

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF FORT WORTH PRESENTS
"Pillars of Our Craft" Levinson/Klotz/Segev/Nakamatsu
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Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2024

Duo in B-flat for Violin and Viola, K.424
Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)

The combination of violin and viola invites chamber music. Both instruments are portable. No keyboard is required. They play in different ranges and have distinct timbres that make it easy for the listener to discern which instrument is playing. Yet there is comparatively little repertoire for this combination, far less, for example, than for violin and cello or even for two violins. Mozart's two duos for violin and viola are thus much beloved to string players. They also have a delightful story behind them.

Mozart married Constanze Weber in August 1782. His father disapproved of the match, and never warmed up to his daughter-in-law. Mozart was determined to win over his father, however, and hoped that by bringing his bride from their home in Vienna to visit his father in Salzburg, he could effect cordial relations among his family. The young couple arrived in Salzburg in late July, 1783. Mozart was quick to make the social rounds in his former home town, eager to show off Constanze and to renew friendships.

Among those he sought out was his old friend Michael Haydn (younger brother of Franz Joseph), who was court musician, *Konzertmeister* and, since Mozart's summary dismissal from the post two years prior, *Kapellmeister* to Salzburg's Archbishop Colloredo. Mozart was dismayed to find Haydn taken so ill that he was temporarily unable to fulfill his responsibilities

to the Archbishop. Haydn seemed unduly distressed by his temporary incapacity. Upon inquiring further, Mozart learned that the Archbishop was withholding the *Kapellmeister's* salary until Haydn could satisfy an incomplete commission for six duets for violin and viola. Haydn had written four of the pieces when he became sick and was unable to continue.

Taking prompt advantage of the opportunity to help his friend, Mozart returned two days later with two freshly composed duos in fair copy. The manuscripts lacked only Michael Haydn's signature before they could be delivered with the other four to the impatient Archbishop.

Though parts of this delightful story may be apocryphal, there is no doubt as to the authenticity of K. 423 and 424. Twice in December 1783, following his return to Vienna, Wolfgang wrote to his father asking him to forward the manuscripts of the duos. By then he had turned his attention again to his own six string quartets, the set eventually dedicated to the older Haydn. Composing these pieces for violin and viola gave Mozart a timely opportunity to experiment with the thinner texture and stretch the musical possibilities of just two instruments.

The only prior instance of Mozart's pairing violin and viola together as solo instruments is the magnificent *Sinfonia Concertante*, K.364 (1779). Clearly he had plenty of additional ideas for the combination to spare. The violin-viola pieces overflow with imaginative ideas that must have helped him in his consideration of inner voicing and texture for the larger string quartet ensemble.

Another fascinating aspect of these two works is their subtle assimilation of Michael

Haydn's style. Haydn's employer, Archbishop Colloredo, was knowledgeable about music and continued to have Mozart's works performed even after young Wolfgang was no longer in his employ. Mozart took care to camouflage his style so that his duos would deceive the Archbishop and merge smoothly and plausibly with the four works that Haydn had already completed. In late 18th-century sets of six such works, it was customary to write in six different tonalities. Haydn's four were in C, D, E, and F major. Mozart rounded out the set by continuing up the scale, to G and (skipping A) B-flat major.

Musicologist H.C. Robbins Landon has singled out the grace notes and trills in the first movement of K.424 as evidence of Mozart's imitating Michael Haydn's style. But Mozart's own command of both string instruments and known preference for the viola as a chamber music instrument certainly inform the graceful writing in this duo.

Serenade for Strings, Op.10

Ernst von Dohnányi (1877-1960)

Far less well known today than his contemporaries Bartók (1881-1945) and Kodaly (1882-1967), Dohnányi was fabulously successful and quite famous in his own time, ranking only behind Liszt among Hungarian composers and pianists. He made his keyboard debut at the age of 20, to great acclaim in both Berlin and Vienna. The same year, 1897, he won a prize for his first symphony; composition ranked as high a priority as performance from his early years. Fascinated with writing music even during childhood, he composed 72 works between 1884 and 1895 -- by which time he had reached the mature age of 18!

