

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Amy Yang, *piano*
Sunday, October 4 – 3:00 PM

PROGRAM (Selection of program notes)

Drei Intermezzi, Op. 117

Johannes Brahms

Born: May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1892

Duration: 18 minutes

Occasionally unsure what title, if any, he should give a piece, Brahms came to use the term intermezzo as a rubric under which he could file anything that was not especially whimsical or fiery. The Three Intermezzi, Op. 117, do not require the technical facility necessary to perform many of his earlier works, but an incisive musicality is paramount for a proper understanding of these musical miniatures. All three Intermezzi of Op. 117 were written in the summer of 1892, the year of their publication. This is one of the rare cases in which Brahms gave a specific title for an entire set of pieces.

After Brahms

Avner Dorman

Born: April 14, 1975, Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel

Composed: 2015

Duration: 12 minutes

Avner Dorman says *After Brahms: Three Intermezzi* is inspired by the late piano compositions of Johannes Brahms (Opp. 116, 117, 118, and 119). The first intermezzo derives its structure and underlying texture from the left hand arpeggios of Brahms' Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 1, and these figures appear in the lower strings and brass. The second intermezzo draws its inspiration from Brahms' Intermezzo Op. 119, No. 1. The original descending arpeggios change in a series of meter shifts — each bar is one pulse longer or shorter than its predecessor, creating a pendulum-like pattern. While the last intermezzo, elegiac in its character, is not directly inspired by a specific Brahms piece, it is perhaps the most Brahmsian in its emotional expression and musical content. The continual descending lines, the suspended lyrical inner voice, and the variety of expressive cross-rhythms all recall Brahms' style.

Valse Triste, Op. 44

Jean Sibelius

Born: December 8, 1865, Hämeenlinna, Finland

Died: September 20, 1957, Ainola, Finland

Composed: 1904

Duration: 5 minutes

Despite almost a century of familiarity and unsatisfactory performances by unlikely instrumental combinations, it's easy to imagine the truly magical effect that Jean Sibelius' Valse Triste (1904) must have had on audiences of the day. Cast in a ternary dance form, *Valse Triste* opens with a simple utterance, but this apparently transparent statement masterfully introduces an overwhelming mood of vast, if perhaps bittersweet, melancholy. As the music unfolds, it exhibits a remarkable ambiguity of mood, reflecting both an old woman's joy at being reunited with her dead husband and the audience's knowledge that it is in fact Death himself that the mother is dancing with. Passions rise in the middle section, and as the opening material reasserts itself at the end of the dance, it is clear that the woman has died. The work draws to a somber end with three ominous chords.

Humoresque, Op. 20

Robert Schumann

Born: June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Germany

Died: July 29, 1856, Endenich, Bonn, Germany

Composed: 1839

Duration: 25 minutes

Originally entitled "Grosse Humoreske," this piece has been regarded by some musicologists as an ill-judged attempt by Schumann to take his formula in *Kreisleriana* a step further. This assessment is harsh, however, for these pieces, unified by their extremes ("laughing and weeping") and generally in the key of B-flat Major, are colorful and imaginative, full of energy and depth, and if they do not strike out new territory, they are rife with ideas and never sound tiresome.