CHAMBER MUSIC TULSA

PRESENTS

Notos Quartet

Sunday, March 9, 2025
3:00 p.m.

John H. Williams Theatre
Tulsa Performing Arts Center

Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, K. 493 — **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Allegro (fast)
Larghetto (somewhat solemn)
Allegretto (moderately fast)

Piano Quartet in D Minor — **William Walton**

Allegramente (cheerful)
Allegro scherzando (quick and playful)
Andante tranquillo (slow, peaceful)
Allegro molto (very fast)

INTERMISSION

Piano Quartet in G Minor, Op. 25 — **Johannes Brahms**

Allegro (fast)
Intermezzo. Allegro, ma non troppo — Trio. Animato
(Interlude, fast, but not too fast, trio — lively)
Andante con moto (moderate pace, with motion)
Rondo alla zingarese (rondo in a gypsy style)

Please hold your applause until after the final movement of each work.

The Notos Quartet's concert weekend and outreach activities are underwritten by a generous gift from Amanda and Kenneth Lawrence.

The Notos Quartet is represented by California Artists Management.

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Notos Quartet

Sindri Lederer, Violin **Antonia Köster, Piano**
Andrea Burger, Viola **Benjamin Lai, Cello**

The Notos Quartet is one of the most celebrated young chamber ensembles to emerge in recent years - praised for its virtuoso brilliance, passion, sensitivity, and mature interpretive powers.

Founded in 2007, the Berlin-based piano quartet first drew attention winning first prize in six major, international competitions. Since then it has established itself worldwide, performing at renowned European concert halls, such as the Philharmonie Berlin, Konzerthaus Berlin, Konzerthaus Vienna, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, London's Wigmore Hall, Tonhalle Zürich, BOZAR Brussels, and the Teatro Fenice in Venice, as well as important festivals in Rheingau, Schwetzingen, Würzburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Lockenhaus, Usedom, Radio France in Montpellier, and traveling abroad for concerts in Australia, South Africa, Great Britain, Russia, China, Japan and Southeast Asia. They made their American debut in 2022 with three concerts for Chamber Music San Francisco and returned in October 2023 for their debuts in New York City and Los Angeles.

Their repertoire spans from the great classical masterpieces to contemporary music. The Notos Quartet has a strong commitment to new music as shown by numerous commissions and collaborations with such composers as Beat Furrer, Bryce Dessner, Garth Knox, and Bernhard Gander. They also search for important lost or forgotten works to bring to new audiences. Their 2017 debut CD, "Hungarian Treasures," on Sony Classical/ RCA includes an unknown piano quartet by Béla Bartók, recorded for the first time ever, and paired with music of Kodaly and Dohnanyi. Their 2nd Sony CD, "Brahms: The Schönberg Effect (2021)," includes Brahms' great Piano Quartet in G Minor, but also Brahms' Symphony No. 3 arranged for the Quartet by Andreas N. Tarkmann. Their 3rd CD, "Paris Bar" released by Sony in 2022 as a tribute to Paris features music of Jean Français, the Polish/French composer Alexandre Tansman, and the Hungarian, László Lajtha, who studied in Paris where he was highly regarded, but whose music was banned in Hungary. For its first recording, the Notos Quartet was recognized by ECHO Klassik 2017 as "Newcomer of the Year," an award they returned in 2018, the first artists to ever do so, in response to the ECHO Pop Awards honoring an album with anti-Semitic content. The range of the Quartet's programming has been documented by numerous concert recordings, interviews and features on radio and television at home and abroad, including ARD, ZDF, Deutschlandfunk, BBC, France Musique, ORF, NHK Japan and IPR USA. In 2022 they received the €25.000 Würth Prize of Jeunesses Musicales Germany for their passionate and expressive interpretations.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Nationality: Austrian
Born: January 27, 1756, Salzburg
Died: December 5, 1791, Vienna
Piano Quartet in E-flat major, K. 493
Duration: ***31 minutes***
Composed: 1786

Johannes Brahms
Nationality: German
Born: May 7, 1833, Hamburg
Died: April 3, 1897, Vienna
Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25
Duration: **40 minutes**
Composed: *1857-1861*

William Walton
Nationality: English
Born: March 29, 1902,
Oldham, England
Died: March 8, 1983, Ischia, Italy
Piano Quartet in D Minor
Duration: ***30 minutes***
Composed: 1918-1921
Revised: 1975

Program Notes

By Steven Eiler, © 2024

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) completed his Piano Quartet No. 2 in E-flat Major at the height of his powers as both a performing pianist and as a composer of chamber music, and yet in some sense the piece ought not to exist at all. After his wunderkind fame as a child prodigy and his disastrous attempt as a local court musician in his hometown of Salzburg, Mozart hit a stride in the first half of the 1780s. This period saw many of his most celebrated piano concertos premiered by Wolfgang himself, and it also saw his budding friendship with Haydn and the publication of the six so-called "Haydn Quartets" Mozart wrote in dedication to the elder statesman of Viennese music.

