

FROM PRAGUE TO VIENNA

Thursday, April 30, 2020

Wu Han, piano

Arnaud Sussmann, violin

Paul Neubauer, viola

David Finckel, cello

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Sonatina in G major for Violin and Piano, Op. 100 (1893)

Allegro risoluto

Larghetto

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Finale: Allegro

JOSEF SUK

Quartet in A minor for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello, Op. 1 (1891)

Allegro appassionato

Adagio

Allegro con fuoco

--INTERMISSION--

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Quartet No. 1 in G minor for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello, Op. 25 (1860-61)

Allegro

Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo

Andante con moto

Rondo alla Zingarese: Presto

It is customary to hold applause until the end of the final movement of each piece.

Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices.

Photographing, sound recording or videotaping this performance is prohibited.

Please join us for a post-concert party in the Dexter Ballroom.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Sonatina in G major for Violin and Piano, Op. 100

Antonín Dvořák

Born September 8, 1841, in Nelahozeves, Bohemia.

Died May 1, 1904, in Prague.

Composed in 1893.

Duration: 19 minutes

After Dvořák had composed both the F major String Quartet, Op. 96 (“American”) and the E-flat major String Quintet, Op. 97 during a respite from his duties as director of the National Conservatory in New York City at a community of Czech immigrants in Spillville, Iowa in summer 1893, he realized that the milestone of his hundredth opus number was quickly approaching. Rather than devote that special number to some public musical monument, however, Dvořák decided to reserve it for his private family use by assigning it to a modest piece written specially for his 15-year-old daughter Otilie and her 10-year-old brother Antonín—the Sonatina for Violin and Piano in G major. (Opp. 98 and 99 were later allotted to the Piano Suite in A major and the *Biblical Songs*.) The sonatina was composed quickly between November 22 and December 3, 1893 in New York City, and played immediately thereafter at the family’s apartment at 327 East 17th Street by Otilie (piano) and little Tony (violin).

The sonatina opens with a determined melody that begins like a drawing-room waltz before adding a suave complementary phrase to comprise the movement’s main theme. A gapped-scale strain, part American Indian, part Bohemian folk song, serves as the subsidiary subject. The development section, exactly the right length and weight for this compact sonata form, leads to a full recapitulation of the earlier materials and a short, quiet coda. The *Larghetto*, which Fritz Kreisler often included on his recitals under the title *Indian Lament*, is based on a haunting melody that Dvořák had scribbled onto his shirt cuff during a visit to Minnehaha Falls in Minnesota the previous summer. The center of the movement is given over to a brighter piano theme whose arpeggiated chords and pentatonic scale might suggest a banjo tune. The *Scherzo*, energetic and succinct, takes as its subject yet another folkish, gapped-scale melody. The sonata-form Finale provides an emotional microcosm of Dvořák’s New World experience: a perky, syncopated tune reminiscent of an old plantation song is used as the main theme, while the pair of melodies making up the second theme area, one minor and one major, seems to capture his longing for his beloved Czech homeland.

Quartet in A minor for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello, Op. 1

Josef Suk

Born January 4, 1874, in Křečovice, Bohemia.

Died May 29, 1935, in Benešov, near Prague.

Composed in 1891.

Premiered on May 13, 1891, in Prague.

Duration: 22 minutes

Josef Suk, one of the most prominent musical personalities of the early 20th century, was born into a musical family and entered the Prague Conservatory at the age of 11 to study composition and violin. He began composing three years later, and in 1891 became the prize pupil of a new member of the Conservatory faculty—Antonín Dvořák. Following his graduation in 1892, Suk founded the Czech Quartet, with which he was to perform over 4,000 concerts before retiring in 1933. He was deeply influenced in his early compositional style by the music of Dvořák, and his relationship with his teacher was cemented when he married that composer's daughter, Otilie, in 1898.

