



MOZART & BRAHMS
THURSDAY, JULY 16, 2020

GERALD R. FORD AMPHITHEATER

CONCERT 7 PM

Anne-Marie McDermott, piano

Kerry McDermott, violin
Zoë Martin-Doike, viola
Brook Speltz, cello

Dover Quartet

Joel Link, violin
Bryan Lee, violin
Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola
Camden Shaw, cello

Paul Neubauer, viola

MOZART

Quartet No. 1 for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello in G minor, K. 478 (27 minutes)
Allegro
Andante
Rondo: Allegro

BRAHMS

Sextet No. 1 for Two Violins, Two Violas and Two Cellos in B-flat major, Op. 18 (34 minutes)
Allegro ma non troppo
Andante, ma moderato
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Rondo: Poco Allegretto e grazioso

Quartet No. 1 for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello in G minor, K. 478 (1785)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

As Mozart reached his full maturity in the years after arriving in Vienna in 1781, his most expressive manner of writing, whose chief evidences are the use of minor modes, chromaticism, rich counterpoint and thorough thematic development, appeared in his compositions with increasing frequency. Among the most important harbingers of the shift in Mozart's musical language was the G minor Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello (K. 478), which he completed on October 16, 1785 in response to a commission for three (some sources say six) such works from the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister. Hoffmeister had only entered the business a year earlier, and Mozart's extraordinary and disturbing score, for which the publisher saw little market, threw a fright into him. "Write more popularly, or else I can neither print nor pay for anything of yours!" he admonished. Mozart cast some quaint expletives upon the publisher's head, and said it was fine with him if the contract were canceled. It was. (Composer and publisher remained friends and associates, however. The following year, Hoffmeister brought out the Quartet in D major, K. 499, which still bears his name as sobriquet.) Artaria & Co., proving more bold than Hoffmeister, acquired the piece, and published it a year later; there are hints in contemporary documents that it enjoyed a number of performances in Vienna.

Alfred Einstein, in his classic 1945 study of Mozart, called the G minor tonality in which the K. 478 Quartet is cast the composer's "key of fate.... The wild command that opens the first movement, *unisono*, and stamps the whole movement with its character, remaining threateningly in the background, and bringing the movement to its inexorable close, might be called the 'fate' motive with exactly as much justice as the four-note motive of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." Contrast to the movement's pervasive agitation is provided by a lyrical melody initiated by the strings without piano. The *Andante*, in sonatina form (sonata without a development section), is probing, emotionally unsettled music, written in Mozart's most expressive, adventurous harmonic style. Of the thematically rich closing rondo, English musicologist Eric Blom noted, "[It] confronts the listener with the fascinatingly insoluble problem of telling which of its melodies ... is the most delicious." So profligate is Mozart's melodic invention in this movement that he borrowed one of its themes, which he did not even bother to repeat here, for the principal subject of a piano rondo (K. 485) he composed three months later.

Sextet No. 1 for Two Violins, Two Violas and Two Cellos in B-flat major, Op. 18 (1860)
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

The Principality of Lippe-Detmold, midway between Frankfurt and Hamburg, was one of the leading centers of 19th-century German music. The reigning Prince, Leopold III, had a taste for music, which he was able to gratify by employing a permanent orchestra of 45 players that presented a broad spectrum of works from Mozart through Wagner. A great deal of chamber music was played by the principals of the orchestra, a choir was formed from members of the household and townsfolk, and guest artists were often asked to visit the court to perform with the resident forces. One such visitor was the piano virtuoso Clara Schumann, who not only performed but also gave lessons to one of the Prince's sisters and to the sister of the Court Chamberlain. When Clara moved from Düsseldorf to Berlin in 1857, a year after her husband's death, she

recommended that the couple's young friend, the composer Johannes Brahms, continue the ladies' lessons. So taken were they with their 24-year-old teacher that they wrangled for him a position at court which included conducting the chorus and orchestra, participating in chamber music and, of course, continuing their instruction. The post was only for the three months of October through December, but the salary was sufficient to sustain Brahms in his modest life style in Hamburg for a full year. He returned again in 1858 and 1859.

Brahms found much to like at Detmold. The rich musical atmosphere was an inspiration to his study of the Classical masters, aided by the performances of Mozart and Haydn that the Prince required from the orchestra. The financial reward left him much time free to compose. Perhaps equally important to him were the lovely parks and forests surrounding the palace, where he took long walks to calm himself and ponder his future and his art. In those painful years after Schumann's death, Brahms was not only confronting his grief at the loss of his dear friend and mentor, but was also sorting out his strong personal feelings for Clara. At Detmold, as throughout his life, he found the antidote to his feelings for her in music. When he returned there in autumn 1859 he wrote to his Aunt Auguste, "I am quite ecstatic: I think of nothing but music, and of other things only when they make music more beautiful to me. If things go on like this, I am perfectly capable of evaporating into a musical chord and floating away in the air." It was under this halcyon spell that Brahms created his first chamber work for string ensemble, the Sextet in B-flat major.

The Sextet was conceived at Detmold in 1859, but largely composed between March and September of the following year. The work was first heard in Hanover in October 1860, played by a group under the direction of the composer's friend and champion, violinist Joseph Joachim. Daniel Gregory Mason noted that the work marked an important artistic and stylistic passage for Brahms, "unmistakably the moment of his musical adolescence.... It is the first piece of chamber music in which, freeing himself once for all from the subjectivity and turgidity of romanticism, he starts to explore the road of classical universality in beauty, in which he was to discover such unprecedented treasures." Mason then went on to point out the Sextet's indebtedness to the clear Classical formal models of Mozart and Beethoven. In a later study of Brahms, however, Burnett James, while allowing the dominant vein of neo-Classicism in the Sextet, adds, "Yet underneath there is the firm, irresistible, romantic spirit moving." In noting the apparently antithetical qualities in this music, these two writers have summarized the essential characteristic of Brahms: effulgent Romantic emotional expression fully disciplined by impeccable Classical form. The B-flat Sextet is among the earliest indisputable evidences of Brahms, the master.

Brahms was absolutely profligate with fine melodies in the opening, sonata-form movement. The first-theme group comprises the lyrical cello strain given immediately at the beginning and a *Ländler*-like tune (with a dotted rhythm) played in close harmony; a wide-ranging cello melody and another dotted-rhythm motive provide contrast. The development section is concerned just with the first-theme group motives, but all of the thematic material is returned in the recapitulation in heightened settings. The second movement is a theme with variations of which Brahms was so fond that he made a two-piano version (now lost) to play at parties with friends, as well as a transcription for solo piano (as Theme and Variations in D minor, which he presented to Clara as a birthday gift in 1860). The *Scherzo* is both vivacious and sly, filled with deceptive but delightful

rhythmic cross-accented that fuddle the toe-tapping proclivities of many a listener. The closing *Rondo*, in its form and thematic material if not in its somewhat prolix working-out an homage to Mozart, confirms Walter Niemann's words about this Sextet: "In it, Brahms' grave face wears an almost Apollo-like brightness and breathes a strong, healthy spirit of almost exuberant vitality."

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