

Program Notes: Berlin

Notes on the program by Patrick Castillo

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(Born Bonn, Germany, baptized December 17, 1770; died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria)

Cello Sonata in F Major, op. 5, no. 1

Composed: 1796

Publication: 1797, Vienna

Dedication: Friedrich Wilhelm II, King of Prussia

Other works from this period: Three Piano Trios, **op. 1** (1794–1795); Quintet in E-flat Major for Piano, Oboe, Clarinet, Horn, and Bassoon, **op. 16** (1796); Sonata in D Major for Piano, Four Hands, **op. 6** (1796–1797); Three String Trios, **op. 9** (1797–1798); Three Violin **Sonatas**, **op. 12** (1797–1798)

Approximate duration: 26 minutes

In 1796, the twenty-five-year-old Beethoven embarked on a concert tour to Prague, Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin. From Prague, Beethoven wrote to his brother Johann: "My art is winning me friends and respect, what more do I want? And this time I shall make a good deal of money." In Berlin, he appeared before Friedrich Wilhelm II, King of Prussia, himself a talented amateur cellist. Joined by the king's first cellist, Jean-Louis Duport, Beethoven presented the **Opus 5** sonatas and the **variations** on Handel's *See the Conqu'ring Hero Comes!* (a **theme** chosen, one can fairly surmise, to flatter the king). The king rewarded Beethoven with a snuffbox filled with louis d'ors—"no ordinary snuffbox," the composer proudly noted, "but such a one as it might have been customary to give to an ambassador."

Though ostensibly dedicated to Friedrich Wilhelm II, the Opus 5 sonatas' true honoree is Duport, whose groundbreaking contributions to the cello tradition are documented in Beethoven's writing for that instrument. The sonatas call for a range of technical effects introduced by Duport, bringing the cello in league with the violin as a solo instrument: **arpeggios**, **double-stops**, and soaring **cantabile** in high **registers**. Consequently, these sonatas, writes Beethoven scholar Lewis Lockwood, "emerged as the first true cello sonatas worthy to rank with Mozart's violin sonatas."

The two sonatas of Opus 5 are structurally similar—a slow introduction leading to an **Allegro** first **movement**, followed by a spirited **rondo**—but are of contrasting humors. The Sonata in F Major, **op. 5, no. 1**, is the sunnier of the pair. The extended **Adagio sostenuto** introduction begins on a cautious note, cello and piano, in **unison**, taking tentative first steps. From these hesitant utterances emerges a cello melody of breathtaking lyricism, set in the instrument's sweet tenor register—an understated celebration of the instrument (and Duport's facility). This sinewy melody passes through light and dark **harmonic** shadings, the piano surrounding it with increasingly ornate filigree, until both arrive at a pregnant **pianissimo fermata**.

The ebullient **Allegro** begins straightaway, with the piano issuing the first theme: a long-breathed melody, extroverted despite Beethoven's instruction that it be played **piano, dolce**. Bouncing **staccato** eighth notes in the cello and piano's left hand propel the music forward. This music steadily builds to a fortissimo cadence. The second theme begins with a thoughtful, **chromatic** gesture, but this music, too, soon reverts to the carefree spirit of the movement's opening strain. Though the **development** briefly indulges in a moodier, minor-key **episode**, the movement's prevailing character is light and joyful.

The sonata remains in buoyant good cheer for the rondo finale. The innocuous **subject** belies the athleticism required from both

cellist and pianist. The episodes that appear in alternation with recurrences of the **refrain** furthermore indulge in a broad palette of colors and characters: **sforzando** outbursts that puncture the music's seeming tranquility, a martial episode accentuated by stark cello **pizzicato**, clangorous arpeggios in the piano's bass register, and other such bold strokes result in a fiercely expressive finale.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria; died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria)

