

3 Maps and Legends

Music@Menlo's eighth season, *Maps and Legends*, explored a wide compass of times, places, and universal phenomena. The season's offerings ranged from programs that celebrated a nation's identity to music composed in response to the changing of the seasons and the trauma of war. The 2010 edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* chronicles this fascinating journey, preserving for listeners the exceptional performances that made *Maps and Legends* such a memorable experience.

Disc 3 honors the great musical tradition of Vienna, the seat of Western music from the early eighteenth century to the dawn of the twentieth. Vienna was the crucible of the Classical and Romantic periods, fostering the innovations of Joseph Haydn—the father of the Classical style—and forward-looking statements like the *Serioso* Quartet of Ludwig van Beethoven, Haydn's prize pupil. Beethoven's vision for a new direction in music would be realized by the Romantic generation in such masterpieces as Johannes Brahms's Opus 36 Sextet.

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (1732–1809): Keyboard Concertino in C Major, Hob. XIV: 11 (1760)

Haydn composed the Concertino in C Major, Hob. XIV: 11, for keyboard, two violins, and cello in 1760, near the end of roughly a decade spent as a freelance composer in Vienna and shortly before beginning his tenure as Kapellmeister at the court of the Hungarian Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy. (The composer spent the majority of his professional career, from 1761 to 1790, in Esterhazy's employ.) This early period of his career



Miró Quartet

also yielded about fifteen symphonies, numerous keyboard sonatas, trios, divertimentos, concertos, string trios, partitas for wind band, and possibly the Opus 2 string quartets, nos. 1 and 2. The C Major Concertino is one of at least fifteen keyboard concertos that Haydn composed; precisely how many he produced is difficult to determine as there are a number whose authenticity is uncertain.

The modest instrumental forces required suggest that the little-known keyboard concertinos were intended for domestic entertainment rather than the concert hall. Whereas the rhetorical content and grand sonic environment of Mozart's and Beethoven's concertos for soloist with orchestra come more readily to mind as the Classical piano concerto rubric, Haydn's C Major Concertino transposes that aesthetic

to a piercingly intimate setting. (Mozart explored a similar sound with arrangements for piano and string quartet of three of his piano concertos, K. 413–415.) The elegance, clarity, and wit of the concertino’s language are vintage Haydn. Despite their scale, Haydn’s concertinos nevertheless spotlight the keyboard soloist with brilliant, concertante writing, supported by an impeccably sculpted conversational accompaniment in the strings.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827): String Quartet in f minor, op. 95, *Serioso* (1810–1811)

The String Quartet in f minor, op. 95, marks the transition from Beethoven’s middle “heroic” style to his late period. It is the eleventh of his sixteen string quartets, which collectively represent a cornerstone of the chamber music literature. In its unrestrained expressivity, the Opus 95 Quartet foreshadows both Beethoven’s own late quartets and the aesthetic of the Romantic generation that followed him. Owing to its austere character, Beethoven nicknamed the work “Quartetto serioso.” The quartet was not originally intended for public performance but for private appreciation by musicians and connoisseurs.

The *Serioso* is a study in brevity. The opening *Allegro con brio* contains all of the components of a proper sonata-form movement—a brusque opening theme, lyrical second theme, full development section, recapitulation, and coda—concentrated inside about just four minutes of music.

What the first movement achieves in pithiness, the second matches in expressive ambiguity. It functions as the quartet’s slow movement, despite the tempo marking *Allegretto ma non troppo*. Rather than following the first movement’s f minor conclusion in the related key of D-flat major, the movement begins in the remote tonality of D major; within this traditionally bright and extroverted key, Beethoven instead crafts a subtle and enigmatic utterance. C-naturals and B-flats borrowed from the melancholy

sound world of d minor leave ear and anima disoriented. Following a resigned cadence, the viola begins a contemplative fugue.

The third movement, marked *Allegro assai vivace ma serioso*, punctures the meditative atmosphere left by the *Allegretto*. A pair of dramatic shouts and silences forcefully restores the first movement’s terse tone; the scherzo proceeds at once lithe and unrelenting.

The scherzo’s propulsive dotted rhythm is transfigured in the slow introduction to the biting finale. At the quartet’s conclusion, Beethoven counteracts the *Allegretto agitato*’s malevolence with a suddenly exuberant coda—a kind of punch line, perhaps most amusing to the composer whose listeners weren’t in on the joke.

One hundred years later, the Viennese composer Anton Webern would intrigue listeners by writing music of extreme concision. His Six Bagatelles for String Quartet, composed between 1911 and 1913, take all of about three and a half minutes to perform. Arnold Schoenberg wrote about these works: “One has to realize what restraint it requires to express oneself with such brevity. You can stretch every glance into a poem, every sigh into a novel. But to express a novel in a single gesture, joy in a single breath—such concentration can only be present in the absence of self-pity.” That these words could just as well have applied to the *Serioso* Quartet a century before is a testament to the breadth of Beethoven’s vision.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897): Sextet no. 2 in G Major, op. 36 (1864–1865)

Brahms composed his String Sextet in G Major, op. 36, between 1864 and 1865. It is his second essay in the string sextet genre, following the Opus 18 Sextet of 1860. Like the other chamber works of Brahms’s early maturity, the Opus 36 Sextet displays the craftsmanship and sensitivity of an artist fully fledged despite his youth. Brahms’s expert handling of the string sextet sonority prevails throughout the work, as he exploits different instrumental and registral combinations to achieve a broadly expressive sonic palette.

Above a hushed, oscillating figure in the viola, the first violin proclaims the opening movement's soaring first theme, its heroic melodic contour tempered by Brahms's instruction to play *mezza voce*. The delicate balance contained in these measures between fortitude and restraint foreshadows a duality that pervades much of the sextet. The movement also represents the composer's cathartic response to his ill-fated love affair with the amateur soprano Agathe von Siebold. Dropping the T (and with H used in German notation for the note B-natural), the robust second theme spells "Agathe." "Here," Brahms, the lifelong bachelor, wrote of this passage, "I have freed myself from my last love."

The scherzo exercises a similar restraint to that of the first theme of the *Allegro non troppo*. Its wistful manner descends to a whisper as the first violin and viola play a hushed triplet figure in stark octaves, marked *tranquillo*. The rambunctious country-dance of the trio section emphatically offsets the scherzo's melancholy.

The *Poco adagio* is a theme and variations. Given the enigmatic profile of the opening section, the critic and Brahms intimate Eduard Hanslick referred to this movement as "variations on no theme."

The finale begins with a breathless gallop of sixteenth notes before quickly settling into a more relaxed musical idea, crooned by the first violin in its lowest register. The cello introduces the billowing second theme beneath a reappearance of the sixteenth-note figure. As if emerging victorious from the introversion and agita of the preceding movements, the effervescence of these two ideas carries the sextet to a spirited coda. Along the way, demonstrating Brahms's steady craftsmanship and deep admiration of the music of Bach, the movement's development section features a fugue.

—Patrick Castillo



About Music@Menlo

Music@Menlo is an internationally acclaimed three-week summer festival and institute that combines world-class chamber music performances, extensive audience engagement with artists, intensive training for preprofessional musicians, and efforts to enhance and broaden the chamber music community of the San Francisco Bay Area. An immersive and engaging experience centered around a distinctive array of programming, Music@Menlo enriches its core concert programs with numerous opportunities for in-depth learning to intensify audiences' enjoyment and understanding of the music and provide meaningful ways for aficionados and newcomers of all ages to explore classical chamber music.