

# From Prussia with Love

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 5 PM  
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

**SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943)**  
**Cello Sonata in G minor, Opus 19 (1901)**

*I. Lento; Allegro moderato*

*II. Allegro scherzando*

*III. Andante*

*IV. Allegro mosso*

Eric Kim, cello

Anna Tilbrook, piano

**PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY**  
**(1840–1893)**

**“Moy geni, moy angel, moy drug”**  
 **(“My Genius, my Angel, my Friend”)**  
**(ca. 1857–8)**

**Six Romances, Opus 6 (1869)**

*“Net, tol’ko tot, kto znal” (“None but the lonely heart”), Opus 6, No. 6*  
*“Otchevo?” (“Why?”), Opus 6, No. 5*

**Six Romances, Opus 38 (1878)**

*“To bilo ranneyu vesnoy” (“It was in the early spring”), Opus 38, No. 2*  
*“Sred’ shumnoy bala” (“Amid the din of the ball”), Opus 38, No. 3*

*“Serenada Don Zhuan” (“Don Juan’s Serenade”), Opus 38, No. 1*

Ben Hulett, tenor  
Anna Tilbrook, piano

INTERMISSION

**JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)**  
**String Sextet No. 1 in B-flat Major, Opus 18 (1860)**

*I. Allegro ma non troppo*

*II. Andante, ma moderato*

*III. Scherzo. Allegro molto—Trio. Animato*

*IV. Rondo. Poco Allegretto e grazioso*

Benny Kim, violin  
Giovanni Guzzo, violin  
Philip Dukes, viola  
Robin Ashwell, viola  
Keith Robinson, cello  
Eric Kim, cello

**Cello Sonata in G minor, Opus 19 (1901)**

**Sergei Rachmaninov was born in Semyonovo, Russia, on April 1, 1873, and died in Beverly Hills, California, on March 28, 1943.**

 *Approx. performance time: 35 mins.*

 *SMF performance history: 3/24/10, 3/22/09*

When Sergei Rachmaninov completed his First Symphony in August of 1895, he was 22, and brimming with all the confidence of youth. “I imagined that there was nothing I could not do and had great hopes for the future,” he later recalled. Rachmaninov’s First Symphony premiered in St. Petersburg on March 15, 1897, with composer Alexander Glazunov conducting. The performance was a disaster, and immediately after the final notes sounded, Rachmaninov “fled, horrified, into the street.”

While Rachmaninov was able to escape the confines of the theater, he still had to face the wrath of the critics. Russian composer César Cui wrote in the *St. Petersburg News*:

If there were a conservatory in Hell, if one of its many talented students were instructed to write a programme symphony on the “Seven Plagues of Egypt,” and if he were to compose a symphony like Mr. Rachmaninov’s, then he would have fulfilled his task brilliantly and would delight the inhabitants of Hell.

Rachmaninov was devastated by this disastrous turn of events. He lapsed into a deep depression:

Half my days were spent lying on a couch and sighing over my ruined life. My only occupation consisted of a few piano lessons which I was forced to give in order to keep myself alive. This condition, which was as tiresome for myself as for those about me, lasted more than a year. I did not live; I vegetated, idle and hopeless. The thought of spending my life as a piano-teacher gave me cold shudders. But what other activity was there left for me?

Rachmaninov’s friends were alarmed by his condition, and tried all forms of cures to buoy his spirits. Finally, they convinced Rachmaninov to consult Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a doctor who had gained some prominence for his employment of hypnosis. Between January and April of 1900, Rachmaninov visited Dr. Dahl on a daily basis.

Rachmaninov told Dahl that he had promised to compose a piano concerto. Dr. Dahl set about treating his patient:

I heard the same hypnotic formula repeated day after day while I lay half asleep in the armchair in Dr. Dahl’s study. “You will begin to write your Concerto...You will work with great facility...The Concerto will be of an excellent quality...” It was always the same, without interruption. Although it may sound incredible, this cure really helped me. Already at the beginning of the summer I began again to compose. The material grew in bulk, and new musical ideas began to stir within me—far more than I needed for my Concerto.

Rachmaninov completed the final two movements of his Second Piano Concerto in the autumn of 1900. He added the opening movement in the spring of the following year. The composer was the soloist in the highly successful October 27, 1901 premiere in Moscow. Rachmaninov dedicated his Second Piano Concerto, one of the composer’s most beloved works, to Dr. Dahl.

Two other compositions date from the period following Rachmaninov’s consultations with Dr. Dahl. They are Suite for Two Pianos, No. 2, Opus 17 (1900–01) and the Cello Sonata in G minor, Opus 19 (1901).

