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BRAHMS BEYOND BORDERS

CONCERT I

Saturday, July 13, 2019 • 8 PM
Market Square Presbyterian Church

Stuart Malina / Ya-Ting Chang, Piano
Peter Sirotin, Violin
Michael Stepniak, Viola
Fiona Thompson, Cello

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 26
Allegro non troppo
Poco adagio
Scherzo: Poco allegro
Finale: Allegro

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

INTERMISSION

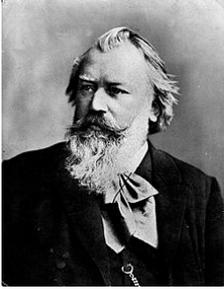
Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 25
Allegro
Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo
Andante con moto
Rondo alla zingarese: Presto

Brahms

Market Square Concerts is generously supported by Lois Lehrman Grass.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)



No other composer than Brahms better represents a melding of Romantic style and Classical form. Furthermore, within his lifetime he experienced both the waning of Romanticism and the birth of the controversial Second Viennese School led by Arnold Schoenberg. Nor was Brahms free from a part in this latter musical evolution as evidenced by some of his late works and by Schoenberg's bow to him in his essay "Brahms the Progressive." The famous late 19th century controversy that pitted Brahms against Wagner and divided the musical world would seem of less significance if it had not inspired the French to take a new path with Impressionism. Within all these developments, however, Brahms maintained his individual stamp of elegant form, adventurous harmony, gorgeous melody, and grand sweep of emotion.

The Piano Quartets

Brahms completed two piano quartets in 1861, the G Minor, Op. 25 and the A Major, Op. 26. A third one, begun in 1856 during the sickness and death of his musical hero, Robert Schumann, would much later become his Op. 60 Piano Quartet in C Minor. While the three works differ greatly, they all share Brahms' special genius for the form. He found a ready acceptance for the first two when he came to Vienna in 1862 to perform them with the Hellmesberger Quartet. They also had approval from his life-long friend, Joseph Joachim, the famous Hungarian violinist and composer.

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 26

The A Major Piano Quartet, composed between 1857 and 1861, is a glowing example of Brahms' extraordinary ability to combine Classical form and Romantic spirit. Nor does it neglect the qualities that caused Arnold Schoenberg to write his famous essay, "Brahms the Progressive." While the work clearly bears the stamp of

Schubert in its breadth and lyricism, it is also reflects Brahms' singular originality.

The first movement opens with a noble chorale-like theme stated by the piano and then developed by the strings and piano together. Sonata form is honored with a return to the opening theme and a quiet coda, but form alone does not give the whole picture. That Brahms could do so much with one repeated motto is astonishing. This technique, best described as "the developing variation," not only marks this movement but continues throughout the entire work.

The second movement *Poco adagio* is a tender and emotional extended moment. If the piano dominated the first movement, here the strings have their way although the piano regularly breaks through with impassioned statements. And again, a simple motto, first stated by the cello, is fully explored.

While that atmosphere lifts in the third movement *Scherzo*, it is not a cloudless horizon. In Brahms, a scherzo is hardly a "joke." Here it is more like an animated conversation that grows strong and declarative but, like any good conversation, has its quiet moments. Again, ABA sonata form (exposition, development, and recapitulation) operates in both the *Scherzo* and the adjoining *Trio* section but veiled by the beautiful canon of four voices.

Brahms lets loose in the *Finale* with a joyful Hungarian folk dance shot through with tenderness. Make no mistake, however, for Classical form persists in this brilliant and complex movement that goes far beyond the scope of folk music.

The work was premiered on November 29, 1862 in Vienna's Musikverein. Brahms was the pianist with violinist Joseph Hellmesberger, violist Franz Dobyhal, and cellist Heinrich Röver.

Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 25

As Schubert's imprint lies on the "Trout" quintet, so is Brahms' stamp upon the G Minor Piano Quartet. Here in one work are all his markings: soaring melodies, fluid and complex rhythms, layers of texture, and rich harmonies. The works bear all the best qualities of Romanticism but, gratefully, none of its excesses such as lack of form, over-use of non-musical associations, and a tendency to the melodramatic. Here again, Romantic spirit and Classical form meet in perfect balance.

