



Program Notes  
by  
Michael Grace

## Festival Artists Concert

Tuesday, June 23, 2020

8:00 PM

Packard Hall

### Horn Quintet in E-flat Major, K. 407

*Allegro*

*Andante*

*Allegro*

**W. A. Mozart**  
(1756-1781)

Michael Thornton, *French horn*, Grace Park, *violin*,  
Toby Appel and Scott Yoo, *viola*, Mark Kosower, *cello*

Mozart wrote the Horn Quintet in Vienna in late 1782. The combination of instruments he selected for this work is unusual. French horn, one violin, two violas and bass make up an ensemble that was undoubtedly a first at the time and has possibly never been matched since. As usual with Mozart, however, the unorthodox seems inimitably right with hindsight; the two violas give the string texture a kind of mid-range warmth that matches with the darkness of the solo horn. The overall timbre of the work is one that feels particularly rich.

The quintet was written for a celebrated hornist with the Salzburg orchestra, one Joseph Ignaz Leutgeb. Mozart himself dubbed the work "*das Leutgeb'sche Quintett*" after the player's name. The hornist was famous for his virtuosic ability to play notes on natural horns that were nearly impossible to achieve. He accomplished this by stopping the instrument with the right hand. One critic in Paris said he had the ability to "sing an adagio as perfectly as the most mellow, interesting and accurate voice." Mozart's admiration for Leutgeb was great; in addition to this quintet, he also composed for him the celebrated three concertos for solo horn and orchestra.

The quintet is in three movements and ranges from sounding like a true piece of chamber music to a concerto for solo horn with the strings playing the role of orchestral accompaniment. The first movement, *Allegro*, is in sonata form with the horn taking the lead in each of the two themes. However, the violin frequently answers the horn statements and becomes a true chamber-music partner. The second movement, *Andante*, is the gem of the work, for in it Mozart moves to the realm of his deeper musical feelings and writes a sensitive duet for the violin and horn. It is noteworthy that in this more heartfelt movement he allows the violin to present the first theme completely before the horn enters. The finale, *Allegro*, returns to the spirit of the opening movement although it is cast in rondo form and the audience will be able easily to identify the rondo theme that returns three times after its initial statement. And like the first movement, it ends with a brief, flashy fanfare for the solo horn.

**Duo Concertante in G Major for Flute and Viola**

*Allegro*  
*Andante*  
*Rondo*

**Franz Hoffmeister**  
(1754-1812)

Alice Dade, *flute*, Toby Appel, *viola*

Franz Anton Hoffmeister pursued a career primarily as a music publisher in Vienna, although he was involved in starting many other publishing ventures, including one in Leipzig that eventually became the current giant, C. F. Peters. He was, in addition, a composer whose music did not go unnoticed. He was a close friend of Mozart's and published the first edition of several of the latter's compositions. Some of Mozart's talent indeed rubbed off on Hoffmeister, but he was never as productive, active, or possessed by genius as his famous friend.

Perhaps the most Mozartian characteristic of this duo is the feeling of ease. Hoffmeister makes it sound as if the work was easy to compose, but it is full of interesting features that give it a sense of order and finesse. The first movement, for example, opens with a charming melody for the flute. Then, the viola gets a melody of its own. Then, after a little transition, the two instruments share a melody simultaneously. And so, for the most part, goes the rest of the composition. There is always a sense of pleasing balance between the two instruments. The overall order of the composition is further enhanced by the pattern of movements. The first is fast, *Allegro*, the second more moderate in tempo, *Andante*, and the last, *Rondo*, faster and lighter. Audiences at this time liked compositions that were entertaining and elegant, and this duo fits the bill.

One notable feature is the prominence of the viola, an instrument that had often played a servile role by filling in harmonies. We can surmise that Hoffmeister wanted to get a larger range than he would have if he used a violin instead of viola. And it is notable that the darker color and lower range of the viola contrasts beautifully with the shiny sound of the flute. As Hoffmeister would have wanted, be entertained.

***Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann***

**Johannes Brahms**  
(1833-1897)

Susan Grace, Orion Weiss, *pianos*

Johannes Brahms composed a set of 16 variations based on a theme by his beloved mentor, Robert Schumann. It was, after all, Schumann who, in his widely-read music journal (*Die neue Zeitschrift für Musik*) had hailed Brahms as the foremost great young and upcoming composer. It is paradoxical that Brahms selected this theme, however, because Schumann called it "Letzter Gedank" (last thought) and wrote it shortly before he attempted suicide. He also thought that the theme had somehow been transmitted to him from the ghosts of Felix Mendelssohn and Franz Schubert. He was planning to write a set of variations on the theme himself. It is noteworthy that Brahms wrote his work for piano duet (two players at one piano), but in recognition of the social distancing advised in this time of the Coronavirus, the work will be performed by two pianists at two pianos.

