

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER WITH DANIEL HOPE

Sunday, March 31 at 5 pm
Trinity United Methodist Church

JOSEF SUK (1874–1935)**Quartet in A minor, Opus 1 (1891)**I. *Allegro appassionato*II. *Adagio*III. *Allegro con fuoco***JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)****Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Opus 60 (1855–56, 1874)**I. *Allegro non troppo*II. *Scherzo. Allegro*III. *Andante*IV. *Finale. Allegro comodo*

INTERMISSION


ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)**Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 87 (1889)**I. *Allegro con fuoco*II. *Lento*III. *Allegro moderato, grazioso*IV. *Finale. Allegro ma non troppo*

Daniel Hope, violin
Paul Neubauer, viola
David Finckel, cello
Wu Han, piano

Quartet in A minor, Opus 1 (1891)

Josef Suk was born in Křečovice, Bohemia, on January 4, 1874, and died in Benešov, near Prague, on May 29, 1935. Premiered on May 13, 1891, in Prague.

 Approximate performance time is 22 minutes.

 SMF performance history: SMF premiere

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 through which 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)! Inspired, he finished the work quickly and premiered it at the conservatory as his graduation thesis on May 13 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 Opus 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 the traditional formal and stylistic 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. 3 in C minor, Opus 60 (1855–56, 1874)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna, Austria, on April 3, 1897. Premiered on November 18, 1875, in Vienna by the composer and members of the Hellmesberger Quartet.

 Approximate performance time is 34 minutes.

 SMF performance history: 3/27/14, 3/25/08

In April 1853, the 20-year-old Johannes Brahms set out from his native Hamburg for a concert tour of Germany with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi. The following month in Hanover they met the violinist Joseph Joachim, who befriended Brahms and gave him several letters of introduction, including one to Robert and Clara Schumann in Düsseldorf. On the last day of September 1853, Brahms met the Schumanns for the first time. “Here is one of those who comes as if sent straight from God,” Clara recorded in her diary. The friendship was immediate and unstinting.


Brahms's euphoria over his new relationship with the Schumanns turned quickly to concern for their wellbeing when Robert, long troubled by severe nervous disorders, tried to drown himself in the River Rhine on February 27, 1854. Brahms rushed to Düsseldorf, and a week later helped Clara admit him to an asylum at Eendenich. Brahms visited Düsseldorf and Eendenich frequently and eagerly during the ensuing months, both to pay his respects to Robert, who was still able to converse and even write a little music during his lucid moments, and to offer his support to Clara. It was during that difficult period, when Clara proved herself both vulnerable and strong, that Brahms, despite the 14-year difference in their ages (he was 21 in 1854, Clara 35), fell in love with her. Clara, however, though she may have been equally drawn to Brahms, never allowed their relationship to be anything more than completely proper, either before her husband's death on July 29, 1856 or at any time thereafter. Since Brahms was prevented from demonstrating his emotions in the usual more prosaic ways, he sublimated his feelings into the most eloquent language at his command—music—and wrote several impassioned


compositions during the mid-1850s, notably the B Major Trio, Opus 8 and a quartet for piano and strings that he began in 1855. The Piano Quartet, his first attempt at that genre, was completed in its original form—in the key of C-sharp minor and in just three movements—by April 1856, but Brahms refused to have it published and hid the score away for two decades. In 1874, he thoroughly revised the quartet, transposing it into C minor, rewriting the finale, and adding a scherzo. (The original version is lost, probably burned by the composer.) Even at that late date, the quartet remained a potent reminder of his earlier fervent emotions.

The quartet's powerful first movement is begun by stark octaves for the piano, which are answered by the tear-drop phrase in the strings that serves as the main theme; the subsidiary subject is a brighter legato strain initiated by the piano. These motives (the main theme most prominently) are treated in the development, which builds to an episode of furious octave-leap unisons as the gateway to the recapitulation. The ferocious *Scherzo* has no true formal trio to serve as a foil to the impetuosity of the music, only a lyrical string passage that is hurried along by an incessant triplet accompaniment. The tender *Andante*, according to Richard Specht, is Brahms's farewell to the vision of Clara as lover, “a painful acknowledgment of their impossible relationship.” The violin presents the *Finale*'s broad main subject to the accompaniment of motoric piano figurations; the strings provide a brief chordal phrase as second theme. Both ideas are treated in the development, after which the recapitulation arrives with a unison statement of the main theme by the strings. The second theme is heard in a brighter key, but the music returns to C minor for its final despondent gestures.

Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 87 (1889)

Antonín Dvořák was born in Nelahozeves, Bohemia, on September 8, 1841, and died in Prague on May 1, 1904. Premiered on November 23, 1890, in Prague by Hanuš Trneček (piano), Ferdinand Lachner (violin), Petr Mares (viola), and Hanuš Wihan (cello).

 Approximate performance time is 35 minutes.

 SMF performance history: 3/23/15, 3/25/10, 3/23/08

By the time Dvořák undertook his Piano Quartet in E-flat Major in 1889, when he was nearing the age of 50, he had risen from his humble and nearly impoverished beginnings to become one of the most respected musicians in his native Bohemia and throughout Europe and America. He was invited to become Professor of Composition at the Prague Conservatory at the beginning of the year, but refused the offer after much careful thought in order to continue devoting himself to creative work and touring as a conductor of his music. In February, his opera *The Jacobin* enjoyed a great success at its premiere in Prague, and the following month his orchestral concert in Dresden received splendid acclaim. In May, Emperor Franz Josef awarded him the distinguished Austrian Iron Cross, and a few months later he received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. Dvořák composed his E-flat Major Piano Quartet at his country home in Vysoká during the summer of 1889, the time between receiving these last two honors, in response to repeated requests from his publisher in Berlin, Fritz Simrock, who had been badgering him for at least four years to provide a successor to the Piano Quartet, Opus 23 of 1875. The new composition was begun on July 10th, and completed within just five weeks, evidence of the composer's testimony to his friend Alois Göbl that his head was so full of ideas during that time that he regretted he could not write them down fast enough; he completed his boundlessly lyrical Symphony No. 8 two months later.

The quartet's first movement follows a freely conceived sonata form. To launch the work, the unison strings present the bold main theme, which immediately elicits a capricious response from the piano. Following a grand restatement of the opening theme and a transition based on a jaunty rhythmic motive, the viola introduces the arching subsidiary subject. The development is announced by a recall of the theme that began the movement. A varied recapitulation of the earlier materials rounds out the movement. The *Lento* is unusual in its structure, consisting of a large musical chapter comprising five distinct thematic entities played twice. The cello presents the first melody, a lyrical phrase that the composer's biographer Otakar Šourek believed was “an expression of deep, undisturbed peace.” The delicate second motive, given in a leisurely, unruffled manner by the violin, is even more beatific in mood.

A sense of agitation is injected into the music by the animated third theme, entrusted to the piano, and rises to a peak of intensity with the stormy fourth strain, which is argued by the entire ensemble. Calm is restored by the piano's closing melody. This thematic succession is repeated with only minor changes before the movement is brought to a quiet and touching end. The third movement, the quartet's scherzo, contrasts waltz-like outer sections with a central trio reminiscent of a fiery Middle Eastern dance. The *Finale*, like the opening *Allegro*, follows a fully realized sonata form in which an energetic main theme, which stubbornly maintains its unsettled minor tonality for much of the movement, is contrasted with a lyrically inspired second subject, first allotted to the cello. A rousing coda of almost symphonic breadth closes this handsome work of Dvořák's full maturity.

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