CONCERT PROGRAM VIII:
The Solo Voice

August 9 and 10
Friday, August 9, 8:00 p.m., Stent Family Hall, Menlo School
Saturday, August 10, 6:00 p.m., The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton

PROGRAM OVERVIEW
The season comes to a riveting close as we celebrate the exuberance of Bach’s music for solo instruments and the virtuosity of the soloist. With its origins as an orchestral concerto, Bach’s Concerto for Violin and Oboe revels in the novelty of a double concerto, a masterly example of a virtuosic pairing of strings and wind instruments. Schubert’s Rondo in A Major equally captures the essence of the virtuosic violin with its rambunctious finale. Mozart wrote his Twelfth Piano Concerto shortly after the death of Bach’s son Carl Philipp Emanuel, a close friend and mentor. The program concludes with the Double Concerto for Violin, Piano, and Strings by Felix Mendelssohn, one of the most devoted heirs of Bach’s legacy, responsible for launching the modern Bach revival.

FÊTE THE FESTIVAL:
8:30 p.m., following the concert on August 10,
Palo Alto Art Center

Tickets are $65. Please see the patron services team for availability.

SPECIAL THANKS
Music@Menlo dedicates these performances to the following individuals and organizations with gratitude for their generous support:
August 9: The Jeffrey Dean and Heidi Hopper Family
August 10: The Martin Family Foundation

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)
Concerto for Violin and Oboe in c minor, BWV 1060 (ca. 1736)
  Allegro
  Adagio
  Allegro

Kristin Lee, solo violin; James Austin Smith, oboe; Hyeyeon Park, harpsichord; Arnaud Sussmann, Benjamin Beilman, violins; Richard O’Neill, viola; Dmitri Atapine, cello; Scott Pingel, bass

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
Rondo in A Major for Violin and String Quartet, D. 438 (1816)

Sean Lee, solo violin; Jorja Fleezanis, Benjamin Beilman, violins; Richard O’Neill, viola; David Finckel, cello

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
Piano Concerto no. 12 in A Major, K. 414 (1782)
  Allegro
  Andante (after J. C. Bach)
  Rondeau: Allegretto

Gilbert Kalish, piano; Arnaud Sussmann, Jorja Fleezanis, violins; Richard O’Neill, viola; David Finckel, cello;
Scott Pingel, bass

INTERMISSION

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)
Double Concerto in d minor for Violin, Piano, and Strings (1823)
  Allegro
  Adagio
  Allegro mauro

Wu Han, piano; Benjamin Beilman, solo violin; Kristin Lee, Sunmi Chang, violins; Richard O’Neill, viola; Dmitri Atapine, cello; Scott Pingel, bass

www.musicatmenlo.org
Johann Sebastian Bach was elected in 1723, at the age of thirty-eight, to the position of Music Director and Cantor in Leipzig, where he taught at the St. Thomas School and directed all musical activities at the city’s two churches, the Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche. Bach would remain in Leipzig until his death, in 1750, and produced many of his mature masterpieces during his time there. In fulfillment of his church duties during this period, Bach created his greatest sacred works, including the cantatas, the St. Matthew Passion and St. John Passion, and the Mass in b minor.

But Bach’s second decade in Leipzig saw the creation of much of his great instrumental music, as well. In 1729, Bach assumed the directorship of the Collegium Musicum, a concert series presented by local musicians and students which had been founded in 1702 by Georg Philipp Telemann. The Collegium presented weekly concerts for the Leipzig cultural, primarily at the consequently iconic Zimmermann’s Coffeehouse near the city center. Bach programmed music by Telemann, Corelli, Vivaldi, and other leading composers of the day and also composed much new music himself for the series. With the Collegium as a newly available outlet for Bach’s creativity in addition to the church, the 1730s saw a revitalized output of keyboard, chamber, and orchestral music to match the inspired catalog of sacred vocal music composed over the previous decade.

Harpsichord concerti were a significant part of Bach’s compositional output for the Collegium Musicum in the 1730s. He wrote eight harpsichord concerti (ca. 1738), all transcriptions of earlier concerti for wind or string instruments. In addition to these, Bach also composed, several years prior, a number of concerti for multiple harpsichords, which are likewise transcriptions of earlier works. (One of these—the C Major Concerto for Two Harpsichords—opens Concert Program I [see p. 13].) Another concerto from this period is a two-harpsichord concerto in C minor, based on a concerto for oboe and violin. While the original performance materials for this concerto are lost, it exists in a scholarly reconstruction that is widely performed today.

