

# Program Notes: Vienna

Notes on the program by Patrick Castillo

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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

### *Andante and Variations in G Major for Piano, Four Hands, K. 501*

**Composed:** completed November 4, 1786, Vienna

**Other works from this period:** Detailed in the notes below

**Approximate duration:** 8 minutes

Over the latter half of 1786, Mozart produced a significant amount of music featuring the piano, including the Piano Trios in G Major and B-flat Major, K. 496 and 502; the Piano **Concerto** in C Major, K. 503; the *Kegelstatt* Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, K. 498; and, for four-hand piano, the **Sonata** in F Major, K. 497, and the **Andante and Variations** in G Major, K. 501. In 1787, Mozart added to this last genre the *Sonata* in C Major, K. 521.

Mozart (like Schubert a generation later) played a seminal role in elevating the piano-duet medium from light domestic entertainment to chamber music of substantial heft. The aforementioned sonatas in F major and C major certainly do the heavy lifting in this regard, but so does the delectable *Andante and Variations* merit its place in the four-hand literature. The set lasts not quite as long as just the first **movement** of either sonata yet sacrifices nothing of Mozart's characteristic formal elegance, textural clarity, and sheer melodic beauty.

The melodious *Andante* **theme** is an original tune (not, as was common, lifted from a popular **aria**) but would not be out of place in any of Mozart's comic operas. The first variation quickens the *Andante*'s easy eighth-note pace to flowing sixteenth notes. In the second variation, the *secondo* accelerates to **triplets**, pacing a modestly ornamented melody in the *primo*. Caffeinated thirty-second notes impel the third variation forward. The music turns introspective in the fourth variation: the tempo relaxes to the theme's *Andante* gait, but the music slides into morose g minor. The fog lifts for the ebullient fifth variation. After a flurry of virtuosic thirty-second-note runs, the work ends on a delicate note.

## JOHANNES BRAHMS

(Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany; died April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria)

### *Piano Quintet in f minor, op. 34*

**Composed:** 1862

**Published:** 1865

**Dedication:** Princess Anna of Hesse

**First performance:** June 22, 1866, Leipzig

**Other works from this period:** String Sextet no. 1 in B-flat Major, op. 18 (1859–1860); Piano Quartets nos. 1 and 2, opp. 25 and 26 (1861); Cello Sonata no. 1 in e minor, op. 28 (1862–1865); Trio in E-flat Major for Horn, Violin, and Piano, op. 40 (1865)

**Approximate duration:** 40 minutes

Brahms's Piano Quintet underwent a curious genesis. The work began as a string quintet for two violins, viola, and two cellos. Completed in 1862, the quintet in this original version was deemed imperfect by both Brahms and the violinist Joseph Joachim, the composer's trusted confidant. Brahms rearranged the piece into a sonata for two pianos, which he premiered with the pianist Karl Tausig in 1864. Later

that year, the work evolved towards its final incarnation, for piano and string quartet.

The obsessive perfectionism illustrated by the work's gestation is equally in evidence in its musical content. An oft-noted defining quality of Brahms's music is its airtight craftsmanship: each note is meticulously vetted, the **counterpoint** between all voices is unassailable, and every motivic idea is essential to the work's structure. This last quality is particularly discernible in the quintet's first movement, which begins with a four-measure introduction, stated in **octaves**, mezzo **forte**, by the first violin, cello, and piano.

What sounds like an innocuous prologue in fact contains not only the first theme but a germinal **motif** from which springs the whole of the proceeding movement. Following an expectant **fermata**, the piano transforms these introductory measures into a propulsive sixteenth-note figure.

Above this, the strings exclaim a sequence of chords, built on a two-note descending figure—a gesture likewise embedded in the four-measure introduction.

As the music gathers steam, the piano develops these descending two notes, while the strings take up the propulsive sixteenth notes. Ensuing musical ideas likewise derive from the two-note descending motif: a keening melody, **piano, espressivo**, presented by the first violin:

—and, soon thereafter, a martial two-against-three passage:

—which leads into an ardent strain in the viola and cello, marked **piano, sotto voce**.

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

As this newly formulated theme develops, the piano accompanies with the sixteenth-note pattern derived from the quintet's opening. Brahms continues in this manner, constructing a majestic movement with breathtaking mastery and elegance from the simplest materials.

The second movement, marked *Andante*, **un poco adagio**, transfigures the two-note motif—the fuel for so much *Sturm und Drang* in the first movement—into a sweetly lilting lullaby. The piano sings the tune, *piano*, *espressivo*, *sotto voce*, to a gentle accompaniment in the strings.

The key changes from warm A-flat major to radiant E major for the rhapsodic subsidiary theme, crooned by the second violin and viola. An initial stepwise descent expands into a series of cascading triplets. The lullaby returns to bring the movement to a tranquil close.

