

# Santa Fe CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

51<sup>ST</sup> SEASON

Monday  
6 p.m.  
AUGUST 19

The Lensic  
Performing Arts Center

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## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM by Eric Bromberger

### LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)

*Sonata for Violin and Piano (1914–22)*

Czech composer Leoš Janáček wrote his Sonata for Violin and Piano in 1914, just as Europe was becoming engulfed in World War I. Janáček couldn't find a violinist who was interested in performing his new work, however, so he set it aside and didn't return to it until after the war. At that time, he completely revised it, and the sonata was first performed in its final version in Brno in 1922, when the composer was 68.

Listeners unfamiliar with Janáček's music will likely be struck by the distinctive sound of this work. Janáček generates a shimmering, rippling sonority in the accompaniment, and over this the violin has jagged melodic figures, some of which are sustained and some of which are very brief. In fact, these harsh interjections are one of the most characteristic aspects of this music. Janáček also shows here his fondness for unusual key signatures: the sonata's four movements are in D-flat Minor, E Major, E-flat Minor, and G-sharp Minor.

The opening movement, marked simply *Con moto*, begins with a soaring, impassioned recitative for the violin, which immediately plays the movement's main subject over a jangling piano accompaniment that's reminiscent of the cimbalom of Eastern Europe. Despite Janáček's professed dislike of German forms, this movement shows some relation to sonata form: there's a more flowing second subject and an exposition repeat that's followed by a brief development full of sudden tempo changes, and the themes are treated as fragments.

Janáček originally composed the *Ballada* movement as a separate piece and published it in 1915, but as he revised this sonata, he decided to use the *Ballada* as its slow movement. This is long-lined music that's gorgeous in its sustained lyricism as the violin sails high above the rippling piano. At the climax, Janáček marks both parts *ad lib*, giving the performers a wide freedom of tempo before the music falls away to its shimmering close.

The *Allegretto* sounds folk-inspired, particularly in its short, repeated phrases. (Janáček interjects individual measures in the unusual meters of 1/8 and 1/4.) The piano has the dancing main subject, but it's accompanied by vigorous swirls from the violin. The trio section leads to an abbreviated return of the opening material and a cadence on harshly clipped chords.

The sonata concludes, surprisingly, with a slow movement, and this *Adagio* is in many ways the most impressive movement of the entire work. It shows some elements of the *dumka* form, with its rapid alternation of bright and dark music. The piano opens with a quiet chordal melody marked *Dolce*, but then the violin breaks in roughly with interjections that Janáček marks *Feroce* ("Wild, fierce"). A flowing second theme in E Major offers a glimpse of quiet beauty, but the movement drives to an unexpected climax with the violin making *Maestoso* ("Majestic") declarations over the piano playing *tremolando*. (Janáček regarded this passage as the high point of the entire sonata.) And then the sonata comes to an eerie conclusion. The climax falls away to an enigmatic close, and matters end

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ambiguously on the violin's halting interjections.

Janáček's Sonata for Violin and Piano is extraordinary music—original in conception and sonority and very moving despite its refusal to ever do quite what we expect it to. For those unfamiliar with Janáček's late music, this sonata offers a glimpse of the rich achievement that would come in the remarkable final 14 years of the composer's life.

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### **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–91)**

*String Quartet in E-flat Major, K. 428 (1783)*

Mozart's arrival in Vienna opened up glistening new vistas for him, and one of the most important of those was the example of Haydn's string quartets. Although Mozart had already written 13 quartets by the time he'd left Salzburg, all of them had been completed by the time he was 17 and showed resemblances to the divertimento form that the string quartet evolved from. The effect of Haydn's most recent quartets on Mozart was stunning, and he quickly set out to write a cycle of six new quartets of his own.

Under Haydn's hands, the quartet had evolved from its early role as genteel entertainment music (background music for court functions) into a great musical form. From Haydn, Mozart learned to democratize the voices, giving all four players individual roles in what had become a complex and expressive music drama.

Usually the fastest of workers, Mozart labored long and hard over his six quartets. It took him well over two years to complete the cycle, and he went back and revised each of them carefully, which suggests that he took this music quite seriously. In his dedication of the six quartets to Haydn, Mozart confessed that they were "the fruit of long and laborious toil." These six quartets are generally considered Mozart's finest, and certainly they're among the greatest ever written.