Under the auspices of the prominent conductor Hans Richter, Dohnányi travelled to London in 1898. With a stunning performance of the Beethoven Fourth Piano Concerto, his international virtuoso career was launched. Coincidentally, he busied himself on tour by composing; the result was the string trio entitled *Serenade* on this afternoon's program. Although the Op. 10 *Serenade* was Dohnányi's only essay for the string trio ensemble, he was a lifelong champion of chamber music. His published works include three string quartets, two string sextets, a piano quartet, two piano quintets, and two piano sextets, including one with winds. Dvorák's *Terzetto*, Op. 74 (1887) for two violins and viola may have served as a model for the *Serenade*.

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians offers these remarks about Dohnányi's music and the five-movement *Serenade*:

As a composer he soon discarded the strong early influence of Schumann and Brahms, and by 1902 he had found his own language in the *Serenade*, Op.10. He did not seek to open new paths, but concentrated his efforts on expressing the entire Romantic heritage in the perfect forms of the 18th century.

The opening march – which functions rather like a fanfare introduction, in keeping with its 18th-century precedents – and the *Romanza* are charming essays in late 19th-century style, pleasant and light. In the Scherzo, however, Dohnányi is bolder. He tackles this electrifying *fugato* movement with vigor and aggression, using more adventurous rhythms and modal scales evocative of Eastern Europe. Generally scherzos are shorter movements; this one is longer than either of the two movements that precede it, which contributes to our sense of its significance; it is a turning point in the *Serenade*.

In the last two movements more adventurous harmonies emerge, lending piquance and novelty. Listeners may note a familiar contour to the chorale-like theme of Dohnányi's substantial *Tema con variazioni*; it is closely related to the first movement *Marcia*. The first three variations are more like decorations of the theme, adding a countermelody as accompaniment, and wandering a bit afield from the harmonies of the 'chorale.' Textures grow more complex in the last two variations. In a couple of places the cello plays in a higher register than viola or violin. In the fourth variation, marked *Poco più agitato*, the mood shifts, triggered by nervous triplets and a shift to minor mode. It yields to a serene *Adagio*, with the triplets now calmed down. Apart from a brief *tremolando* interruption, the atmosphere remains calm to end the variations.

An energetic *Rondo* concludes the Serenade. Decisive exclamation points - often in double stops - punctuate the motoric, recurring rondo figure that the three players toss among one another. A more homophonic [chordal] secondary episode alternates with the motor rhythm, but those exclamation points are never far off. Dohnányi's compositional invention serves to blend rondo and variation. Toward the end, he effects a smooth return to the first movement *Marcia*. Its restatement as a coda unifies the Serenade, drawing the work to a convincing close.

Légende, Op.17 for Violin and Piano

Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880)

Polish heritage, Russian career, French style

Though he was born in Poland and spent much of his career in Russia, Henryk

Wieniawski was educated in the French school. Like his slightly older contemporary and friend Henri Vieuxtemps, he was an exceptional violin talent, auditioning for the Paris Conservatory in 1843, when he was only eight. Refinement and elegance were the signature characteristics of French violin-playing, and Wieniawski proved an apt student, both as a performer and as a composer.

Wieniawski composed most of his music as a vehicle for his own virtuoso career. Though his two violin concerti are great favorites of violinists, audiences have always preferred splashy showpieces like his two concert Polonaises for violin and orchestra. "French school, Slavonic temperament" is the way *The New Grove* succinctly summarizes Wieniawski's music.

This *Légende* is a more lyrical affair - and has a back story that is one of classical music's most appealing. On tour in the British Isles in 1859, Wieniawski met Isabella Hampton, the niece of the English composer George Osborne. He was smitten, but her parents objected, wary of their daughter's union with a musician. They relented when they heard Wieniawski perform the *Légende* at one of his London concerts. His talent as both performer and composer led them to sanction the match. The young couple married in 1860.

A single movement of about eight minutes, the *Légende* is in the finest tradition of 19th-century salon music. Essentially a ternary form, it is heartfelt and melodious. Instead of technical fireworks, Wieniawski requires the violinist to play extensive double stops in thirds, sixths, and octaves (very difficult to play in tune), and to focus on beauty of tone. A brief cadenza and a flourish in the coda hint at violinistic bravura, but this work is really about rich sound and

emotional projection.

String Trio (2023)

Inbal Segev (b.1973)

Ms. Segev's biography appears in the bio section of this afternoon's program. She has graciously provided the following note for her String Trio, which receives its world premiere this afternoon.

In this composition, I have woven together a Middle Eastern melody with a chorale. My inspiration for this piece was drawn from Mendelssohn's Adagio movement in his Cello and Piano Sonata, Op. 58, where the composer beautifully juxtaposed his Christian upbringing with his Jewish heritage.

Growing up in Israel, at home we only listened to and played Western classical music, while everywhere outside of my bubble I could hear Mediterranean music – on buses, streaming from neighbors' windows, echoing through the streets, and even within the walls of my school.

The repertoire for string trios is notably limited, especially when compared to its more prevalent counterpart, the string quartet. Having been a part of my own string trio for over a decade, I've always wished we had more, and so, here it is.

– Inbal Segev

Quartet in G minor for Piano and Strings, K. 478

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

What is Mozart's most celebrated chamber work? From the standpoint of controversy, that designation must surely go to the String Quartet in C, K. 465, with its mystifying chromatic slow introduction. A sentimental vote might go to the Clarinet Quintet, K. 581; the intellectuals and the string players would likely opt for one of the late viola quintets. But to the majority of concert-goers and listeners, that distinction certainly belongs to the beloved minor Piano Quartet. Familiar even to non-musicians, this frequently performed work has achieved a niche in the chamber repertory the more remarkable for its being the first work of its genre. There is no certain precedent for the ensemble of piano plus string trio; Mozart's division of the musical labors and thematic material among the four players debunks any notion of categorizing this work (or its companion piece, the Quartet in E-flat, K. 493) along with the keyboard-dominated piano trios.

The G minor quartet was completed in 1785 and published by Hoffmeister in Vienna, without opus number, probably late in 1785. A number of specific references to contemporary performances survive, indicating that this work and the E-flat Quartet achieved considerable popularity during Mozart's lifetime. A Paris edition was published by LeDuc in May, 1788 identifying the piece as Opus 14; the work's appeal had clearly traveled well beyond Mozart's native country. These were Mozart's most successful years in Vienna, and the closest he came as an adult to achieving fame and economic stability.

That stated, the fierce drama of the opening movement is the more jarring. Much has been written about the significance of keys and their associations in the music of Mozart, Haydn,

and Beethoven. There is no doubt that g-minor did have special, grave associations for Mozart. He reserved g-minor for some of his most passionate and stormy music. What must be remembered is first, how comparatively rare any work in minor mode was in the late 18th century; the number is startlingly small. Second, Mozart himself wrote very few works in g-minor. It seems like more because the few that exist are so widely known: the Symphonies No. 25 and No. 40 are cases in point. One of the viola quintets, K. 516, is also in G minor, and, of course, this Piano Quartet. No other works from Mozart's maturity are in this powerful tonality. How long a shadow these few masterpieces have cast!

The music of the G minor quartet is familiar. Even so, the listener is struck by the passionate character of the first movement. The lyrical slow movement and lighthearted G major finale are an enormous contrast, almost as if they belonged to a different work. Perhaps Mozart sensed that his Viennese audience would not favor such stark drama as the closing sentiment of a chamber work intended for the salon. The last movement, especially without the distancing bridge of a minuet/trio, barely succeeds in erasing the memory of the opening *Allegro*. Despite the bright G major theme of the finale, G minor is the indelible impression this quartet makes, and the musical legacy it bequeathes.