The concerto is cast in three movements, following the Baroque convention of a fast first movement, a slow second movement, and a fast finale. The ritornello that begins the Allegro first movement is compact and exuberant, and, despite the characteristically moody key of c minor, it emanates an irresistible joie de vivre. The oboe and violin soloists present a secondary theme, which leads quickly into a spirited exchange with the full ensemble, issuing fragments of the ritornello. The subsequent solo-tutti conversation that ensues throughout the movement is lively and emotionally intense.

The Adagio second movement highlights the soloists further, setting florid and piercingly expressive melodic writing for the oboe and violin above a simple, naive accompaniment in the strings.

The concerto finishes with a vigorous Allegro finale—like the first movement, set in ritornello form. Compared to the first movement’s compact theme, the finale’s ritornello is verbose, underscoring the movement’s extroverted energy. Also like the first movement, the finale features an animated dialog between solo and tutti passages. One of the movement’s most striking solo episodes features dazzling triplet figurations in the violin. It is known that when Bach first discovered the violin concerti of Vivaldi’s L’estro armonico, he was enthralled by their demonstrative, high-flying virtuoso quality; such theatrical passages in Bach’s music reflect the influence of Vivaldi’s Italianate virtuoso style.

—Patrick Castillo

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(Born January 31, 1797, Vienna; died November 19, 1828, Vienna)

Rondo in A Major for Violin and String Quartet, D. 438
Composed: June 1816
Published: 1897

Other works from this period: Wanderers Nachtlied, D. 224 (1815); Symphony no. 4 in c minor, D. 438, Tragic (1816); String Trio in B-flat Major, D. 581 (1817); Piano Quintet in A Major, D. 667, Trout (1819); Fantasy in C Major, D. 760, Wanderer (1821)

Approximate duration: 14 minutes

Curiously, Franz Schubert—the Viennese musical icon credited by the American composer John Harbison with writing “the best piece in every genre he really tackled”—never tackled the quintessentially Romantic medium of concerto for solo instrument and orchestra. Mozart and Beethoven each composed landmark violin concerti, piano concerti, etc., but no such works come to us from Schubert. Only two pieces in his enormous body of work resemble the concerto medium: the Konzertstück in D Major for Violin and Orchestra and the Rondo in A Major for Violin and Strings (which can be performed with either string orchestra or string quartet). Both works are relatively short, with each cast in a single movement—but for their brevity, neither wants for a wealth of musical ideas.

In the absence of a true violin concerto, the A Major Rondo serves as Schubert’s masterpiece in the genre. Composed in 1816, when Schubert was only nineteen years old, the work radiates youthful élan from beginning to end.

Schubert identifies the work as a rondo, the straightforward Classical form in which a central refrain recurs in alternation with contrasting sections of music, called episodes. But in fact—as with another of Schubert’s rondos, the Grand Rondeau for Piano, Four Hands (see Concert Program I [p. 13])—in the present rondo, Schubert elevates the standard rondo form, through his ingenious design, to a work of unexpected sophistication.

It’s easy to lose sight of the A Major Rondo’s formal sophistication. Schubert’s melodic ideas are so exquisitely unassuming, their naiveté seems to contradict the expert craftsmanship behind the work. Also, the rondo so avidly celebrates instrumental virtuosity—in the true spirit of the Romantic concerto—its brilliant showmanship, too, might mask its elaborate formal design.

