PROGRAM NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

LARS VOGT, PIANO

Monday, April 1 at 6 pm
Trinity United Methodist Church

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Three *Intermezzi*, Opus 117 (1892)
I. *Andante moderato* (E-flat Major)
II. *Andante non troppo e con molto espressione* (B-flat minor)
III. *Andante con moto* (C-sharp minor)

Four *Klavierstücke*, Opus 119 (1893)
I. *Intermezzo. Adagio* (B minor)
II. *Intermezzo. Andantino un poco agitato* (E minor)
III. *Intermezzo. Grazioso e giocoso* (C Major)
IV. *Rhapsodie. Allegro risoluto* (E-flat Major)

***Variations on a Theme by Paganini*, Opus 35 (1862–3)**

INTERMISSION

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)
***Sonata 1.X.1905*, "From the Street" (1905)**
I. *The Presentiment. Con moto*
II. *The Death. Adagio*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Opus 57, "Appassionata" (1805)
I. *Allegro assai*
II. *Andante con moto*
III. *Allegro ma non troppo*; *Presto*

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

Three *Intermezzi*, Opus 117 (1892) Four *Klavierstücke*, Opus 119 (1893)

Approximate performance time is 30 minutes.
SMF performance history: SMF premiere

The early 1890s appeared to mark the abrupt termination of the career of one of the 19th century's greatest composers. In the preceding years, Johannes Brahms had suffered the deaths of family members and many of his closest friends. These losses seem to have taken a devastating toll on the German composer's spirits. In December of 1890, Brahms forwarded the score of the Second String Quintet in G Major, Opus 111, to his publisher, Simrock. Brahms wrote: "With this letter you can bid farewell to my music—because it is certainly time to leave off..." Brahms also told friends: "I have worked hard enough; now let the young folks take over."

In 1891, Brahms drafted his Will, known as the "Ischl Testament." That same year however, Brahms encountered the inspiration for a new series of instrumental works that would serve as crowning glories to a magnificent career. That inspiration came in the person and talents of Richard Mühlfeld (1856–1907), principal clarinet of the famed Meiningen Orchestra. Brahms heard the Meiningen Orchestra under the direction of its new conductor, Fritz Steinbach. Brahms was immediately impressed by Mühlfeld's extraordinary musicianship. Brahms later compared Mühlfeld's artistry to that of the great operatic sopranos, calling him "my prima donna."

It was not long before Brahms and Richard Mühlfeld commenced a professional collaboration and warm friendship. In the summer of 1891, Brahms composed two works for Mühlfeld—the Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano in A minor, Opus 114, and the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in B minor, Opus 115. In 1894, Brahms composed two more works for Richard Mühlfeld, the Opus 120 Sonatas for Clarinet and Piano—No. 1 in F minor, and No. 2 in E-flat Major.

During that same period (1892–3), Brahms composed his final solo piano works (although a few of these selections may have been created earlier). The *Fantasias*, Opus 116 (1892), *Intermezzi*, Opus 117 (1892), and *Klavierstücke*, Opus 118 and 119 (1893), comprise twenty brief works, all cast in A–B–A form. While the Opus 116-19 works pose considerable technical and interpretive challenges, for the greater part virtuoso display yields to affecting lyricism, introspection, and harmonic subtlety.

The *Intermezzi*, Opus 117, are a trio of lullabies. Above the score to the first *Intermezzo*, in E-flat Major (*Andante moderato*), Brahms quotes (in German) a Scottish lullaby, "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament," included in Johann Gottfried Herder's collection of folk songs, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*:

> "Sleep gently my child, sleep gently and beautifully,
> It grieves me so, to see you cry."

The second *Intermezzo*, in B-flat minor (*Andante non troppo e con molto espressione*), imparts a gossamer elegance. Brahms described the final *Intermezzo*, in C-sharp minor (*Andante con moto*) as "the lullaby of all my griefs."

The four *Klavierstücke*, Opus 119, open with three *Intermezzi*, by turns hushed (*Adagio*, B minor), restless (*Andantino un poco agitato*, E minor), and playful (*Grazioso e giocoso*, C Major). The set closes with a heroic *Rhapsodie* (*Allegro risoluto*, E-flat Major), evoking memories of the young Brahms who, 40 years earlier, had captivated the imagination of Robert and Clara Schumann, and soon, the entire music world.

Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Opus 35 (1862–3)

Approximate performance time is 23 minutes.
SMF performance history: SMF premiere

The Italian violinist Nicolò Paganini (1782–1840) was one of music's greatest and most charismatic virtuosos. Paganini's riveting stage presence, coupled with the violinist's spellbinding technique, drove audiences into a frenzy. Paganini was as much a master of

self-promotion as he was of the violin. He understood the value of publicity, particularly of the sensational variety. Paganini did little to stifle incredible rumors that he learned to play the violin on a single-stringed instrument while serving a prison sentence for murder, or that his incomparable talents resulted from a pact with the devil. In fact, Paganini encouraged these and other stories at every turn. The violinist's shoulder-length hair and gaunt, black-attired figure only served to reinforce the diabolical associations.

Not surprisingly, Paganini's works for violin showcased his unique talents. While commentators have differed on the musical worth of Paganini's compositions, there is no question they exerted a profound influence upon subsequent artists. One work in particular, the last of Paganini's 24 *Caprices for Solo Violin*, Opus 1 (ca. 1805), a theme and brilliant set of variations, has served as the inspiration for such pieces as Nathan Milstein's *Paganiniana* (1954) for solo violin, two works for piano and orchestra, Sergei Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Opus 43 (1934), and Witold Lutosławski's *Variations on a Theme by Paganini* (1978), as well as Boris Blacher's *Orchestral Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, Opus 26 (1947).

Another work derived from the *Caprice* No. 24 is Johannes Brahms's *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*, Opus 35. Brahms's *Paganini Variations* were inspired by yet another legendary 19th-century virtuoso, the Polish pianist Carl Tausig (1841–1871). During his tragically brief life, Tausig, a pupil of Franz Liszt, was hailed as perhaps the greatest pianist of his generation, a musician who combined an electrifying technical prowess with keen musical insight. Brahms met Tausig in Vienna in the early 1860s, where the two had many opportunities to play and discuss music. Brahms wrote to violinist Joseph Joachim that Tausig and composer Peter Cornelius "achieve more with their little finger than other musicians with the whole head and all their fingers."

Brahms dedicated the *Paganini Variations* to Tausig. As befits the work's dedicatee (and of course Brahms was himself a superb pianist), the *Paganini Variations* demand a virtuoso of the highest rank. When yet another remarkable pianist, Clara Schumann, received Brahms's score, she dubbed the work the "*Hexenvariationen*" ("Witchcraft Variations"). The Brahms *Paganini Variations* comprise a set of two Books, each opening with the original Paganini theme, followed by 14 variations.

Sonata 1.X.1905, "From the Street" (1905)

Leoš Janáček was born in Hukvaldy, Moravia, on July 3, 1854, and died in Moravská Ostrava on August 12, 1928.
Approximate performance time is 13 minutes.
SMF performance history: 3/24/08, 4/02/05

Until 1918, composer Leoš Janáček's native Moravia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire. In 1905, the Czechs requested that their own university be established in Brno. On October 1, the Austrians of Brno organized a demonstration in opposition to this request. The Czechs formed a counter-demonstration, and passions reached the boiling point.

The town council summoned both the police and the army to quell the protests by clearing the Czechs' rallying base, the Beseda Society building. During the skirmish, a young Czech worker, Frantisek Pavlík, was bayoneted, and later died in a hospital.

These horrible events inspired Janáček to compose a piano composition, originally in three movements, and entitled *Street Scene 1 October 1905*. Janáček's preface to the score reads:

> "The white marble staircase
> of the House of Artists in Brno...
> a simple worker Frantisek Pavlík
> falls, stained with blood...
> He came only to plead for a university...
> and was killed by cruel murderers."

The premiere of *Street Scene* took place in Brno at the Friends of Art Club on January 27, 1906, performed by Ludmila Tučková. During the rehearsal that afternoon, Janáček grabbed the score for the final movement from Tucková and set it on fire. Tučková played the remaining two movements that evening.

Later, Janáček tossed the rest of the score into the Vltava River. As the composer recalled: "They did not want to sink. The paper bulged and floated on the water like so many white swans."

But Tučková had already taken the precaution of copying the surviving two movements. Janácek authorized their publication in 1924.

The first movement, entitled *The Presentiment* (*Con moto*) begins lyrically, but grows ever more troubled before resolving to a desolate close. The second movement, originally called *Elegy*, and later, *The Death* (*Adagio*), is an extended funeral march, built upon a subdued, yet insistent dotted-rhythm motif introduced at the outset. The music builds to an anguished climax, and then fades to silence.

Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Opus 57, "Appassionata" (1805)

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827.
Approximate performance time is 24 minutes.
SMF performance history: 3/28/17, 3/23/07

By the start of the 19th century, Beethoven had established himself as one of Vienna's most important pianists and composers. But during this period, Beethoven also began to experience difficulties with his hearing. In the spring of 1802, on the advice of his physician, Beethoven left the stress of life in Vienna to spend time in the beautiful country village of Heiligenstadt.

It appears that during the stay in Heiligenstadt, Beethoven suffered a further decline in his hearing. Beethoven was forced to confront the possibility—even the likelihood—that he would lose his hearing altogether. It was, of course, the cruelest joke fate could play upon Beethoven. He would soon become a pianist unable to perform in public, and a composer unable to hear his own musical creations.

It's not surprising that Beethoven spent much time contemplating the meaning of his life. One of the products of this soul-searching process was the document known as the "Heiligenstadt Testament," written in October of 1802. Addressed to his two brothers, the Testament was found among Beethoven's papers after the composer's death in 1827.

In the "Heiligenstadt Testament," Beethoven confessed:

> But how humiliated I have felt if somebody standing beside me heard the sound of a flute in the distance and *I heard nothing*, or if somebody heard a *shepherd sing* and again I heard nothing—Such experiences almost made me despair, and I was on the point of putting an end to my life—The only thing that held me back was *my art*. For indeed it seemed to me impossible to leave this world before I had produced all the works I felt the urge to compose; and thus I have dragged on this miserable existence—a truly miserable existence...

In the decade following the "Heiligenstadt Testament," Beethoven responded with ferocious, unflagging energy and determination. During this extraordinary period, Beethoven composed such masterpieces as the Symphonies Nos. 2-8, the Fourth and Fifth ("Emperor") Piano Concertos, the "Razumovsky" String Quartets, and the composer's only opera, *Fidelio*. Piano Sonatas were also an important part of the post-Heilgenstadt period. As with the other compositions mentioned, they reflect Beethoven's constant search for new and revolutionary modes of expression that served to define him as a composer who forever changed the course of music.

Beethoven dedicated his Sonata No. 23 to his dear friend, Count Franz von Brunswick. The nickname, "Appassionata," was originated by a publisher more than a decade after Beethoven's death.

Beethoven's pupil and friend, Ferdinand Ries, recalled a summer visit (probably in 1804) to the composer's residence in Baden. When Ries arrived for his lesson, he heard Beethoven in the next room, improvising. Beethoven greeted Ries and announced: "We won't have a lesson today. Instead let us take a walk together, the morning is so beautiful." During their walk, a bird offered a beautiful song. It soon became clear to Ries that Beethoven, suffering the onset of deafness, could not hear it. Ries lamented:

> The sweet fascination which those tones had exercised on me at first now turned into profound sadness...When after several hours we returned home, he sat down impatiently at the piano and exclaimed: "Now I shall play something for you." With irresistible fire and mighty force he played the *Allegro* of the great F minor Sonata. The day will forever remain unforgettable to me.

I. *Allegro assai*—The "Appassionata" opens with a series of hushed arpeggio chords, capped by delicate trills. An ominous four-note motif that would also serve as the basis for the Fifth Symphony (1808) follows. Soon, the troubled repose is shattered by a *forte* outburst, followed by the explosive first principal theme, based upon the opening measures. The contrasting major-key second theme is a clear descendent of the opening measures as well. The remainder of the sonata-form movement is an epic conflict between those diverse forces. In the extended coda, mysterious repetitions of the four-note motif lead to the final *Più Allegro*, in which the relationship between the two principal themes is now made crystal clear. The storm and stress of the opening movement finally resolves to a restive *ppp* conclusion.

II. *Andante con moto*—The second movement is in theme and variations form. The noble principal theme, marked *piano e dolce*, appears at the outset. The ensuing variations become ever more active. A final reprise of the principal melody yields to a pair of arpeggio chords, juxtaposing *pianissimo* and *fortissimo* dynamics. The finale ensues without pause.

III. *Allegro ma non troppo*; *Presto*—Bold fanfares herald the finale's principal theme—bracing *moto perpetuo* sixteenth notes, punctuated by opposing hand interjections. As in the first movement, Beethoven omits the traditional sonata form repetition of the exposition. But in the finale, he also adds a repeat of the development and recapitulation. The concluding *Presto* is a breathtaking technical and dramatic tour-de-force.