The first movement is a monument of musical development with what Sir Donald Francis Tovey calls “the most voluminous second-subject ever written.” There is literally something for everyone, listeners and players, in this movement. Brahms originally called the second movement a scherzo but wisely changed the category, recognizing his own lack of feeling for the scherzo as we know it in Haydn and Beethoven. If Brahms was uncomfortable with the joking qualities of a scherzo, the intermezzo, on the other hand, belongs to him. In the second movement *Intermezzo* of the G Minor Piano Quartet, the muting of the violin produces the lovely veiled quality so closely associated with Brahms. Another Brahmsian imprint in this movement is the use of cross-rhythms. The third movement is an achievement in Romantic expressiveness, but just as we think we can bear no more, Brahms saves us with a military march. With our palates cleaned, the viola and cello then draw us back to the opening feeling. Of Brahms’ three piano quartets, the G minor is probably the most popular due mostly to the breathtaking *Rondo alla zingarese* that concludes the work.

In 1848, Hungarian rebels against Russian and Prussian suppression slipped over the border into Hamburg bringing their music with them, and Brahms heard for the first time the *alla zingarese* style with its irregular rhythms and triplet figures which play so prominently in his later music. He also learned from one of those rebels, Eduard Hoffman, the use of *rubato* (variance in tempo) in ensemble playing, an effect that demands great sensitivity and taste from players. These two influences infuse the Op. 25 Piano Quartet.

The work was begun in 1856 and received its first performance in 1861, with Clara Schumann as pianist, and its public premiere on November 16, 1862 in Vienna with members of the Hellmesberger Quartet and Brahms himself at the piano.

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CONCERT II

Sunday, July 21, 2019 ▪ 4 PM

Market Square Presbyterian Church

Peter Sirotin & Leonid Ferents, Violins
Michael Stepniak & Blanka Bednarz, Violas
Cheung Chau & Fiona Thompson, Cellos

String Quintet in A Minor, Op. 9

Allegro molto

1915)

Andante con moto

Allegro molto

Andante sostenuto; Allegro

Karl Goldmark

(1830-

INTERMISSION

String Quintet No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 97

Allegro non tanto

1904)

Allegro vivo; Un poco meno mosso

Larghetto with Five Variations

Finale: Allegro giusto

Antonín Dvořák

(1841-

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

String Quintet in A Minor, Op. 9

Karl Goldmark
(1830-1915)



Hungarian-born Karl Goldmark studied at the Vienna Conservatory but became largely self-taught after the Conservatory was forced to shut down with the Revolution of 1848. He became a teacher himself with such notable students as Jean Sibelius. Goldmark was also a music journalist known for his support of both Wagner and Brahms at a time when most of Europe was divided in its opinion on those two composers.

While he supported Wagner's music, Goldmark was offended by Wagner's anti-Semitism. He did form an affinity with Brahms although that relationship was limited because of Brahms' critical personality. Along with many other famous composers such as Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and Richard Strauss, Goldmark is buried in Vienna's Zentralfriedhof.

Among Goldmark's many works that included the opera *The Queen of Sheba*, *The Rustic Wedding Symphony*, and his Violin Concerto No. 1, his String Quintet in A Minor, Op. 9 of 1862 secured his reputation in Vienna. That is easily understandable after hearing the work with its many moods including the urgency, majesty, and underlying darkness of the first movement *Allegro molto*. A more solemn mood occurs in the opening section of the second movement intensified by the cellos while the violins sing. A livelier section follows before a return to the opening mood. All five instruments bring the movement to a quiet conclusion. An unexpected merriness captures the brief third movement *Allegro molto* before a return to gravity in the *Andante sostenuto* of the final movement. A fugue enters where all five instruments have a voice in the ever-challenging complexity of that form. Goldmark then offers us a dramatic and exciting conclusion to the work. Yes, we hear the influence of Brahms in this wonderful piece which is still, however, thoroughly Karl Goldmark.

String Quintet No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 97

Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)



Son of a poor but musical butcher and innkeeper, Dvořák escaped that destiny and went instead to Prague where he began composing immediately after completing his studies at the Organ School. He was a violist in the orchestra of the National Theatre in Prague and little known as a composer until he was befriended by Brahms who recognized his rare genius and championed him throughout his life. Dvořák traveled to England in 1844 where he was immediately acclaimed and then to America in 1892 where he won fresh approval. He returned to his native Bohemia in 1895 where he became professor of composition and later director at the Prague Conservatorium until his death in 1904. He was given a national funeral and buried with other national heroes in Vyšehrad cemetery.

Chamber music permeated Dvořák's compositional life from his Op. 1 String Quintet of 1861 to his Op. 106 String Quartet of 1896. While his love of folk music is ever present in his some forty chamber works, he was not confined in them by his nationalistic interests. More important than any national identification are the freshness, spontaneity, and sense of exploration which pervade his chamber music. No greater compliment has been paid Dvořák than by Brahms himself when he said, "I should be glad if something occurred to me as a main idea that occurs to Dvořák only by the way."