Before presenting the refrain, the rondo begins with an Adagio prelude. The character of the music—its open, expectant octaves, its ascending melodic sweep—has a curtain-raising feeling about it, as if preparing the listener for the majestic breadth of the rondo to follow. From the mass of the full-ensemble sonority, the violin soloist emerges with a flourish.
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  
(Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg; died December 5, 1791, Vienna) 
Piano Concerto no. 12 in A Major, K. 414 
Composed: 1782  
Published: 1785  
Other works from this period: Symphony no. 35 in D Major, K. 385, Haffner (1782); String Quartet in B-flat Major, K. 458, The Hunt (1784); Piano Concerto no. 21 in C Major, K. 467 (1785); Symphony no. 38 in D Major, K. 504, Prague (1786); Così fan tutte, K. 588 (1790)  
Approximate duration: 25 minutes  

For Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, one of the Classical period’s most gifted piano virtuosos as well as its finest composer, the piano concerto served as an essential creative outlet. He produced twenty-seven piano concerti over his lifetime, completing his first four at age eleven and his final one within a year of his death. The piano concerto medium would remain indispensable for Mozart throughout his career, and he would in turn prove vital to the development of its literature. In the mid-1780s—particularly between 1784 and 1786—Mozart played the dual roles of artist and impresario in Vienna to great success. He frequently presented concerti unveiling his latest compositions: typically a symphony, a chamber work, perhaps a keyboard improvisation, and a piano concerto. Mozart composed twelve of his twenty-seven piano concerti for these concerti. Expressly designed to showcase himself as both a composer and a virtuoso, these works crystallized the piano concerto medium. Writing for The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Cliff Eisen and Stanley Sadie identify the twelve concerti written during this period as “unquestionably the most important works of their kind.”

Mozart composed his Piano Concerto no. 12 in A Major, K. 414, in 1782. It is the second of a trio of piano concerti that Mozart composed shortly after his move to Vienna. In a letter to his father, Mozart wrote of these three: “These concerti are a happy medium between what is too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without being vapid. There are passages here and there from which the connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction; but these passages are written in such a way that the less learned cannot fail to be pleased, though without knowing why.” Mozart goes on to offer the following biting cultural assessment, which his music perhaps aimed to address: “The golden mean of truth in all things is no longer either known or appreciated. In order to win applause one must write stuff which is so inane that a coachman could sing it, or so unintelligible that it pleases precisely because no sensible man can understand it.”

Though the A Major Concerto predates Mozart’s most celebrated piano concerto period, compositionally, it nevertheless belongs in the same realm as the twelve concerti of 1784–1786. The work demonstrates all of the hallmarks of Mozart’s mature compositional language in the genre: the piano writing is in equal measures logically expressive and brilliantly virtuosic; the dynamic between soloist and orchestra is pitch-perfect—and, moreover, has an intimacy suggestive of chamber music. Indeed, the concerto exists in an arrangement for piano and string quartet which Mozart prepared in the hopes of promoting the concerto for private home performances.

The first movement Allegro presents a wealth of thematic ideas, testifying to the depth of Mozart’s melodic imagination. The movement contains no fewer than six distinct melodic ideas, the first theme marked by an intimacy suggestive of chamber music. Indeed, the concerto exists in an arrangement for piano and string quartet which Mozart prepared in the hopes of promoting the concerto for private home performances.

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“This is not lavishness: Mozart uses melodies at once so complex and so complete that they do not bear the weight of development.”

The Andante second movement is based on an overture by Johann Christian Bach, Johann Sebastian’s youngest son and an important childhood friend and mentor to Mozart. Johann Christian Bach had died on New Year’s Day of 1782, the year of this concerto. Mozart wrote that his passing marked “a sad day for the world of music.” His fondness for Johann Christian, and his grief over his death, can be felt in the Andante’s tender opening. Mozart casts the melody in the strings, to be played sotto voce.

The finale is a lighthearted rondo, a welcome reprieve following the heartrending slow movement. The alternating episodes complement the refrain’s cheerful demeanor, and Mozart moreover picks ups elements of the refrain throughout, lending the proceedings an organically flowing quality.

—Patrick Castillo

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(Born February 3, 1809, Hamburg; died November 4, 1847, Leipzig)

Double Concerto in d minor for Violin, Piano, and Strings

Composed: 1823

First performance: July 3, 1825

Other works from this period:
- Piano Quartet no. 2 in F minor, op. 2 (1825), Symphony no. 1 in C minor, op. 11 (1824), Sextet in D Major, op. 110 (1824), Octet in E-flat Major, op. 20 (1825), Die Hochzeit des Camacho, op. 10 (1825)

Approximate duration: 36 minutes

In the decades following his death in 1750, Bach’s music fell, if not quite into obscurity, into some measure of neglect. But in 1824, the fifteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn received from his grandmother what would be a gift of great historic consequence: a copy of the score to Bach’s St. Matthew Passion. Five years later, Mendelssohn’s obsession with Bach and his particular affinity with this work culminated in a celebrated performance of the passion at the Berlin Singakademie. The performance—led by the brilliant twenty-year-old conductor Felix Mendelssohn—revitalized interest in Bach’s music throughout Western Europe, thus crediting Mendelssohn as the author of the modern Bach revival.