Suk suffered the double tragedy of the deaths of Dvořák in 1904 and of his own young wife only 14 months later. His personal loss was reflected in his later music, which became more modernistic and complex in its texture, harmony, rhythmic construction, and form, and more sophisticated in its instrumental technique. The works of his later years—most notably the symphony dedicated to the memories of Dvořák and Otilie titled *Asrael* (“*Angel of Death*”) and the symphonic poem *The Ripening*—show a concentrated emotional power throughout that Suk sought “to embrace the sterner problems of humanity,” according to Otakar Šourek. Much of the closing decade of his life was devoted to teaching composition at the Prague Conservatory, where he served four terms as Rector and taught many important Czech musicians of the next generation, including Bohuslav Martinů. His grandson, also named Josef (1929-2011), was one of the leading violinists of his generation.

In January 1891, Suk was admitted to one of the dozen prized places in Dvořák's first composition class at the Prague Conservatory. He quickly shot to the head of the class, and when the students went on Easter break, Dvořák assigned them to write a set of variations on a theme he proposed but, realizing a greater potential in Suk, told him that he wanted something more substantial from him for piano quartet. Suk spent his time at home in Křečovice, in the country 40 miles south of the capital, completing the first movement of his Quartet in A minor, but he could only finish the first two sections of the *Adagio* before heading back to school. When Suk played on the piano what he had written for his teacher, Dvořák walked over to him, kissed him on the forehead, and said “*Chlapík*”—“*Good Lad!*” Thus inspired, he finished the work quickly and premiered it at the Conservatory as his graduation thesis on May 13th with a student quartet that was to form the core of the Czech Quartet. The Piano Quartet won a publication award from the Czech Academy the following year, and it was issued as his Op. 1 with a dedication to Antonín Dvořák.

The A minor Piano Quartet is evidence that the 17-year-old Suk understood, respected, and could utilize traditional formal models, qualities that must have pleased his teacher immensely. The opening sonata-form movement takes as its main theme a surging, dramatic melody presented by unison strings; a transformation of the opening theme in the cello, lengthened in rhythm, made lyrical and aspiring in character, and cast in a brighter key, provides the subsidiary subject. The music again turns dramatic in the development section and builds to an expressive climax before quieting for the recapitulation of the main theme by the piano. The reprise of the aspiring second theme culminates in a heroic coda. The *Adagio*, the music that excited Dvořák's admiration, follows a three-part form (A–B–A) whose outer sections are based on a tender, arching melody sung by cello and then violin; the movement's central episode is more animated and impassioned. The main theme of the finale, another sonata structure, is characterized by a march-like vigor and a distinctive dotted rhythm. The piano posits the idea initially and it is then shared by the rest of the ensemble before the music takes up the smooth, wide-ranging second subject. The extensive development section treats the themes in reverse order. The recapitulation of the exposition's events leads to the quartet's triumphant conclusion.

Quartet No. 1 in G minor for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello, Op. 25

Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg.

Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna.

Composed in 1860-61.

Premiered on November 16, 1862, in Vienna by the composer as pianist and members of the Hellmesberger Quartet.

Duration: 40 minutes

The high-minded direction of Johannes Brahms's musical career was evident from his teenage years—as a lad, he studied the masterpieces of the Austro-German tradition with Eduard Marxsen, the most illustrious piano teacher in his native Hamburg, and played Bach and Beethoven on his earliest recitals; his first published compositions were not showy virtuoso trifles but three ambitious piano sonatas inspired by Classical models; and he was irresistibly drawn to Joseph Joachim and the Schumanns and other of the most exalted musicians of his day. When Robert Schumann hailed him as the savior of German music, the rightful heir to the mantle of Beethoven, in an article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (“*New Music Journal*”) in 1853, Brahms was only too eager to accept both the renown and the responsibility inherent in such a lofty appraisal. He tried sketching a symphony as early as 1855 (not completing it, however, until two decades later), but his principal means of fulfilling Schumann's prophecy during the early phase of his creative life were piano works and songs, and then chamber music. Finished compositions did not come easily for Brahms, however, and he made several attempts to satisfy himself with a chamber piece before he allowed the publication of his Piano Trio, Op. 8 in 1854. (He had destroyed at least three