String Quartet in D Major, K. 575, Prussian

Composed: June 1789, Vienna

Published: 1791, Vienna

First performance: May 22, 1790

Other works from this period: *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* in G Major for Strings, **K. 525** (1787); Piano **Concerto** no. 26 in D Major, **K. 537** (1788); Symphony no. 40 in g minor, **K. 550** (1788); **Divertimento** in E-flat Major for Violin, Viola, and Cello, **K. 563** (1788); Quintet in A Major for Clarinet and String Quartet, **K. 581** (1789)

Approximate duration: 24 minutes

In late 1789, his star having begun to fade among Vienna's fickle audiences (and his family's financial security becoming consequently precarious), Mozart set out for a concert tour with stops in Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin. In this last city, he appeared before Friedrich Wilhelm II, who requested that Mozart compose a new set of six string quartets and keyboard sonatas.

Mozart, for various reasons, set to work on the king's request with meager enthusiasm: he was despondent over his dwindling prospects in Vienna, and he moreover began to suffer from a spate of physical ailments, complaining in letters of frequent headaches, rheumatism, and insomnia. His wife, Constanze, was pregnant and incapacitated by a foot condition.

Nevertheless, nearly desperate for income, Mozart completed the first of the quartets for the king of Prussia (thereafter known as his *Prussian* Quartets), the Quartet in D Major, **K. 575**, within a month of his return to Vienna. The Quartets in B-flat Major, **K. 589**, and F Major, **K. 590**, followed a year later and would be Mozart's last quartets. He died from rheumatic fever in 1791, leaving the set of six unfinished. The *Prussian* Quartets appear to have never found their way back to Berlin. Mozart sold them to the publisher Artaria—from such a weakened negotiating position that he reported, "I have now been obliged to give away my quartets...for a pittance, simply in order to have cash in hand"—and they were printed in 1791 without a dedication.

The D Major Quartet's carefree demeanor does nothing to betray the direness of Mozart's circumstances at the time of its composition. It is, on the contrary, music of light and delight immediately from the **Allegretto** first movement's opening measures. Mozart takes care to pay due homage to Friedrich Wilhelm II, a competent amateur cellist: violins and viola begin the quartet, as though preparing the way for his majesty's entrance. The first violin presents the first theme, **sotto voce**: an ascending arpeggio and then a graceful descent. The viola (Mozart's instrument, which he likely manned for the quartet's first performance) takes up the theme as the cello appears. As the movement proceeds, the king's instrument is given ample time in its bright upper register. Although upper strings deferentially step aside as the cello introduces the second theme (like the first theme, a rising arpeggio followed by a descending melody), each voice issues the melody

*Bolted terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 94.

in turn, creating a rich, conversational texture. Despite a brooding, minor-key exchange between first violin and cello, the brief development section remains predominantly lighthearted, arriving easily at an untroubled recapitulation.

The **Andante** is a work of quintessentially Mozartian beauty. Rich chordal textures surround warm, long-breathed melodies. The movement is cast in A major, the same moonlit key as the Piano Concerto no. 23 (K. 488), Clarinet Concerto, and Clarinet Quintet, and has in common with those works an air of romantic serenity. Naturally, the movement likewise features lyrical melodic writing for the cello, in its soulful tenor voice.

The third movement **Minuetto** appears, at first glance, merrily uncomplicated, but an abrupt passage of stark **forte** octaves, forte-piano **syncopations**, and moody staccato gestures hints at something darker behind the minuet's seeming placidity. But, the clouds pass as quickly as they gathered, and the minuet returns to its characteristic elegance. The cello soars in the lovely **trio** section.