Mendelssohn composed his Concerto in d minor for Violin, Piano, and Strings in 1823, as a fourteen-year-old prodigy. The well-to-do Mendelssohn family regularly staged Sunday morning musicales at their home throughout Felix’s youth as a vehicle for his (and his sister Fanny’s) blossoming gifts; the Double Concerto was composed for and premiered at one of these events. Though composed during Mendelssohn’s adolescence, the concerto exhibits the craftsmanship of a tremendously precocious composer. Not surprisingly, the prodigious young Mendelssohn caught the attention of Western Europe’s musical community through these musicales and came to be regarded by many as the second Mozart. Astonished at his rapid development, Mendelssohn’s teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter noted, “He is growing beneath my eyes.”

At the time of the Double Concerto’s composition—one year prior to his discovery of the St. Matthew Passion—Mendelssohn was very much under the spell of Bach, as much as he was absorbing the musical innovations of his own time, particularly the late works of Beethoven. The Double Concerto reflects this dichotomy between the Baroque influence on Mendelssohn’s music and the emerging Romantic energy that would come to define the nineteenth century. Moreover, in addition to the synthesis of Baroque and Romantic elements, another striking element of the work is Mendelssohn’s treatment of the two soloists: the violin, a brilliant, melodic instrument, is generally entrusted with music of soaring lyricism, while the piano, Mendelssohn exploits for its massive sonority, combining powerful chordal textures with dazzling runs up and down the keyboard.

Also noteworthy about the concerto is its sheer youthful exuberance. One can hear in this work how much music the young, insatiably curious Mendelssohn had swirling around in his head—and it all comes out, unapologetically, in this no-holds-barred concerto.

The work begins with the strings issuing a contrapuntal theme, reminiscent of a Bach fugue but infused with the spirit of Romantic Sturm und Drang. As the theme unfolds, the contrapuntal texture grows increasingly intricate.

Mendelssohn introduces a long-breathed second theme, in F major—a markedly Romantic contrast to the compact first theme. The orchestral exposition ends with a return to the Bachian counterpoint of the opening measures, but the piano’s furious entrance rips the music from its Baroque reverie back into the era of Beethoven.

The soloists unite the Baroque and Romantic idioms, with the piano presenting the Bachian first theme in its left hand as a foundation for the overture Romantic gestures in the right hand and the violin. The rest of the ensemble follows suit.

The soloists soon take over the lyrical second theme; the strings answer with a fragment of the Bachian theme, which, in short order and seemingly out of nowhere, plunges the music into showy salon fare. One of this movement’s greatest delights lies in discovering how the young and, at times, cheeky Mendelssohn inventively wedd all of these elements: Baroque counterpoint with Romantic Sturm und Drang, profundity with showmanship, heroism with salon music.

Later in the movement, Mendelssohn introduces another dramatic turn: a declamatory recitative in the violin, theatrically set above piano tremolando. It’s easy to imagine this music, in another era, as the soundtrack to a love scene in a silent film. This dreamy music segues abruptly back to the frenetic energy that came before, from which Mendelssohn steers the first movement to its final measures.

Mendelssohn follows the fireworks of the concerto’s expansive first movement with a heartfelt Adagio. After the initial tutti statement of the theme, most of the movement is given over to an intimate dialog between the two soloists. The full ensemble comes together again only for the movement’s magical conclusion. The warm texture of the strings, playing sotto voce, surrounds the soloists with an ethereal glow.

The final movement begins with an impassioned statement uttered first by the piano, which is then joined by the solo violin. The full ensemble responds with emphatic terseness. The fiery energy of this music is countered by the brighter, elegant second theme. Throughout the proceedings, whether tempestuous or calm, Mendelssohn spotlights the soloists with passages of pyrotechnic virtuosity.

—Patrick Castillo