In 1785, Mozart received a commission from the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister to compose three piano quartets. He completed the first, in G minor (a key Brahms would later adopt for his own first piano quartet heard on this concert), but it was immediately rejected by Hoffmeister as too difficult for amateur performers to play and therefore would not sell well to his primary market. Hoffmeister released Mozart from his commitments to the commission (and from any further payment for it), and that could have been the end of the matter.

But Mozart had too much energy and momentum to stop writing and went ahead to complete this E-flat Major Quartet in 1786 despite not being paid to do so. It therefore forms an interesting case study (along with Mozart's final symphonies) of a piece created on the composer's own expressive terms without being beholden to the tastes of any particular patron or the public. It also marks the end of the most fruitful years of chamber music and keyboard music

in Mozart's career. Shortly after completing this quartet, he would return to opera as his primary creative vehicle, and produce relatively little (for Mozart, anyway) music for piano and strings in his remaining five years of life.

The E-flat Major Quartet begins with a lively bouncing piano figure and an energizing flattened 7th in the harmony. This establishes the primary mood to which this opening movement will periodically return. In between these carefree episodes, Mozart inserts moments of breathtakingly reflective beauty. The most striking gestures often come when either the piano as a soloist or the strings as a group take the floor without the other part of the ensemble present. Here echoes of Mozart's string quartets and his piano concertos emerge from the texture, although never for long enough to forget what kind of special ensemble one is hearing.

The second movement begins with a dramatic solo piano flourish in A-flat major that dips down and climbs up again twice before the strings begin a period of call and answer between themselves and the piano. The rest of the movement unfolds a series of lilting, swaying gestures that sound less like a stately dance (despite their slow, triple-meter), and much more like a genuine conversation. Ideas presented once by the piano are later repeated and developed by the strings and vice-versa until the end. What exactly the conversation is about is anyone's guess, but the aching tone suggests a subject of passionate interest to both "characters" represented by the strings and piano.

The third and final movement is generally a much lighter affair than either the first or second, showing that even when Mozart had no one in particular to please, his instincts still pulled toward the pleasing musical satisfaction for which he was his era's most outstanding paragon. It delves into moments of minor-mode darkness in its middle, but never for long. It quickly bounces back into the light, playful sound of an incomparable composer creating a work of astounding delight simply because he wanted to.

While William Walton (1902-1983) would go on to live a much longer life than Mozart, he was only 16 when he composed his own Piano Quartet in D Minor. It was the first substantial work of the young English composer's career, and while he withdrew some other juvenilia from his official catalogue, he not only retained this work, he revised it twice: once in 1955 and again in 1975, more than half a century after its original conception.

He undertook the project in his first year as a student in Christ Church College at Oxford University. Walton had begun singing in the Choir School at Christ Church at the age of 10. His father, Charles Walton, himself a singer and a choir director, had recognized his son's talents and sent him to Oxford as a child so he might have better opportunities for training as a musician. The young William's talents were also recognized by the Right Reverend Thomas Banks Strong (to whom the D Minor Quartet is dedicated). Strong advocated for Walton's early admission into the university as a sixteen-year-old and helped secure funding for his studies. This chamber work was the first fruit of that remarkable support.

While the piece bears the title of "D Minor," it begins without a written key

signature and its first theme is, in fact, in the Dorian mode. The difference between a Dorian scale and a standard minor scale is that the sixth note of the scale is raised by a half-step, in this case to B-natural instead of D minor's B-flat. Over an open fifth drone in the cello, Walton uses that bright B-natural to create a splash of major-key feeling in the otherwise minor first theme. This element of surprise and tonal ambiguity follows throughout the rest of the piece.

In fact, that B-natural pitch forecasts surprising modulations to a second theme, also in the Dorian mode. This gives way shortly to a piano solo using the five-note pentatonic scale, the other defining sound of Walton's quartet.

These unorthodox harmonic decisions might seem reserved or even conservative compared to the wild and near total abandonment of tonality that had already been undertaken by the likes of Arnold Schoenberg or Igor Stravinsky in the years immediately prior to this quartet's 1919 composition, but it must be remembered that Walton, from his own perspective, was a teenager singing mainly traditional British choral music. He would have had limited exposure to the musical avant-garde at this early moment in his career. As such, this quartet is testament to a thrillingly inventive imagination.