The original work was dedicated to Julie Schumann, the daughter of Clara and Robert, and the object of Brahms' youthful affections. But she later became engaged to another man and Brahms had to assuage his grief with other musical compositions. It is not certain if Brahms had hoped to woo Julie by writing these four-hand pieces for them to play, sitting closely side-by-side on one duet piano bench. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, this was a common activity for dating that rarely had any negative side effects. But in the age of the Coronavirus, tonight the work will be performed by two pianists at two separate grand pianos. They will be at least 10 feet apart!

There are ten variations in this set. Unlike many sets of variations, each is not marked by some distinctive break from the last. The melancholy mood of the theme pervades much of the composition. The variations often seem to flow from one to another without major shifts in key, tempo, pianistic figurations, or melodic style, but with only minor shifts in mood. As with most of his music, Brahms wanted to maintain a sense of stylistic unity throughout. There are, of course, some exceptions. For example, Variation IV is much slower, with a thinner texture and in a very different key from Variation III. And the last variation, marked *Molto moderato, alla marcia* (very slow, as a march) is very distinctive; its dotted rhythms and slow tempo evoke a funeral march, although there is a triumphant aura. It also contains one of the most identifiable versions of the original melody, giving the entire set a sense of unity.

#### **Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 47**

*Sostenuto assai; Allegro ma non troppo*

*Scherzo – Molto vivace*

*Andante cantabile*

*Finale – Vivace*

Orion Weiss, *piano*, Scott Yoo, *violin*, Toby Appel, *viola*, Mark Kosower, *cello*

**Robert Schumann**

(1810-1856)

Schumann's life is often seen as emblematic of early romanticism. His dreams of being the piano virtuoso of his age (like the revival of Mozart and Beethoven) were cut short by a hand injury. Then, he had to sue Friedrich Wieck, his piano teacher and father of his beloved Clara, to gain the right to marry her. Thereafter he devoted much of his life to writing love songs for her, piano music for her to play, and other works that she suggested. His devotion to her was unfortunately cut short by an untimely death brought on by the incurable ravages of syphilis (the romantic malady of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century!).

In addition to composing, in his earlier years Schumann wrote many articles about music and published them in his own journal. His inner romantic personality inspired him to sign articles with pseudonyms, his two favorites being Florestan and Eusebius. Eusebius was a youthful dreamer and represented Schumann's lyrical, contemplative side; Florestan was a revolutionary and represented his more fiery and impetuous side. While both characters emerge in this work, for the most part it has a jubilant and triumphant spirit. As Robert Schaufler pointed out in his study of Schumann, in this quartet "Florestan is caracoling through gala days upon his high horse."

This piano quartet was composed in the fall of 1842, often thought of as his year of chamber music (he completed no less than three string quartets, the famous piano quintet, a piano trio, and the quartet all in that year!). It is certain that the works with piano were written for Clara to play in her busy schedule

as a concert pianist. It is, by the way, generally surmised that she became his pianistic voice after his hand injury. So it is no wonder that the piano declares a strong presence throughout; it often doubles the strings when they might have taken the lead by themselves, its accompaniments are often a bit too powerful, and its textures are rich. The husband clearly wanted his wife to be prominent in the performance. We might also note that the piano itself was emerging as a more powerful and expressive instrument at this time, and most early romantic composers couldn't resist giving it an assertive role in chamber music.

The first movement opens with a slow introduction, *Sostenuto assai* (quite sustained), which anticipates the theme of the main section of the movement, *Allegro ma non troppo*. The first and most distinctive theme of this movement is introduced by four vigorous, staccato chords followed by a lively melodic figure in the piano.

The second movement consists of a *scherzo* and two *trios*. The *scherzo*, marked *Molto vivace* (very fast), is extremely effective and difficult; the scoring of all four parts in unison *staccato* (detached) eighth notes requires great precision from all players. The two *trios* are contrasting in character, the first with more lyrical scale-like melodies, the second with slow chords. Motives from the fast *scherzo* return from time to time and close the movement as well.

The third movement, *Andante cantabile* is pure, lush romantic song at its best. The opening melody, heard first in the cello and later gently taken over by the violin, is the essence of dreamy, tender lyricism. It is followed by a hymn-like section which reminds the listener of some of Schumann's little piano pieces written for children. The return to the original melody is made distinctive by another texture; here the melody is heard in the rich tones of the viola with a fast, delicate and light countermelody hovering above in the violin. The movement comes to a most effective close with the cello playing a very low and long held note; in order to reach this note, the player must tune the lowest string one step lower than normal.

The finale, *Vivace* (very fast), opens with a little fugue on a theme that is derived from the first movement. The second theme is heard in the lyrical tenor voice of the cello before being picked up by the violin and viola. Giving a lyrical theme to the cello with just harmony in the upper strings creates a lush texture and was to become a romantic trait. The development section of this movement is led by the piano, with one particularly striking ten-note fragment that generates much musical excitement and intensity. After the recapitulation, the work closes with a stunning coda; it begins as another little fugue, but builds steadily to a most exciting climax. Florestan rides his trusty steed to the height of his exuberance.