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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 as 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