for Violin and Piano*, composed in 1943, celebrates the work of three African American artists. The *Suite* was—like *Pictures at an Exhibition*—inspired by art in other forms, but where Mussorgsky was inspired by paintings and sketches, Still was inspired by the work of three African American sculptors. The first movement, *African Dancer*, is Still's response to a work of the same name by Richmond Barthé (1901–1989). Barthé made the early part of his career in New York City, where he was associated with the Harlem Renaissance. His *African Dancer* depicts a nude female frozen in motion as she dances, and Still's music captures the energy of her dance. After a declarative opening statement by the piano, the violin sails in energetically; a bluesy middle section, full of slides, leads to a return of the opening material and a euphoric climax.

Sargent Johnson (1887–1967) overcame a difficult childhood–he was sent to several orphanages, and he and his brothers were separated from their sisters when they were all very young. Johnson eventually made his home in San Francisco, where he worked as both sculptor and painter. He created a number of works titled *Mother and Child*, so the exact inspiration for this movement is uncertain. Still's movement has invariably been compared to a lullaby, but this lullaby does not remain soothing and quickly grows to an animated passage full of double-stops before winding down to its quiet conclusion.

Augusta Savage (1892–1962) also had a difficult childhood, and like Barthé she was associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Her *Gamin*, of painted plaster, depicts the head and shoulders of a boy of about twelve. He wears a cap and loose clothing and seems to stare out at the viewer with a slightly defiant air. Still's *Gamin* is a character study of the that boy, full of blues and sharply-syncopated rhythms. This movement—very short—has a particularly effective ending.

Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op. 67

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born: 1906
Died: 1975
Composed: 1944

I. Andante
II. Allegro con brio
III. Largo
IV. Allegretto

The Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941 was the greatest catastrophe ever to befall any nation. In four years, twenty *million* Russians died, and the country sustained damage and suffering that no amount of time could fully repair. Shostakovich, then in his late thirties, reacted to the war with two quite different kinds of music. There was the public Shostakovich, who wrote the *"Leningrad" Symphony* and marches and songs. Patriotic and optimistic, these made the right noises for the time—and for the Soviet government. But the private Shostakovich recorded his reactions to these years in other music. The *Eighth Symphony* of 1943 and the *Piano Trio in E minor* of 1944 reveal a much less optimistic Shostakovich, one anguished by the war. This was not the kind of music a Soviet government committed to the artistic doctrine of Socialist Realism wanted to hear, and it is no surprise that performances of the Trio were banned for a time or that the *Eighth Symphony* was singled out for particular censure at the infamous meeting of the Union of Soviet Composers in 1948.

Two particular events in the winter of 1944 appear to have inspired this trio. The first came in February, when Shostakovich's closest friend, the scholar and critic Ivan Sollertinsky, died (the *Trio* is dedicated to his memory). The second was the discovery—as the Nazi armies retreated—of atrocities committed against Russian Jews. Shostakovich completed the *Trio* in the spring and played the piano at its first performance in Leningrad on November 14, 1944.

The very beginning of the *Andante*—an eerie melody for muted cello, played entirely in harmonics—sets the spare and somber mood of this music. The other voices enter in canon, with the main theme of this sonata-form movement a variation of the opening cello melody. The *Allegro con brio* opens with fanfare-like figures for the strings. This is one of those hard-driving, almost mechanistic Shostakovich scherzos, and its dancing middle section in G Major brings scant relief.

The stunning *Largo* is a passacaglia. The piano announces eight solemn chords that form the bass-line of the passacaglia, and there follow five repetitions as the strings sing poised, grieving lines above the piano chords. The concluding *Allegretto* follows without pause. This movement is said to have been inspired by accounts that the Nazis had forced Jews to dance on their graves before execution. Shostakovich does not try to depict this in his music, but the sinister, grotesque dance for pizzicato violin that opens this movements suggests a vision of horror all its own. Shostakovich makes the connection clear with the second theme, of unmistakably Jewish origin, for piano above pizzicato chords. The close brings back themes from earlier movements–the cello melody from the very beginning and the entire passacaglia theme–and finally the little dance tune breaks down and the music vanishes on quiet pizzicato strokes.

No wonder the Soviet government banned performances of this music! The *Trio in E minor* is unsettling music, more apt to leave audiences stunned than cheering, and it is a measure of Shostakovich the artist that he could transform his own anguish into music of such power and beauty.

Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), Op. 4
ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

Born: 1874
Died: 1951
Composed: 1899-1902

Verklärte Nacht was one of Schoenberg's first successes, and it remains his most popular work. He wrote this thirty-minute piece for string sextet (string quartet plus extra viola and cello) in the final months of 1899, when he was 25, but could not get it performed. When he submitted it for performance to the Tonkunstlerverein, Vienna's chamber music society, the judges rejected it because the score contained a chord they could not find in their harmony textbooks. Referring to its unusual tonalities, one of the judges made a now-famous crack, saying that *Verklärte Nacht* sounded "as if someone had taken the score of Tristan when the ink was still wet and smudged it over."

Verklärte Nacht was finally performed in 1903 in Vienna by the Rosé Quartet. The leader of that quartet, Arnold Rosé, was Mahler's brother-in-law, and Mahler met Schoenberg at rehearsals for *Verklärte Nacht* and became his champion, though he confessed that some of Schoenberg's music was beyond him. The first performance brought howls from conservatives, but this music made its way quickly into the repertory. In 1917 Schoenberg arranged *Verklärte Nacht* for string orchestra, and he revised this version in 1943; at this concert, the music is heard in its original form.

Verklärte Nacht—the title translates *Transfigured Night*–is based on a poem of the same name by Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), a German lyric poet. The subject of Dehmel's poem may have been as difficult for early Viennese audiences as Schoenberg's music. It can be summarized briefly: a man and a woman walk together through dark woods, with only the moon shining down through the black branches above their heads. The woman confesses that she is pregnant, but by another man—her search for happiness led her to seek fulfillment in physical pleasure. Now she finds that nature has taken vengeance on her. The man speaks, and—instead of denouncing her—he accepts her and the child as his own: their love for each other will surround and protect them. The man and woman embrace, then continue their walk through the dark woods. But the night has now been transfigured, or transformed, by their love. The first line of Dehmel's poem—"Two people walk through bleak, cold woods"—is transformed in the last line: "Two people walk through exalted, shining night."

Musically, Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* can be understood as a tone poem depicting the events of Dehmel's poem, and it falls into five sections: *Introduction, Woman's Confession, Man's Forgiveness, Love Duet,* and *Apotheosis*. *Verklärte Nacht* may look forward to the music of the twentieth century, but its roots are firmly in the nineteenth: the influences are Brahms (in the lush, dramatic sound), Wagner (in the evolving harmonies), and Richard Strauss (whose tone poems served as models). The music is dark and dramatic, and Schoenberg drives it to several intense climaxes. Particularly interesting are the harmonies: this music begins in dark D minor and evolves through troubled and uncertain tonalities to the bright D Major of the *Man's Forgiveness* and the concluding walk through the transfigured night.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger