

Date du recital/Date of recital: *May 23, 2024*

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This program features three masterworks, each representing the tremendous emotional journeys in music. While all the music is played on viola, all the pieces on today's program were written for different instruments and later transcribed for the viola. The transcription of Mozart's E minor violin sonata is the least often played, while works like the Brahms clarinet sonata are played by nearly every violist at some point in their life. Cesar Franck's most popular work, his violin sonata, is played by several different instruments; among the most popular are cello, flute, double bass, and, as we will hear today, the viola. Because of their repurposing for the viola, these pieces give unique challenges in translating the writing that was more idiomatic to their original instruments. Still, the music prevails. The works on this program take us through the darkest moments of grief and sorrow to some of the most tender, joyful, and even exuberant moments of the sonata duo repertoire.

Music simply poured from the hands of **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)** who could compose new music just as fast as he could write it down. He is the epitome of the classical era and one of the composers closest to the hearts of musicians today. Being prolific in opera, much of his music has a vocal quality which is demonstrated by the graceful melodies and contrasting charismatic rhythmic figures that are present throughout all his work. Although he is known for his uplifting melodies, his minor works represent the other side of Mozart's soul that he only brought out for a handful of pieces. Of his approximately 36 violin sonatas, this is the only one written in a minor key. Further, it is the only work in his tremendous catalogue written in the key of E minor. Written in 1778 at the age of 22, Mozart was in the middle of a 16-month journey abroad in which he was unsuccessful in finding a position but more importantly, saw the illness and subsequent death of his mother in July of 1778 in Paris. Although it is not known whether he wrote the piece before or after this event, the depth of the emotion within this work points certainly points to it.

Set in two movements like many of his violin sonatas, the opening of this sonata is particularly startling due to the solemn nature and the unison, monophonic voicing of the piano and viola. The unison, as opposed to a melody and accompaniment texture, gives the theme a profundity that Mozart saves for his more emotionally charged works. It is not until after a set of insistent groups of eighth notes, still in unison, that Mozart finally introduces the theme in a more familiar texture, and we get on with the movement. Although the piece begins with such a bleak opening, Mozart is always juxtaposing with a tremendous array of emotional characters. By mixing yearning with defeat, anger with repose, and sunny with stormy, Mozart constantly reminds us of the interconnectedness of love and sorrow. The second movement contains one of the beautiful, sorrowful minuet melodies of all his entire

catalogue. The themes seamlessly morph between contrasting characters, but the heart of the entire work is in the E major section in the heart of this movement. Marked *dolce*, this section is tender and warm, and the chorale quality of the piano sings with the sighing figures in the viola. The transcription by Joseph Vieland keeps much of the work in the original key, transcribing a couple of the key melodies (such as the opening of the second movement) down an octave to a more advantageous register in the viola. Although the viola lacks the directness of tone in the violin, its mellow, singing quality lends itself well to the tone of this sonata.

Johannes Brahms (1822-1897) was a composer known for his reserve and introspective poeticism. Following in the romantic belief that a composer's work expresses oneself, Brahms' feel for emotional intensity had been in his music since the beginning. After retiring from composing following his second viola quintet, Brahms was famously inspired by the Richard Mühlfeld, the principal clarinetist of the Meiningen court orchestra, to pen a couple of final opuses. The Op. 120 sonatas, written originally for clarinet and piano were written in 1895 and were the last works that he would publish before his death. The classical sonata form was one of the closest to Brahms and as such, these works truly represent this monumental artist's final statements on our human condition. Considering the inward feeling of the work, Brahms' comment on one of his piano pieces is particularly applicable here. "Even one listener," he says, "is too many."¹

Throughout its four movements, Brahms takes the listener on an incredible journey ultimately from darkness to the light. Beginning in the brooding key of F minor, the lyrical first movement is filled with yearning themes that range from tender to passionate outbursts of emotion. Despite the darkness of the movement, the final cadence of the movement resolves to F major instead of F minor, offering us of a glimmer of hope. The second movement is one his most profound. Essentially a song, Brahms explores the different colors and octaves of the instruments to create a melody that just gets more delicate and precious with each iteration. After a peaceful ending, the movement that follows is light in character and rhythm. We have moved beyond the tumultuous emotion in the first movement into a brighter and sunnier world. The final movement announces the triumph in a more outward way, the initial notes in the beyond sound like bells singing across the town for everyone to hear. Although written with the clarinet in mind, Brahms himself did the transcription for viola, noticing that the range of both instruments were similar. He makes many changes in register, most notably the opening of the piece which uses the violas rich C and G strings. Furthermore, in a few spots he adds double stops to strengthen the impact of the viola part. The dark, singing tone of the viola is well suited to this work, earning its place as one of the great viola sonatas.

The final composer on this program is **Cesar Franck (1822-1890)**, who only found success as a composer in the last ten years of his life. He worked for most of his life as an organist and only by the encouragement of a group of students was he able to find the confidence to seriously compose near the end of his life.² He produced a handful of significant

¹ Conrad, Wilson, *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*, (Grand Rapids: W.B Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 106.

² Stove, R. J., *César Franck: His Life and Times* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 234.

works, but the violin sonata, written in 1886, is by far the most famous. This work was written as a wedding gift to the violinist Eugene Ysäye and was sightread by him and Franck's sister-in-law on the spot, quite a feat considering the tremendous difficulty of the piano part especially.³ Subsequent touring of the piece began its legacy of being performed in concert halls across the world.

In this sonata, Franck uses a peculiar structure to create a fresh emotional journey throughout the piece. The first movement is unique in that it begins with *Allegretto ben moderato*, rather than the typical *Allegro* used for the beginning of a sonata. Additionally, instead of traditional development of themes, Franck simply juxtaposes the two themes, assigning one each to the piano and violin. After the peaceful ending to the first movement, the stormy second movement is quite unexpected. Set as a scherzo in the key of D minor, the movement begins with an intense piano toccata which despite having contemplative interludes, always returns. The movement ends in a euphoric flurry in the D major key. Although a triumphant ending to a movement, the slow third movement again picks up the emotional intensity. This *Recitativo-Fantasia* begins with alternating solos from violin and piano, reminiscent of the first movement but with now with a greater sense of longing and dramaticism. In the middle of the movement, we move into the *fantasia* section which introduces themes that will be picked up again in the final movement. Despite the desolate ending, the beginning of the fourth movement is pure melodic joy. Throughout the movement, we hear themes from throughout the work all put together in a magnificent patchwork of the journey that we have taken.

³ Stove, R. J., *César Franck: His Life and Times* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 257.

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