The other movements of Walton's quartet continue to balance on the edge between late romantic expressivity and a modernist impulse to defy convention. The emphatic second movement is in a fast three-beat meter and contains passages that sound like a fugue, but which quickly break up into new soaring melodies and obstinate hammering of repeated notes in the accompaniment. The third movement offers a much-needed reprieve after the relentless energy of the second. Besides its gorgeous lyrical melodies, it offers a variety of delicate textures, including various uses of pizzicato (plucked strings) as well as a series of a long-sustained whisper-thin harmonics in the violin while the viola plays a solo. Its tenderest moments come when the piano rests, but its most surprising moments come when the piano plays chromatic passages that almost sound like jazz. Like the first movement, it also sometimes ventures into the sound of pentatonic melodies, giving the piece a difficult-to-place folk-like character despite its harmonic adventurousness. The allegro molto finale opens with stabs of sound but soon gives way to a kaleidoscope of moods recalling the previous three movements. Its final syncopations sound more like ragtime than anyone might expect from an English composer of the time. If Mozart's finale exhibits the serious playfulness of a mature voice choosing to enjoy itself, Walton's piece ends with nearly the opposite effect. It sounds like the voice of youth trying desperately to be serious but having fun the whole way through in spite of itself.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) revered the great masters of Viennese music – Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert – but did not visit the city of Vienna (which would eventually become his home) until he was nearly 30. When he arrived in Vienna in 1862, he soon met the faculty of the Conservatoire there, including its director (and concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic) Joseph Hellmesberger. Hellmesberger

was also the leader of the only established professional string quartet in Vienna and gathered two of his colleagues from that ensemble to rehearse Brahms' recently completed Op. 25 Piano Quartet in G Minor with the composer himself at the piano. The group was immediately enthusiastic about the piece and programmed it on an upcoming concert within just weeks of Brahms' arrival.

The G Minor Quartet had received its actual premiere a year earlier with Clara Schumann at the piano. Brahms had met the Schumanns in 1853 when Robert was still alive and of relatively sound mind, and both Robert and Clara became ardent supporters of the young composer and his music. Robert Schumann had published an effusive article which praised Brahms as "a chosen one" and "a strong champion" of music, and which would burden the then-20-year-old with the weight of expectation for the rest of his life.

Joseph Hellmesberger did not help Brahms' crushing sense of comparison with past masters when he declared him the "heir to Beethoven" upon their meeting in 1862. Beethoven's own massive, seven-movement Op. 131 string quartet was programmed on the same concert with Brahm's G Minor piano quartet, which surely encouraged the comparison. At the time of his Vienna debut, Brahms' piano playing was reviewed with more enthusiasm than his composition, even by Eduard Hanslick, who would go on to become a close friend of Brahms and outspoken supporter of his music in the years to come.

Still, the G Minor Quartet, taken on its own terms now, has an immediately gripping appeal. It's opening theme, presented in octaves on the piano, outlines a curious melody of all quarter notes that pulls at the edges of its G minor tonality, suggesting possible resolutions to both B-flat major and G major. But when it is taken up in successively rising registers by the cello, viola, and violin, it confirms its rootedness in G minor and begins an achingly evocative journey.

Brahms' first movement honors the formal design of the older music to which his was often compared but takes considerable liberty with its structure. About five minutes in, the opening quarter-note melody returns verbatim in the piano then up through the strings, implying a repeat of the entire section, as would have been standard. But instead of repeating the section, that brief repetition launches into an exploratory development section instead. Later, at the point when Viennese stylistic norms would dictate a final return to the opening theme, Brahms skips it and jumps straight to his second theme instead. This flexible approach to the form marks Brahms as a true musician of the Romantic era, however much his music was (and still is) compared with that of his forebears.

The second movement of this quartet, like the Walton heard earlier, is in a fast three-beat meter. It is initially and repeatedly punctuated by a nervously insistent ostinato in one voice or another. Around that quickly tapping repeated-note figure, the rest of the ensemble performs a swirling dance despite the apparent nervous tick. By the end of the movement, almost with a sigh of relief, the piano breaks free of the repetitions and flourishes upward in a gesture of free abandon.

The third movement picks up this liberated feeling from the end of the second. It is a singing, lyrical affair in E-flat major that initially sounds much more at ease than most of the music that preceded it. It has moments of regression to the insistent note-repetitions of the second movement but always breaks free back into its own soaring melodies.

The final movement of Brahms' quartet and of today's program was immensely popular upon its premiere and has continued to be ever since. It is an early example of Brahms adapting the style of Hungarian folk dances into his music. Brahms himself was from Hamburg, Germany, not Hungary, but he had toured with the Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi in the 1850s and had learned an appreciation for the style from him. It breaks out with a catchy tune that is 12 beats long and ends on the leading tone, demanding that the melody repeat itself to finish its own thought. It plays with the listener's metric expectations, feeling short of a complete statement. The main theme travels through various contrasting episodes in between satisfying returns to the initial foot-stomping, fist-pounding 12-beat tune. It is a rousing, joyful finish to the piece and to today's program.

Mission and Vision Statement

The mission of Chamber Music Tulsa is to share the experience of chamber music through live performance and community engagement. Our vision is to make chamber music widely accessible in Tulsa, to present compelling performances by professional ensembles, and to invest in the future of the art form by commissioning new music. For more information, visit chambermusictulsa.org.

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