Rachmaninov dedicated the Sonata to his friend, the Russian cellist Anatole Brandukov. They performed the Sonata’s premiere in Moscow, on December 2, 1901. It’s not surprising, given the talents of these two artists, that the Sonata poses considerable technical challenges for both musicians. It’s also not surprising, given its creator, that the Sonata is a work rich with melodic inspiration, ingenious thematic manipulation, and a wide range of instrumental colors.

*I. Lento; Allegro moderato*—The Sonata opens with a slow-tempo introduction (*Lento*), with the cello intoning a two-note motif that will serve as a nucleus for the movement’s principal themes, and in fact, much of the entire work. The introduction’s hushed conclusion is in stark contrast to the forceful opening of the principal *Allegro moderato*. Over a restless piano accompaniment, the cello presents the yearning first principal theme, marked *espressivo e tranquillo*. The piano introduces the second, *espressivo* principal theme (*Moderato*), based upon pairs of descending notes. The theme soon builds to a rapturous statement by the cello and piano, as the exposition draws to a close. The two-note motif introduced at the outset of the work plays a central role in the restless development section. A fiery restatement

of the first principal theme inaugurates the recapitulation. The vibrant final measures bring the opening movement to a stirring close.

II. *Allegro scherzando*—The scherzo's initial principal episode, with its dark atmosphere and relentless forward momentum, recalls the desperate ride through a stormy night depicted in Franz Schubert's immortal song, *Erlkönig* (1815). A relaxed, lyrical episode (*Un poco meno mosso*) provides marked contrast. The two episodes alternate, until finally, the scherzo reaches its abrupt conclusion.

III. *Andante*—The slow-tempo movement is in A—B—A form. In the introduction of both the "A" and "B" sections, the piano launches the melody, then repeated by the cello. Indeed, the entire movement is a heartfelt duet that journeys to its tender close.

IV. *Allegro mosso*—The finale is based upon two central themes. After the piano's introduction, the cello plays the first theme, a scurrying triplet-based melody. The second, contrasting theme is a broad, flowing melody, again introduced by the cello and marked *sempre espressivo*. The two melodies receive an extended and varied development prior to their recapitulation. The coda begins in restrained fashion, but soon becomes a thrilling *Vivace* sprint to the finish.

## Tchaikovsky Songs

**Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, on May 7, 1840, and died in St. Petersburg, Russia, on November 6, 1893.**

🕒 *Approx. performance time: 7 mins.*

📅 *SMF performance history: SMF premiere*

Perhaps it's not surprising, given Tchaikovsky's genius for unforgettable melody, that songs are a significant part of his musical canon. All told, Tchaikovsky composed more than 100 such works. This concert features excerpts from Tchaikovsky's song repertoire that spans a period of approximately two decades.

Tchaikovsky was a teenager when he composed the brief song **"Moy geniy, moy angel, moy drug"** (**"My Genius, my Angel, my Friend"**) (ca. 1857-8). But the haunting melody, with its passionate, ascending sequence, anticipates music of the mature composer.

Tchaikovsky composed his set of **Six Romances, Opus 6**, in the final months of 1869, shortly after completing the original version of his orchestral Fantasy Overture, inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This concert features two

songs from the Opus 6 collection. First is one of Tchaikovsky's most beloved creations, **"Net, tol'ko tot, kto znal"** (**"None but the lonely heart"**), **Opus 6, No. 6**. Tchaikovsky's beautiful setting is of a text by Lev Mey, in turn a Russian translation of Mignon's Song from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*). **"Otchevo?" ("Why?")**, **Opus 6, No. 5**, is yet another Mey translation of verse by another immortal German poet; in this case, Heinrich Heine.

Tchaikovsky completed the **Six Romances, Opus 38** in 1878, the same year as his great Fourth Symphony, the latter composed in the wake of his disastrous marriage to Antonina Milyukova. The song **"To bīlo ranneyu vesnoy"** (**"It was in the early spring"**), **Opus 38, No. 2**, is a setting of a text by Alexey Tolstoy, a distant relative of Leo Tolstoy, and the author of the lyrics for many of Tchaikovsky's romances. **"Sred' shumnoy bala"** (**"Amid the din of the ball"**), **Opus 38, No. 3** features another text by A. Tolstoy. A young man attending a ball admires a beautiful woman from a distance. Tchaikovsky would return to this scenario the following year, in his operatic setting of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. The selection of songs concludes with **"Serenada Don Zhuan"** (**"Don Juan's Serenade"**), **Opus 38, No. 1**. Tchaikovsky inserts a bit of Spanish flavor into A. Tolstoy's poetry, as Don Juan implores Nisetta to come quickly out onto her balcony.

