

Santa Fe CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

51ST SEASON

Sunday
6 p.m.

AUGUST 18

The Lensic
Performing Arts Center

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

GIOACHINO ROSSINI (1792–1868)

Sonata a quattro No. 1 in G Major (1804)

Rossini composed his Six Sonatas for Strings in 1804, when he was 12 years old. He wrote them for himself and some friends, probably at the instigation of Agostino Triossi, an amateur double bassist. The particular choice of instruments—two violins, one cello, and one bass—sprang from necessity (there was no viola player available), and it caused Rossini to give the lower voices unusual independence and prominence.

The mature Rossini didn't have a very high opinion of these early works. The manuscript score (which wasn't discovered until after World War II, in the Library of Congress) includes a handwritten note from the composer, added much later in life, in which he describes the music as:

... six dreadful sonatas composed by me at the country place (near Ravenna) of my Maecenas friend Triossi when I was at the most infantile age, not even having taken a lesson in accompaniment, the whole composed and copied out in three days and performed by Triossi, double-bass, Morri, his cousin, first violin, the latter's brother, violoncello, who played like dogs, and the second violin by me myself, who was not in the least doggish, by God.

Despite what Rossini wrote in his note, these sonatas are hardly dreadful, and for a 12-year-old to have composed them is an astonishing achievement. The Sonata in G Major, the first of the six, is the best known. It's a sonata only in a

very modified sense of the term, as none of these works conform strictly to the Classical definition of sonata form. The opening *Moderato* comes the closest to that form, as it introduces and develops several themes, but the development is actually a display section, or a divertimento, in which individual instruments have a chance to show off. The *Andante* shows the influence of Mozart, Rossini's favorite composer. (In a characteristic line, Rossini once described Mozart's music as "the inspiration of my youth, the despair of my maturity, and the consolation of my old age.") The concluding *Allegro* is a buoyant rondo that, near the end, gives the cello and double bass a chance to shine.

Throughout this sonata, the second violin has an unusually prominent part. Apparently the 12-year-old Rossini wanted to make sure he had something to do while playing this piece with his friends.—Eric Bromberger

OUTI TARKIAINEN (b. 1985)

Sensory Flashbacks (2024; Festival Co-Commission; US Premiere)

Outi Tarkiainen's quintet Sensory Flashbacks was co-commissioned by the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, the OUR Festival, and Ensemble Temporum and is receiving its US premiere at this evening's concert. For more information about Ms. Tarkiainen and her work, please see "2024 Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival Commissioned Works," which begins on p. 20 of the Festival's 2024 Program Book. Ms. Tarkiainen, a Finnish

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composer who was born in Lapland's capital city of Rovaniemi, has written the following program note for *Sensory Flashbacks*. In it, she reflects on the inspiration she found in the various emotions and experiences that accompanied a move back to Lapland.—Ed.

Time is inescapably linear. Yet our senses make it heave, float, refract. Our senses measure time in different ways: a familiar scent takes us decades back in time, and a skill once learnt can be instantly recalled. Our body also remembers things which our mind has preferred to forget.

When we moved back up north, we went to live in the house my father had built and where I grew up. In a couple of weeks, my body felt decades younger, and I began moving about like I did as a teenager. Watching my children triggered kinaesthetic memories of how the house felt to a child. Much later, my father said he still woke up in his old house every morning. His body could not believe that he was actually somewhere else. Our sensory memories are volatile—they may transport us back to a time we have lost, to those who are dear to us.

—Outi Tarkiainen

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–97)

String Sextet in G Major, Op. 36 (1864–65)

The *String Sextet in G Major* is unusual among Brahms's works in that it offers one of the most explicit emotional statements ever made by the normally reticent composer. Brahms died a confirmed bachelor, but he fell in love with women throughout his life, and he was even engaged at one point. His fiancée was Agathe von Siebold, the vivacious daughter of a professor at the University of Göttingen. Brahms and Agathe became engaged in 1858, when he was 25, and the couple passed several blissful months together before Brahms, convinced he could never be happy if he was bound by marriage, firmly and abruptly broke off their engagement. The two never saw each other again.

The rupture was painful for both Brahms and Agathe, and they responded in different ways. In her account of her life, published as a novel many

years later, Agathe wrote that it took time for her to come to terms with Brahms's decision:

[Brahms] strode by on his path to fame, and as he, like every genius, belonged to humanity, I gradually learned to appreciate his wisdom in severing the bonds which had threatened to shackle him. [I] saw clearly at last that [I] could never have filled his life with [my] great love.

Brahms looked back on his decision with sharply mixed feelings, and several years later, he made an overt expression of his emotions in his own music. In the first movement of his *String Sextet in G Major*, Brahms included a musical motif that was based on the letters in Agathe's name, and that motif occurs several times. Brahms made its significance clear when he said to a friend: "Here I have freed myself from my last love."

While this sextet shouldn't be understood as simply a tribute to a woman Brahms had loved or (as some have suggested) as Brahms's farewell to the possibility of love, this warm and gentle (and sometimes complex) music is suffused with deep feeling. The first measures of the *Allegro non troppo* movement establish its mood of calm but unsettled beauty. The movement opens with the hypnotic murmuring of the first viola, and then the first violin quickly offers the main theme—a gently singing idea that glides easily between G Major and E-flat Major as it rises and falls. Both that quietly oscillating accompaniment and subtle handling of tonality will be central to this music. The wonderful second subject, which is full of sunlight, leads to the "Agathe" motif just before the start of the development, but there's something plaintive about that motif here, as if it's what Brahms referred to in another work as a *rückblick* (a "glance backward").

Brahms titles this sextet's second movement *Scherzo*, but this is a very unusual scherzo. It's in duple rather than the expected triple meter, and the pace isn't fast. Brahms had written its main theme—which is decorated continuously with mordents—as part of a piano piece a decade earlier. The measured pace of this "scherzo" is blasted aside at the unbuttoned and rollicking trio section, which goes into 3/4 and leaps ahead at a blistering pace.

The *Adagio* is in theme-and-variation form. The theme itself, marked *Molto espressivo*, is slow, although its multi-layered accompaniment is rhythmically complex and full of chromatic tension. Brahms was fascinated by variation form throughout his life, and he'd just completed his solo piano piece *Variations on a Theme of Paganini* before he wrote this sextet. Some of the complexity of that Paganini set can be felt in the five variations here, although this movement eventually reaches a conclusion that's full of radiant calm.

By contrast, the good-natured *Poco allegro* swings easily along its main theme, which is heard immediately after the bustling rush of the movement's introduction. This finale is in sonata form, and Brahms opens the development by treating that introductory material fugally. The rapid chatter of steady 16th notes is heard throughout, and eventually that energetic pulse rushes the movement to its spirited close on a coda marked *Animato*.

Is Brahms's *String Sextet in G Major* an autobiographical composition—one that "tells" the story of a certain moment in its creator's life? Absolutely not—and Brahms would have been the first to insist that it be heard as abstract music. But this music's flickering between light and dark, its sharp mixture of energy and plaintiveness, and its motivic remembrance of vanished love should alert us that it had a special, if very private, meaning for its young composer.

—Eric Bromberger

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.