The **Allegretto** fourth movement's central theme begins with an ascending arpeggio, recalling the opening of the quartet but now set in the cello, colored by a **legato** countermelody in the viola. Set in rondo form, the movement features more textural than emotional contrast between its refrain and alternating episodes. Indeed, the melodic generosity, textural brilliance, and spirited ensemble dialogue found throughout the previous three movements are on equal display in this wholly satisfying finale.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(Born March 21, 1685, Eisenach, Germany; died July 28, 1750, Leipzig, Germany)

Selections from Musical Offering, BWV 1079

Composed: 1747

Published: 1747, Leipzig

Dedication: Frederick the Great

Other works from this period: Detailed in the notes below

Approximate duration: 11 minutes

In 1747, J. S. Bach visited the court of Frederick the Great. Frederick was widely hailed as an enlightened monarch and a devoted patron of the arts. A talented flutist and composer himself, Frederick installed an excellent roster of musicians at the Prussian court—including Bach's son, the composer Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach—and undertook to revitalize German musical life at large.

It was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach who brokered his father's visit to Frederick's court. Bach's reputation as a great theoretician and contrapuntalist preceded him: upon the occasion of his visit, Bach was given a difficult theme, composed by the king—hence known as the King's Theme—to improvise on at the keyboard.



Bach rose to the occasion and then some: two months later, he published *Musical Offering* (*Musikalisches Opfer*), a collection of various compositions based on the King's Theme, which he dedicated to Frederick the Great. The complete work comprises a three-part and a six-part *ricercar* (a term variously used to describe pieces of a technical or esoteric nature—here, essentially synonymous with **fugue**), ten **canons**, and a four-movement **trio sonata** for violin and flute—presumably in tribute to Frederick's flute playing.

The final decade of Bach's life produced some of his most seminal creations. In addition to the *Musical Offering*, he composed the *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988 (1741); the *Canonic Variations* on "Von Himmel hoch," BWV 769 (1747); the *Mass* in b minor (assembled ca. 1747–1749 from new and preexisting movements); and *Die Kunst*

der Fuge (*The Art of Fugue*), BWV 1080 (ca. 1742–1750). Martin Geck writes: "All these projects spring from the same intention: his desire to articulate and summarize the essentials of his work. The result are cycles that go to the root of one particular subject, that demonstrate the richness of music through the use of one model theme."

The *Musical Offering* cycle, headed with the clever acrostic *Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta* ("the theme given by the king, with additions, resolved in the canonic style"), opens with the *ricercar a 3*. The fugue, in c minor, begins with a plain statement of the King's Theme; the second voice follows with the theme at the fifth (beginning on G). From the third voice's entrance, Bach deftly weaves the king's thorny theme into a fluid texture, expertly managing airtight **counterpoint** while creating music of the deepest expressive quality.

The cycle's ten canons collectively display a dizzying array of contrapuntal techniques. One surmises that the first two canons alone, each under a minute long, must have quickly astonished the king. Canon 1 a 2 (that is, for two voices) is one of several musical riddles, in which Bach presents a single melodic line with clues to the performer as to how to interpret the canon. Here, Bach indicates *cancrians*—reverse—and places a backwards clef, key signature, and time signature at the end of the single line of music. This single line of music is to be played by two voices simultaneously, one voice playing as printed and the other in reverse.



The second canon, *a 2, violini in unisono*, features two violins playing a florid melodic line in canon above the King's Theme in the bass voice. The violins read a single line of music; Bach merely indicates when the second violin is to begin. Similarly, in the *Fuga canonica in epidiapente*, the King's Theme appears above an energetic bass line. Bach provides an indication of when the third, unwritten, voice is to enter, repeating the melody up a fifth (*epidiapente*). The two ongoing voices begin trading active eighth-note figures and sustained notes as the third voice enters the fray, creating a dizzyingly dynamic texture. This canon—like, indeed, the whole of the *Musical Offering*—testifies to the essence of Bach's singular genius. As his obituary read, "Once he had heard a particular theme, he could grasp, as it were instantaneously, almost anything artistic that could be brought forth from it."