earlier efforts in that form.) The following year, he turned to writing quartets for piano, violin, viola, and cello, a genre whose only precedents were the two by Mozart and a single specimen by Schumann. Work on the quartets did not go smoothly, however, and he laid one (in C minor, eventually Op. 60) aside for almost two decades, and tinkered with the other two for the next half-dozen years in Hamburg and at his part-time post as music director for the court Lippe-Detmold, midway between Frankfurt and Hamburg.

Brahms was principally based in Hamburg during those years, usually staying with his parents, but in 1860, when he was 27 years old and eager to find the quiet and privacy to work on his compositions, he rented spacious rooms (“a quite charming flat with a garden,” he said) in the suburb of Hamm from one Frau Dr. Elisabeth Rössing, a neighbor of two members of the local women’s choir he was then directing. Hamm was to be his home for the next two years, and there he worked on the *Variations on a Theme of Schumann* for Piano Duet (Op. 23), *Handel Variations* (Op. 24), and Piano Quartets in G minor (Op. 25) and A major (Op. 26). Brahms dedicated the A major Quartet to his hospitable landlady. The two piano quartets were finally finished by early autumn 1861, and given a private reading by some unknown local musicians and Clara Schumann during her visit to Hamm shortly thereafter. The public premiere of the G minor Quartet was given by Brahms and the quartet of Joseph Hellmesberger, director of the Vienna Conservatory, on November 16, 1862, during the composer’s first visit to Vienna. The opening movement of the G minor Piano Quartet contains an abundance of thematic material woven into a seamless continuum through Brahms’s consummate contrapuntal skill. Balanced within its closely reasoned sonata form are pathos and vigor, introspection and jubilation, storm and tranquility. The second movement (*Intermezzo*), cast in the traditional form of scherzo and trio, is formed from long-spun melodies in gentle, rocking rhythms. The Andante is in a broad three-part structure, with the middle section taking on a snappy martial air. The *Gypsy Rondo* finale is a spirited essay much in the style of Brahms’s invigorating *Hungarian Dances*.

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DAVID FINCKEL

Co-artistic director of the Chamber Music Society, cellist David Finckel is a recipient of Musical America's Musician of the Year award, one of the highest honors granted to musicians from the music industry in the United States. He leads a multifaceted career as a concert performer, recording artist, educator, administrator and cultural entrepreneur that places him in the ranks of today's most influential classical musicians. He appears annually at the world's most prestigious concert series and venues, as both soloist and chamber musician. As a chamber musician, he appears extensively with duo partner pianist Wu Han and in a piano trio alongside violinist Philip Setzer. David Finckel served as cellist of the nine-time Grammy Award-winning Emerson String Quartet for 34 seasons. His wide-ranging musical activities also include the launch of ArtistLed, classical music's first musician-directed and Internet-based recording company, whose catalog has won widespread critical praise. Along with Wu Han, he is the founder and artistic director of Music@Menlo, Silicon Valley's acclaimed chamber music festival and institute. The first American student of Rostropovich, David Finckel serves on the faculty at the Juilliard School and Stony Brook University. His new website now hosts Resource, an innovative exploration of challenges and opportunities facing today's classical musicians.