Mozart composed the String Quartet in E-flat Major in June and July of 1783, just after the birth of his first child. Externally, the four movements seem normal enough, but the glory of this music (and of all of Mozart's music) lies in the transformation of those very normal forms.

The *Allegro non troppo* opens with a unison

theme-shape that will recur in a variety of forms, and the second theme—full of dots, turns, and triplets—feels unusually busy after the somber opening. Mozart treats both themes in a development section that's remarkable for its interplay between the quartet's four voices.

The next movement, in the key of A-flat Minor and marked *Andante con moto*, proceeds solemnly over the constant pulse of its 6/8 meter.

The *Menuetto* that follows is most notable for its *Trio* section, which turns unexpectedly dark. Mozart moves to G Minor, and this music is haunted by the chromatic winding of its themes before it leaps back brightly to the minuet section.

The concluding *Allegro vivace* is aptly named, as it's a blistering rondo built on the bobbing, murmuring idea that opens the movement. Mozart may have learned from Haydn the importance of liberating all four voices in a string quartet, but this movement makes unusual demands on the first violinist. The writing here requires a virtuoso player, who's sent hurtling across the range of their instrument.

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### **ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)**

*Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81 (1887)*

In the summer of 1887, Dvořák took his large family to their summer home in Vysoká, in the forests and fields about 40 miles south of Prague. This was a very good time in the 45-year-old composer's life. After years of struggle and poverty, he suddenly found himself famous. His Slavonic Dances was being played around the world, and his Seventh Symphony had been premiered to instant acclaim in London two years earlier.

During that visit to Vysoká, Dvořák found time to both relax and compose. He was usually a fast composer—completing a work quickly after he sketched it—but a piano quintet he started that August took him some time; he didn't complete it until well into October, and it didn't premiere until the following January, in Prague.

Dvořák was at the height of his powers at this time, and that piano quintet—the Piano Quintet in A Major heard on this evening's program—

shows the hand of a master at every turn. This is tremendously vital music—full of fire and soaring melodies—and it’s a measure of its sweep that the first violin and piano are often set in their highest registers.

As a composer, Dvořák was always torn between the Classical forms of the Viennese masters (like his friend Brahms) and his own Czech influences. Perhaps one of the reasons this Piano Quintet is such a standout is that it manages to combine those two kinds of music so powerfully: Dvořák uses Classical forms like the scherzo, rondo, and sonata but also employs characteristic Czech forms like the *dumka* and *furiant*, which makes for an intoxicating mix. Perhaps a further source of this music’s appeal is its heavy reliance on the sound of the viola, Dvořák’s own instrument. The viola presents several of the work’s main ideas, and its dusky sound is central to its overall rich sonority.

The cello, however, has the opening idea of the *Allegro ma non tanto*. This long melody, which Dvořák marks *Espressivo*, suddenly explodes with energy and is extended at length before the viola introduces the sharply pulsed second theme. In sonata form, this movement ranges from a dreamy delicacy to thunderous tuttis, and sometimes those changes are sudden. The music is also full of beautifully shaded moments—passages that flicker effortlessly between different keys in the manner of Schubert, a composer Dvořák very much admired.

The second movement, the *Dumka*, is in a Czech form derived from an old Slavonic song of lament. Dvořák moves to F-sharp Minor here and makes a striking contrast of sonorities at the opening episode. For the first 40 measures, he keeps both the pianist’s hands in treble clef, where the piano’s sound is glassy and delicate; far below, the viola’s C string resonates darkly against this, and the viola’s rich, deep sound will be central to the movement. This opening gives way to varied episodes: a sparkling duet for violins that returns several times and a blistering *Vivace* tune introduced by the viola. The movement closes quietly on a return of its somber opening music.

Dvořák gives the brief third movement the title *Furiant*, an old Bohemian dance based on

shifting meters, but, as countless commentators have pointed out, the 3/4 meter remains unchanged throughout this movement, which is a sort of fast waltz in ABA form. Its dancing opening gives way to a wistful center section, marked *Poco tranquillo*, which is based on a variant of the opening theme.

The *Finale*, marked *Allegro*, shows characteristics of both the rondo and sonata forms. Its amiable opening idea—introduced by the first violin after a muttering, epigrammatic beginning—dominates the movement. Dvořák even offers a brisk fugato on this tune, introduced by the second violin, as part of the development. The full-throated coda, which drives to a conclusion of almost symphonic proportions, is among the many pleasures of one of Dvořák’s finest scores.

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**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.