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

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

Piano Trio no. 2 in c minor, op. 66

Composed: Completed April 30, 1845

Published: 1846

Dedication: Louis Spohr

Other works from this period: **Incidental music** to Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*, op. 93, and Racine's *Athalie*, op. 74; String Quintet in B-flat Major, op. 87; individual *Lieder ohne Worte* from Opuses 67, 85, and 102; *Lied ohne Worte* for Cello and Piano, op. 109 (all 1845)

Approximate duration: 27 minutes

Mendelssohn completed the second of his two piano trios, the Opus 66 Trio in c minor, in 1845, six years after the first. Though he presented the work as a birthday present to his sister Fanny, the published

score bears a dedication to Mendelssohn's friend and colleague Louis Spohr. In addition to his compositional renown, Spohr was known as one of the leading violinists of the day and took part himself in numerous performances of Mendelssohn's Trio in c minor with the composer at the piano.

Like its elder sibling, the c minor Trio exudes **Romantic** pathos immediately from its opening strains. A serpentine piano melody rises to a forceful **cadence**, only to return to a nervous whisper in the strings. Mendelssohn extends this theme to another upward arching musical idea in the violin and cello; a frenzy of sixteenth notes in the piano underneath inverts the contour of the theme, quietly sinking lower and lower. The movement's second theme, introduced by the violin, could be the doppelganger of the first—the heroic counterpart to the tortured opening measures.

The *Andante espressivo* is a vintage *Lied ohne Worte*: this music encapsulates Romanticism at its most deeply heartfelt. Of the quicksilver third movement, marked **Molto allegro, quasi presto**, Mendelssohn yielded that the perilously fast tempo might be "a trifle nasty to play."

Among the compelling narrative threads of Mendelssohn's life and legacy is his complicated relationship with religion. He was born into a prominent Jewish family—his grandfather was the distinguished Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn—but Felix's father, Abraham, insisted that the family convert to Christianity as a means of assimilating into contemporary German society. The hyphenated surname often used in reference to the composer, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, was likewise insisted upon by Abraham Mendelssohn, on the premise that "there can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than there can be a Jewish Confucius."

Though it does not bear any explicit program, the Opus 66 finale might nevertheless be heard as reflecting somewhat the nuanced role that religion played in Mendelssohn's life and artistry. The movement begins with a dance-like theme whose shape and articulation (and opening melodic interval of a minor ninth) suggest Jewish folk music. Later in the movement, Mendelssohn unexpectedly introduces the Lutheran hymn "Gelobet seist Du, Jesu Christ" ("Praise Be to You, Jesus Christ"). While the piano offers the hymn, the strings play fragments of the opening theme. Music scholar Robert Philip has likened this juxtaposition to "two diminutive figures speaking in hushed tones as they enter a great cathedral." Extending this juxtaposition of musical ideas—indeed, ultimately reconciling the two—the movement escalates to an ecstatic climax. A radiantly transfigured version of the opening dance-like melody gets the last word, propelling the trio to a riveting final cadence.

Music@Menlo

CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL AND INSTITUTE

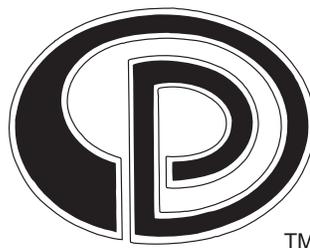


Music@Menlo relies on a team of friendly, enthusiastic, and hardworking volunteers to help the festival run smoothly.

Music@Menlo volunteers contribute their time in a variety of ways, including ushering at concerts, helping with mailings, and hosting artists in their homes.

If you are interested in contributing your time and energy, please contact us at 650-330-2030 or info@musicatmenlo.org.

ProPiano



Pro Piano San Francisco
760 Tennessee Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
info-sf@propiano.com
800-367-0777

Pro Piano New York
New York, New York 11101
(Warehouse Location)
(No Public Access)
By Appointment Only
info-ny@propiano.com
800-367 0777

Pro Piano Los Angeles
(Warehouse Only)
(No Public Access)
Los Angeles, CA 90064
info-la@propiano.com
800-367-0777

Pro Piano, in service to the great spirit of music since 1969.

Our 16th season providing Hamburg Steinway Grands to Music@Menlo!

www.propiano.com