## String Sextet No. 1 in B-flat Major, Opus 18 (1860)

**Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna, Austria, on April 3, 1897.**

🕒 *Approx. performance time: 38 mins.*

📅 *SMF performance history: 3/24/10, 3/22/09*

In the spring of 1857, Johannes Brahms, then 24, agreed to work in the service of the Court of Lippe-Detmold. The Court was located in the German city of Detmold, some 100 miles southwest of Brahms's native Hamburg. During his years of service to the Court, Brahms resided in Detmold during the months of October through December. There, Brahms gave piano lessons to the Princess Frederike, conducted the town's choral society, and offered concerts at the Court.

Brahms found his experience in Detmold to be somewhat of a mixed blessing. Always a down-to-earth man, Brahms was never comfortable with the formalities of court life. On the other

hand, he relished the opportunities to wander in the massive Teutoburg Forest. As Brahms wrote to his dear friend, Clara Schumann (the eminent pianist and composer, and widow of the great German composer Robert Schumann):

...how attractive a post at one of these little Courts is. One gets plenty of time to play to oneself, but unfortunately one cannot always feel happy at heart, for, after all, one would become nauseated by the faces one sees there, they are enough to make anyone a misanthropist. One can enjoy the beauties of nature alone, but when playing music in the drawing room before people, one does not wish to be alone.

Brahms continued to return to Detmold for three years, finally terminating his association with the Court in the winter of 1859.

Despite his teaching and performing duties, Brahms found ample opportunity to pursue composition. During those three autumns in Detmold, Brahms composed numerous choral pieces, his First Piano Concerto in D minor, Opus 15, and the two Serenades for Orchestra (D Major, Opus 11, and A Major, Opus 16).

Brahms also began the first of his two String Sextets during the final year of his Detmold association. In September 1860, Brahms forwarded the music to the great Austro-Hungarian violinist, Joseph Joachim. Brahms wrote: "I have been quite a long time over it and I do not suppose that this will have raised your expectations. But with God's help nothing is impossible, and I am sending you the parts in case the (final movement) Rondo may appeal to you."

Joachim, a staunch friend and advocate of Brahms's music, ultimately became the dedicatee of the German composer's Violin Concerto (1878) and Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra (1887). Joachim provided Brahms with considerable technical and musical advice during the composition of both of those masterpieces. In fact, throughout his career, Brahms frequently turned to Joachim for musical guidance.

After reviewing the Sextet, Joachim suggested the addition of ten introductory bars in the first movement. Generally, however, Joachim was satisfied with the work. On October 14, Joachim wrote to Brahms:

We have played your Sextet through twice...I am very pleased with it, particularly

the first two movements. The Scherzo is full of life and I like the finale, although I had expected the conclusion to be more effective, and I wish the second subject could have shown more contrast with the first, whose geniality it cannot equal. But the playing was partly to blame; the last part is the most difficult.

Brahms's Sextet—scored for pairs of violins, violas, and cellos—is his first major chamber work that does not include piano. The Sextet premiered in Hanover, Germany, on October 20, 1860. Clara Schumann was in the audience. Upon hearing this gorgeous work, Clara wrote in her diary: "It was even more beautiful than I had anticipated, and my expectations were already high."

I. *Allegro ma non troppo*—The expansive opening movement features three principal themes. The first, *espressivo* theme is immediately sung by the first cello, and soon repeated by the first violin and viola. A series of triplets by the first violin leads to the second, *dolce* theme, played by the violins, first viola and cello, to pizzicato accompaniment in the second viola and cello. The first cello introduces the soaring final theme. The ensuing development concentrates upon the first two themes. All of the themes return in the varied recapitulation. The majestic coda concludes with a *Poco più Moderato* sequence that opens softly with pizzicato articulation, proceeding to an *arco* (bowed), *forte* resolution.

II. *Andante, ma moderato*—The Sextet's slow-tempo movement is a theme and set of variations. The theme is presented by the first viola, and then by the first violin, all the while over insistent accompaniment. This theme serves as the nucleus for a series of six variations, encompassing a wide variety of moods and instrumental textures. The final variation brings the *Andante* to a hushed close.

III. *Scherzo. Allegro molto—Trio. Animato*—The brief *Scherzo* begins in lively fashion, becoming even more vivacious in the *Trio* section (*Animato*). After a reprise of the *Scherzo*, the third movement concludes with a brief, exuberant *Coda*, based upon the *Trio*.

IV. *Rondo. Poco Allegretto e grazioso*—The first cello, accompanied by the second viola and cello, offers the *espressivo*, central theme of the *Rondo* finale. The theme returns throughout the movement, alternating with numerous and

diverse episodes. The theme itself receives varied treatment—a particularly charming example occurs in the latter part of the movement, as the violins and first viola engage in dialogue with the second viola and cellos. The final coda (*Animato, poco a poco più*), based upon a fragmented version of the *Rondo* theme, brings the B-flat Major Sextet to an effervescent conclusion.