The **scherzo** comprises three distinct musical ideas, heard in quick succession at the outset, building an irrepressible momentum from one to the next. The apprehensive opening, in 6/8 time, sets an **offbeat** rising **arpeggio** in the first violin and viola above persistent **pizzicati** in the cello and laconic piano commentary. This melody's fluid motion is abruptly halted by the second musical idea, a clipped, **staccato** march in 2/4. The third theme transmutes the march's inexorable rhythmic energy into a full-throated anthem. (All three musical ideas, naturally, abound with the germinal descending two-note cell.) Brahms goes on to develop these themes with a restlessness quite exceeding a typical scherzo—demonstrating a technique later identified by Arnold Schoenberg as “developing variation.” In his essay “Brahms the Progressive,” Schoenberg described Brahms's facility at “variation of the features of a basic unit produ[cing] all the thematic formulations which provide for fluency, contrasts, variety, logic, and unity, on the one hand, and character, mood, expression, and every needed differentiation, on the other hand—thus elaborating the idea of the piece.” Witness the scherzo's climax, which brings together elements of all three ideas: the strings reprise the march while the piano restates the offbeat opening, now with the anthem's robust chordal texture. The movement features a noble trio section before reprising the scherzo.

The quintet's finale begins with a lugubrious introduction, searching melodic lines in the strings buoyed by a tide of triplet chords in the piano. After a pregnant silence, the movement launches into its main **Allegro** section, driven by a dance-like tune redolent of the Gypsy music that so captivated Brahms throughout his life. A secondary theme contrasts this animated music with a mournful song yet retains something of its folk character, as does the **exposition's** closing theme, a variation of the Gypsy dance. After a duly realized **development** and **recapitulation**, the mighty quintet finishes with a blazing **Presto coda**.

## FRANZ SCHUBERT

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

### **Allegro in a minor for Piano, Four Hands, op. 144, D. 947, Lebensstürme**

**Composed:** May 1828

**Published:** 1840, as Schubert's **Opus 144**

**Other works from this period:** Detailed in the notes below

**Approximate duration:** 17 minutes

Franz Schubert's musical life was as ephemeral as it was remarkable. He took gravely ill in 1823, contracting what almost certainly was syphilis, and died five years later at the age of thirty-one. But despite the great physical suffering and psychic anguish at the end of his life, Schubert remained incredibly prolific. In his final year, Schubert completed the two piano trios, the Ninth Symphony (appropriately known as *The Great*), the Cello Quintet, and the last three piano sonatas, among numerous other keyboard, vocal, and orchestral works—all told, an imposing set of masterpieces, miraculously concentrated within a deeply trying twelve months and unequaled by many composers over entire lifetimes.

The *Allegro in a minor*, known as *Lebensstürme*, is one of three outstanding works for piano duet composed during this remarkable period at the end of Schubert's life, alongside the f minor **Fantasy** and the *Grand Rondeau* in A Major. Each of these impresses for its sheer breadth—they rival full-blown symphonies in their expressive aspiration, if not quite in length—in a medium traditionally associated with quaint, domestic musicales. Schubert biographer Christopher H. Gibbs writes of Schubert's late works for four-hand piano:

[They demonstrate the composer's] quest to transcend the confines of the salon...Schubert's music for piano duet is among not only his greatest but also his most original. Such innovations may explain why his attraction to the medium continued even after his energies shifted increasingly to large-scale instrumental works. Indeed, the audacious **harmonic** and structural adventures in his finest keyboard duets may have pointed the way to orchestral projects that he did not live to realize...[T]he late piano duets exquisitely merge Schubert's lyrical gifts with daring formal structures.

As with much of Schubert's music, the *Allegro in a minor* was not published until years after the composer's death, in 1840, at which time the publisher Anton Diabelli christened it *Lebensstürme* (“the storms of life”). This overly trite sobriquet does little to prepare the listener for the depth of what is in store. Harmonic and structural adventures are indeed afoot, creating subtleties of light and shade and the emotional complexity characteristic of Schubert's music. The melodic ideas themselves appear straightforward, as if subjects in a representational painting: *it's an apple; it's an old man*—but Schubert's harmonic daring casts these subjects in nuanced lighting, suggesting that the truth is more elusive than it may seem.

The work begins with a thundering salvo of surly a minor chords. This opening statement arrives at a pregnant silence, from which emerges an introspective **legato** melody, paced by murmuring eighth notes in the *secondo*—still in the unsmiling key of a minor, a different aspect of the same agita.

The second theme is a warm, pianississimo **chorale** that seems to leave behind any previous anxiety—yet Schubert has led the ear to remote territory. A **sonata-form** movement in the key of a minor would typically **modulate** to the relative key of C major or perhaps to the minor-dominant (e minor). Instead, this chorale appears, weirdly, in the distant key of A-flat major. All may seem well, but something is amiss. Though the music remains placid, the harmonies continue

to shift, the ground ever unsteady beneath our feet. The exposition closes with a transfiguration of the opening theme, now in buoyant C major. But the path to C major was dubious. In light of the harmonic chicanery that preceded it, one is unsure whether this optimism can be trusted.

The development section charts further terrain, focusing exclusively on the first theme, which makes a furious return to a minor at the recapitulation. The chorale takes the music to radiant A major, presenting a clearer duality of light and dark—before stormy a minor ultimately wins the day.

## ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

(Born September 13, 1874, Vienna, Austria; died July 13, 1951, Los Angeles, California)

### *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) for String Sextet, op. 4

**Composed:** December 1899 (arranged for string orchestra in 1917 and then revised in 1943)

**Published:** 1905, Berlin

**First performance:** March 18, 1902, Vienna, by the Rosé Quartet, violist Franz Jelinek, and cellist Franz Schmidt

**Other works from this period:** *Adagio* for Violin, Harp, and Strings (1896); Two Songs for Baritone and Piano, op. 1 (1898); Four Songs, op. 2 (1899); Six Songs for Mezzo-Soprano and Piano, op. 3 (1899–1903); *Pelleas und Melisande*, op. 5 (**symphonic poem**) (1902–1903)

**Approximate duration:** 30 minutes

*Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night), Schoenberg's **tone poem** for string sextet, represents the earliest masterpiece by the iconoclastic composer who, arguably more than any other post-Romantic figure, altered the course of Western music. His infamous boast that he had "made a discovery which [would] ensure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years" might have been prematurely confident, but his development of the **twelve-note** method and **serialism** certainly upended the **Classical** tradition, giving rise to a spirit of experimentation that would indeed fuel the art over the subsequent century.

While revealing a composer still under the spell of Brahms and Wagner, *Verklärte Nacht*, composed over just three weeks in 1899, likewise illustrates a hyper-**Expressionist** impulse that would naturally point the composer towards his Second String Quartet (1908), whose last movement, printed without a key signature, made Schoenberg the first composer to completely abandon the tonal system. *Verklärte Nacht*, while still hewing to a conventional tonal framework (it begins in d minor and ends in D major), is a work of lush **chromaticism**, at times seemingly untethered to any harmonic center.

The piece is a **programmatic** work, based on an 1896 poem by Richard Dehmel. The poem tells the story of a woman, pregnant by a stranger, who falls deeply in love with another man. She reproaches herself and tells her lover of the earlier liaison; the man accepts the child as his own. Schoenberg's score charts the poem's narrative.

Two people are walking through a bare, cold wood;  
the moon keeps pace with them and draws their gaze.  
The moon moves along above tall oak trees,  
there is no wisp of cloud to obscure the radiance  
to which the black, jagged tips reach up.

The work begins *sehr langsam* (very slowly), with violas and cellos quietly descending over an impassive pedal D. As the violins enter, the music blooms to an ardent forte. The pace quickens; the first viola presents a disquieted second theme over restive **tremolandi** in the cellos. The first cello, in its plaintive tenor **register**, and first violin drive

a third musical idea, a poignant legato melody, played *mit Dämpfer* (with mutes). This music becomes increasingly agitated before exploding in a radiant fortissimo E major chord.

A woman's voice speaks:

"I am carrying a child, and not by you.  
I am walking here with you in a state of sin.  
I have offended grievously against myself.  
I despaired of happiness,  
and yet I still felt a grievous longing  
for life's fullness, for a mother's joys  
and duties; and so I sinned,  
and so I yielded, shuddering, my sex  
to the embrace of a stranger,  
and even thought myself blessed.  
Now life has taken its revenge,  
and I have met you, met you."

As the woman begins her confession, the music turns tender and sentimentally lyrical. The opening section's fraught orchestration yields to a clearer, melody-driven texture. Yet just as quickly, an irrepressible anxiety bubbles to the surface: each line takes thorny chromatic twists and turns, and the tempo becomes *drängend*, *etwas unruhiger* (urgent, somewhat restless). A steely low E in the second cello, played tremolando, halts the scene; the upper strings add atmospheric effects as the first violin—presumably the anguished woman—utters a *wild*, *leidenschaftlich* (wild, passionate) cry. Her confession ends despondently.

She walks on, stumbling.  
She looks up; the moon keeps pace.  
Her dark gaze drowns in light.

The work's opening music is recalled as the two continue on their way, the morose descending lines now *schwer betont* (heavily stressed). A delicate flourish in the first violin is followed by a series of ethereal chords, impossibly quiet (*pianississimo*). The music turns, unexpectedly, to magnanimous D major, as the man speaks:

"Do not let the child you have conceived  
be a burden on your soul.  
Look, how brightly the universe shines!  
Splendor falls on everything around,  
you are voyaging with me on a cold sea,  
but there is the glow of an inner warmth  
from you in me, from me in you.  
That warmth will transfigure the stranger's child,  
and you bear it me, begot by me.  
You have transfused me with splendor,  
you have made a child of me."

The first cello issues a warm, generous melody. Earlier material, previously cast in foreboding shadow, is transfigured into an amorous scene.

He puts an arm about her strong hips.  
Their breath embraces in the air.  
Two people walk on through the high, bright night.

Dehmel wrote to Schoenberg thirteen years after *Verklärte Nacht* was premiered: "Yesterday evening I heard your *Verklärte Nacht*, and I should consider it a sin of omission if I failed to say a word of thanks to you for your wonderful sextet. I had intended to follow the motives of my text in your composition; but I soon forgot to do so, I was so enthralled by the music."