

PROGRAM NOTES

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): Quintet in E-Flat for Two Violins, Two Violas and Violoncello, K.614 (1791)

According to Wagner, Mozart created "with undisturbed naiveté, in a process entirely free of reflection." This widely held view no longer prevails. He planned, revised and polished as Beethoven did, but at a quicker pace. Consider this excerpt from a letter to his father: "You know that I am, so to speak, soaked in music, that I am immersed in it all day long and that I love to plan works, study and meditate."

Of course, all of this mental activity is necessary to create as Mozart did, but it is not enough. There must be, in addition, that innate ability that ordinary people do not have in large amount. When a person has enough of it, we say he is a genius. Goethe nominated Mozart as a prime example. To him, Mozart was the incarnation of a divine force of creation.

Mozart's last years were personally stressful, even despairing. Yet there was a tremendous flow of masterpieces. They include the last three quartets, the last two quintets, the clarinet quintet and concerto, and the operas Così fan tutte and The Magic Flute.

If we take the string quartet as a standard form, there are some adjustments to be made when adding another instrument. There are increased possibilities of contrasting varied groups of two, three and four instruments. To accommodate the thicker texture of five instruments, there must be a wider spread of sound. To give all parts a significant role in working out the thematic material requires an expansion in another dimension: more time must be allowed.

The E-flat Quintet, Mozart's last chamber music work is, appropriately, a tribute to Haydn from whom he learned so much of his craft. It is believed that it was written for Haydn's friend, Johann Tost. Perhaps this relationship prompted Mozart to salute Haydn in this way. Haydn had recently written a set of twelve quartets for Tost and may well have suggested Mozart for a work.

There are direct references to Haydn in the E-flat Quintet. The slow movement recalls the slow movement of Haydn's Symphony No.85, La Reine. The drone bass in the minuet corresponds to the same section in Haydn's Symphony No.88. The principal theme of the finale resembles closely the finale of one of the quartets dedicated to Tost (Op.64 No.6). The manner is "Haydn" throughout. It seems fitting that Mozart should write a "Haydn" quintet for his last chamber piece. His first quintet is also related to Haydn. It seems odd that Haydn, in his enormous output, never wrote a string quintet.

It is not unusual for composers to write tributes to admired colleagues that incorporate something of the honored person. Schumann imitates the appropriate styles in the Chopin and Paganini movements of his Carnaval. Ravel wrote a piece on the name of Gabriel Fauré. Biting satire is not unknown, e.g. Bartók's allusion to Shostakovich in his Concerto for Orchestra.

-Hoyle Carpenter

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911): Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello (1876)

The opening sentence of Michael Kennedy's Mahler sums up his place in music history. "The music of Gustav Mahler is the bridge from the nineteenth century to the twentieth." All of his mature works are for large groups—chamber music is found only in pieces he composed as a student. The piano quartet was probably composed while he was studying at the Vienna

Conservatory, probably in 1876, the same year that saw the first performance of Wagner's Ring cycle and Brahms' first symphony.

One of his contemporaries describes him at this time, "...shortish, betraying a certain irritability in his uneven gait. His small face, framed by a full brown beard, was intellectually alive and tense; he spoke wittily in a strong Austrian brogue. He always carried a bundle of books or scores under his arm, and conversation with him was sporadic."

Only one movement of the piano quartet was finished. There exists a sketch of the beginning of a scherzo-like movement. The completed movement is in sonata form. The three-note motif at the beginning of the piano part is a unifying device that occurs throughout. There is little resemblance to the music of his later years. None of these early works were published during Mahler's lifetime. The quartet was finally printed in 1973.

-Hoyle Carpenter

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904): String Sextet in A Major, Op. 48 (1878)

Until he got some help from his friends, Antonin Dvořák was a little-known Prague musician whose income from his compositions and as an organist was so meager it barely kept him out of poverty. In 1874 he submitted some of his work for consideration to a committee in Vienna awarding government grants to struggling artists. The young musician was awarded 400 gulden, the highest stipend bestowed by the program.

Among the award committee's members were the renowned critic Eduard Hanslick and that titan of Viennese music himself, Johannes Brahms, both of whom were to prove powerful influences on Dvořák's career. Brahms requested that his publisher begin to issue Dvořák's works, and in 1878 one of them, the Slavonic Dances, modeled on Brahms' popular Hungarian Dances, became an instant hit. Inspired by his success, Dvořák engaged in a whirlwind composing spree, the A Major String Sextet one of its outcomes.

The sextet blends the folk-inspired idioms of the Slavonic Dances with the endearing Viennese lyricism of Schubert and Brahms. Full of spontaneous invention, the Sextet's themes have been described as "flowing with Slavonic blood." The opening movement uses as its main theme a melody of rapturous beauty given as a sweet duet between first violin and first cello. The middle two movements are labeled "Dumka" and "Furiant" – the first a traditional Ukrainian folk ballad alternating between meditative and joyful, and the second a Czech dance whose fiery character is indicated by its name.

The two movements so strongly impress their folk idioms to the sextet that British music critic Alec Robertson writes, "The work has the effect of a brightly colored travel poster advertising Czechoslovakia." The finale is a set of five variations on a theme stated initially by the first viola, followed by a rhapsodic, perhaps somewhat boisterous, coda.

-Steve Siegel

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) (alternate if needed to cut)

Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, No. 1, Op. 99 (1827)

By 1827, Schubert had become a well-known composer. There was every reason to believe that he would become the most prominent of composers on the Vienna scene. Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven were no longer present.

Schubert never heard a public performance of the Op. 99 Trio. However, there was a private hearing on January 28, 1828 played by violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, cellist Joseph Linke and pianist Carl Maria Bocklet. All three had been closely involved with Beethoven's music. Surprisingly, Schubert never offered it to a publisher. It was brought out in 1836 by Diabelli—the same Diabelli of the Beethoven piano variations.

Two of Schubert's best-known chamber works have movements based on his songs—the Trout Quintet and the Death and the Maiden Quartet. The last movement of the Trio is based upon the song, Skolie: "Let us, in the bright May morning, take delight in the brief life of the flower, before the fragrance disappears."

Robert Schumann, with his keen insight into musical values, describes the B-Flat Trio: "One glance at Schubert's Trio (Op.99)—and the troubles of our human existence disappear, and all the world is fresh and bright again. Yet some ten years ago, a trio by Schubert passed across the face of the musical world like some angry portent in the sky. It was his hundredth opus and shortly afterwards, in November 1828, he died. This recently published Trio seems to be the older of the two works. There is absolutely no evidence of any earlier period in its style and it may well have been written just before the familiar E-Flat Trio. Yet the two works are essentially and fundamentally different. The first movement, which in the E-Flat Trio is eloquent of extreme anger and passionate longing, is here a thing of grace, intimate and virginal; the Adagio, in the E-Flat Trio a sigh, rising to spiritual anguish, is here a blissful dream state, a pulsating flow of exquisitely human emotion. The Scherzos are very similar to each other; yet to my mind, that of the B-Flat Trio is superior. I will not attempt to choose between the two last movements. To sum up, the Trio in E-Flat is active, masculine, and dramatic while the B-Flat is passive, feminine, lyrical..."