PAUL NEUBAUER

Violist Paul Neubauer has been called a "master musician" by *The New York Times*. He recently made his Chicago Symphony subscription debut with conductor Riccardo Muti and his Mariinsky Orchestra debut with conductor Valery Gergiev. He also gave the U.S. premiere of the newly discovered Impromptu for viola and piano by Shostakovich with pianist Wu Han. In addition, his recording of the Aaron Kernis Viola Concerto with the Royal Northern Sinfonia was released on Signum Records and his recording of the complete viola/piano music by Ernest Bloch with pianist Margo Garrett was released on Delos. Appointed principal violist of the New York Philharmonic at age 21, he has appeared as soloist with over 100 orchestras including the New York, Los Angeles and Helsinki philharmonics; National, St. Louis, Detroit, Dallas, San Francisco and Bournemouth symphonies; and Santa Cecilia, English Chamber and Beethovenhalle orchestras. He has premiered viola concertos by Bartók, Friedman, Glière, Jacob, Kernis, Lazarof, Müller-Siemens, Ott, Penderecki, Picker, Suter and Tower and has been featured on CBS's Sunday Morning, A Prairie Home Companion and in *Strad*, *Strings* and *People* magazines. A two-time Grammy nominee, he has recorded on numerous labels including Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, RCA Red Seal and Sony Classical and is a member of SPA, a trio with soprano Susanna Phillips and pianist Anne-Marie McDermott. Mr. Neubauer is the artistic director of the Mostly Music series in New Jersey and is on the faculty of the Juilliard School and Mannes College.



ARNAUD SUSSMANN

Winner of a 2009 Avery Fisher Career Grant, Arnaud Sussmann has distinguished himself with his unique sound, bravura and profound musicianship. Minnesota's *Pioneer Press* writes, "Sussmann has an old-school sound reminiscent of what you'll hear on vintage recordings by Jascha Heifetz or Fritz Kreisler, a rare combination of sweet and smooth that can hypnotize a listener." A thrilling musician capturing the attention of classical critics and audiences around the world, he has recently appeared as a soloist with the Mariinsky Orchestra under Valery Gergiev, the Vancouver Symphony and the New World Symphony. As a chamber musician, he has performed at the Tel Aviv Museum in Israel, London's Wigmore Hall, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, the White Nights Festival in Saint Petersburg, the Dresden Music Festival in Germany and the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC. He has been presented in recital in Omaha on the Tuesday Musical Club series, New Orleans by the Friends of Music and at the Louvre Museum in Paris. He has also given concerts at the OK Mozart, Moritzburg, Caramoor, Music@Menlo, La Jolla SummerFest, Mainly Mozart, Seattle Chamber Music, Chamber Music Northwest and the Moab Music festivals. He has performed with many of today's leading artists including Itzhak Perlman, Menahem Pressler, Gary Hoffman, Shmuel Ashkenasi, Wu Han, David Finckel and Jan Vogler. An alum of the Bowers Program, he regularly appears with CMS in New York and on tour. Mr. Sussmann is co-director of Music@Menlo's International Program and teaches at Stony Brook University.



WU HAN

Co-artistic director of the Chamber Music Society, pianist Wu Han is among the most esteemed and influential classical musicians in the world today. She is a recipient of Musical America's Musician of the Year award and has risen to international prominence through her wide-ranging activities as a concert performer, recording artist, educator, arts administrator and cultural entrepreneur. In high demand as a recitalist, soloist and chamber musician, Wu Han appears at many of the world's most prestigious venues and performs extensively as duo partner with cellist David Finckel. Together, they co-founded ArtistLed, classical music's first musician-directed and Internet-based recording company, whose catalog has won widespread critical praise. Recent recordings include a set of three *Wu Han LIVE* albums, a collaborative production between the ArtistLed and Music@Menlo LIVE labels. The latest captures Wu Han's live performances of Fauré's piano quartets from the festival. Complementing her work as a performing artist, Wu Han's artistic partnerships bring her in contact with new audiences in the U.S. and abroad: she is artistic advisor of the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts' Chamber Music at the Barns series, co-founder and artistic director of Music@Menlo Chamber Music Festival and Institute in Silicon Valley. In recognition of her passionate commitment to music education, Montclair State University has appointed her a special artist-in-residence.

