

Santa Fe CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

51ST SEASON

Monday
6 p.m.
AUGUST 12

The Lensic
Performing Arts Center

Due to unforeseen circumstances, horn player **Nathaniel Silberschlag** is unable to perform at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival this summer. We look forward to welcoming him in a future season. We're grateful to **Julia Pilant** for stepping in for this evening's performance of Mozart's *Serenade in E-flat Major, K. 375*.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM by Eric Bromberger

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–91)

Serenade in E-flat Major, K. 375 (1781)

In October 1781, just four months after being fired from his position at the Archbishop of Salzburg's court and moving to Vienna, Mozart wrote a serenade for winds and left an account of its composition:

I wrote it for St. Theresa's Day, for Frau von Hickel's sister, or rather the sister-in-law of Herr von Hickel, court painter, at whose house it was performed [on October 15, 1781] for the first time. The six gentlemen who executed it are poor beggars who, however, play quite well together, particularly the first clarinet and the two horns. . . . I wrote it rather carefully. It has won great applause, too, and on St. Theresa's Night it was performed in three different places, for as soon as they finished playing it in one place they were taken off somewhere else and paid to play it.

The "poor beggars" must have been pleased with the music, as they chose to reward its composer in an unusual way two weeks later, per a letter Mozart wrote to his father:

At 11 o'clock at night I was treated to a serenade performed by two clarinets, two

horns, and two bassoons—and that, too, of my own composition. . . . [T]hese musicians asked that the street door might be opened and, placing themselves in the center of the courtyard, surprised me, just as I was about to undress, in the most pleasant fashion imaginable with the first chord in E-flat.

Although Mozart originally scored the *Serenade in E-flat Major* for six players, he revised it the following July and added two oboes to the original sextet. Today it's always heard in the revised version for eight players.

Mozart's wind serenades often had a "social" function: Frequently they were intended as background music at social occasions, and sometimes they were intended for outdoor performances. These conditions led Mozart to write in what's been described as a "rustic" style, producing energetic, spirited, and not particularly complex music. The *Serenade in E-flat Major*, however, is an exception to that rule. Mozart did indeed write this music "rather carefully," and it remains one of his most polished and expressive serenades.

The *Allegro maestoso* opens with a rhythmic motto that Mozart liked to use at the beginning of works in E-flat Major. (The motto also opens the *Sinfonia concertante*, K. 364, and Piano

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Concerto No. 22, K. 482.) This movement is in sonata form, with two contrasted subjects, a brief development, and a long and amiable recapitulation that actually introduces a new theme, which is a noble horn melody.

The first of the Serenade's two *Menuetto* movements opens with an energetic unison, but the real interest comes in the trio section, which shifts to C Minor, offers haunting chromatic winding and unusual modulations, and grows to a length much greater than the minuet itself.

The *Adagio* is the real glory of this serenade. It, too, is in sonata form, and Mozart writes beautifully for all eight voices here, with the thematic line shared and passed between them. Mozart was justly famous for his writing for winds, and this movement features some of his finest, with the beautiful melodic line changing colors as it moves from instrument to instrument.

Some have felt that after three such distinguished movements the final two seem a little more in the "rustic" serenade style. The second *Menuetto* is focused and brief, while the concluding *Allegro* in sonata-rondo form offers some graceful fugal writing in the midst of all its buoyant energy.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–97)

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34 (1861–64)

Brahms began to write what would eventually become his Piano Quintet in F Minor when he was in his late 20s and still living in his native Hamburg. He originally composed it as a string quintet (a string quartet plus an extra cello), and almost surely he took as his model the great String Quintet in C Major by Schubert, a composer he very much admired. But when violinist Joseph Joachim and other colleagues played through the quintet for the composer, everyone felt that an ensemble of strings alone couldn't satisfactorily project the power of the music. Brahms therefore recast the work as a sonata for two pianos, but, once again, the work was judged to be not wholly successful: It had all the power the music called for, but it lacked the sustained sonority that strings made possible and that much of this music seemed to demand.

Among those who weren't sold on the two-piano version was Clara Schumann, who offered the young composer her own 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.

Brahms did recast it, 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 version. In this form it's come down to us today as a masterpiece from Brahms's early years, and it remains a source of wonder that music that sounds so right in its final version could have ever been conceived of for another combination of instruments. Clara, who had so much admired her husband Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet, found Brahms's 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's occasionally heard in that form, but he destroyed all the parts of the string quintet version.)

The Piano Quintet has many virtues—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 stretches out to nearly three-quarters of an hour, and there are moments when the sheer sonic heft of a piano and a string quartet together makes one understand why Clara thought this music might be most effectively presented by a symphony orchestra.

The Piano Quintet is also remarkable for young Brahms's 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, the 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 16th 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 the viola and cello, also spins off a wealth of secondary material, and the extended development leads to a quiet coda. 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 16th-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 into music of toughness and turbulence.

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 version 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 his Symphony No. 40 in G Minor.

ERIC BROMBERGER earned his doctorate in American literature at UCLA and for 10 years taught literature and writing courses at Bates College and San Diego State University. Then he quit teaching to devote himself to his first love, music. Bromberger, a violinist, writes program notes for the San Diego Symphony, the La Jolla Music Society, San Francisco Performances, the University of Chicago Presents, Washington Performing Arts at The Kennedy Center, and many other organizations. He was a pre-concert lecturer for the Los Angeles Philharmonic for more than 20 seasons.