With caution, we point to the folk qualities of the Op. 97 String Quintet of 1893, heeding Ottokar Šourek's directive that Dvořák "had no intention of employing the national tunes as they stood." That said, the Op. 97 Quintet is rich in its American folk music references, specifically those of the Iroquois Indians whom Dvořák encountered in the Czech settlement of Spillville, Iowa. This is evidenced in the drumming rhythms of the first movement that follow the opening Bohemian melody and again in the second movement *Allegro vivo* when the second viola takes up the beat. The third movement *Larghetto* contains a reference to Dvořák's treatment of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," which he had composed earlier in New York. The fourth movement *Finale* again makes use of

American Indian references coupled with distinctly Bohemian themes. Over all these references, however, Dvořák imposes sonata form.

The Op. 97 Quintet followed closely on the heels of the famous “American” Quartet of 1893. Both works, along with the “New World” Symphony, came from Dvořák’s stay in the United States from 1892 to 1895. It was premiered, along with the “American” Quartet, in Boston on January 1, 1894 by the Kneisel Quartet.

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CONCERT III

Wednesday, July 24, 2019 ▪ 7:30 PM

Market Square Presbyterian Church

Peter Sirotin & Leonid Ferents, Violins
Michael Stepniak & Blanka Bednarz, Violas
Cheung Chau & Fiona Thompson, Cellos

String Sextet in E-flat Major, Op. 44

Andante; Allegro vivace

1890)

Allegro non troppo

Andantino

Finale: Allegro molto vivace

Niels Gade

(1817-

INTERMISSION

String Sextet in B-flat Major

Allegro ma tranquillo

1960)

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Adagio quasi andante

Finale: Animato

Ernö Dohnányi

(1877-

Market Square Concerts is generously supported by Lois Lehrman Grass.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

String Sextet in E-flat Major, Op. 44

**Niels W. Gade
(1817-1890)**



Danish composer and violinist Niels Gade was active with the Royal Danish Orchestra that nevertheless turned down his first symphony for performance in Copenhagen. Felix Mendelssohn, however, conducted it in Leipzig in 1843 to an enthusiastic audience. Gade then moved to Leipzig where he taught at the Conservatory and served as assistant conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. He later became chief conductor but was forced to return to Copenhagen with the outbreak of war between Prussia and Denmark in 1848. There he became director of the Copenhagen Musical Society and joint director of the Copenhagen Conservatory. He served as teacher to such important composers as Edvard Grieg and Carl Nielson. His numerous works after 1848 have been labelled as Romantic nationalism. Within that label, the nationalism may be difficult to identify, but the Romanticism is clear.

If you have not heard Gade's Op. 44 String Sextet you may wonder why since it is such a satisfying work with its moving opening *Andante*, energetic and Mendelssohn-like *Allegro man non troppo*, the darker moments of the third movement *Andantino*, and the high-spirited *Finale* with its heroic and celebratory conclusion. Throughout all four movements is a fine balance of instruments.

String Sextet in B-flat Major

**Ernö von Dohnányi
(1877-1960)**



Like Brahms, Dohnányi culminated the Romantic spirit expressed in Classical form and was a champion of musical taste in his native Hungary where, as conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Budapest, he would program as many as 120 concerts a year. He was also the teacher of such musical figures as Georg Solti and Géza Anda. Furthermore, despite his own Romantic leanings, he championed the music of his fellow countrymen Zoltán Kodály, Bela Bartók, and Leó Weiner.

Politically he was indisputable in his anti-Nazi activities between 1939 and 1941 when he retained Jewish members of the Budapest Philharmonic despite the German occupation of Hungary. After his death in 1960, there was a vigorous campaign to clear him of any suspicions of Nazi sympathy.

To speak of Brahms in connection with Dohnányi is unavoidable, yet much has been said about Dohnányi's ease of composition compared to that of Brahms who struggled notoriously in his compositional efforts. While Dohnányi did share an interest in Hungarian folk style with Brahms, neither composer subjected his originality to that influence.

Dohnányi was to find his own voice and would minimize his dependence on Brahms in his string quartets and certainly in the String Sextet that we hear on this program. So what is the key to the continuing association of the two composers? Probably more than anything else, it lies in the use of what Arnold Schoenberg identified in Brahms as the "developing variation," or, simply stated, the generation of thematic material from one kernel, something that is evident in much of Dohnányi's music, and notably so in the first movement *Allegro ma tranquillo* of the Sextet, the longest of the four movements. The second movement *Scherzo* is lively indeed in its opening but moves back and forth between that and a darker mood throughout. All six instruments sing forth in the *Adagio quasi andante* third movement. Animation is once again the key word in describing the final movement but the Romantic spirit we associate with both Brahms and Dohnányi remains evident.

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