Piano Sonata No. 12 in F Major, K. 332 (1783)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna, Austria, on December 5, 1791. (1756–1791)

I. Allegro
II. Adagio
III. Allegro assai

The composer's take on the piano sonatas of such Classical-era composers as Mozart, Haydn, and Clementi. The Ravel Sonatine has long been a favorite of concert pianists and their audiences. He encouraged Ravel to enter the contest. Ravel complied, but the contest was ultimately canceled, due to the publication’s impending bankruptcy.

Two years later, Ravel added the second and third movements to create a three-movement Sonatine. Ravel dedicated the work to his friends Ida and Cipa Godebski. A few years later, Ravel dedicated his Ma mère l’oye (Mother Goose) (1908), originally for piano duet, to the Godebskis’ children, Mimi and Jean. The first performance of the Ravel Sonatine took place in Lyon, France, on March 10, 1906, performed by Madame Paule de Lestang. The Paris premiere took place a few weeks later. Ravel frequently played the first two movements of the Sonatine in concert, and made a reproducing piano roll of that same music. However, Ravel did not perform the virtuoso finale in public.

Ravel frequently turned to artistic expression of the past, be it musical, visual, or written, as the inspiration for his own compositions. The Sonatine is the early 20th-century French composer’s take on the piano sonatas of such Classical-era composers as Mozart, Haydn, and Clementi. The Ravel Sonatine has long been a favorite of concert pianists and their audiences.

I. Allegro—The first movement, in ¾ time, opens with a genial, flowing melody, juxtaposed with a sprightly response. A vigorous minor-key passage leads to the delicate second principal theme. Another minor-key episode serves as a bridge to the third, chorale-like theme, followed by the exposition’s vigorous close. A brief development section precedes the recapitulation of the principal themes, and the opening movement’s emphatic final bars.

II. Adagio—The Sonata’s slow-tempo movement, in B-flat Major, begins with the yearning central melody, sung over legato accompaniment in the left hand. A hushed lyricism pervades throughout the Adagio, right to the delicate final bars.

III. Allegro assai—A breathless cascade launches the finale, in 6/8 time. Typical of Mozart, this sonata-form movement boasts an abundance of thematic material, as well as irrepressible energy. The expected development and recapitulation of the principal themes lead to a rather unexpected dénouement, with the music gradually fading to a pianissimo close.

Sonatine (1903–5)

Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France, on March 7, 1875, and died in Paris, France, on December 28, 1937. (1903–1937)

The musical setting of the first movement, in 3/4 time, opens with a genial, flowing melody, juxtaposed with a sprightly response. A vigorous minor-key passage leads to the delicate second principal theme. Another minor-key episode serves as a bridge to the third, chorale-like theme, followed by the exposition’s vigorous close. A brief development section precedes the recapitulation of the principal themes, and the opening movement’s emphatic final bars.

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The eight movements of Albéniz's first Suite española were published collectively as the Spanish composer's Opus 47. Albéniz composed a second Suite, Opus 97 (comprising two movements), in the late 1880s. In the original solo piano versions of the Suites, Albéniz conjures a remarkably wide range of colors and textures. Perhaps it is not surprising that Albéniz's magic inspired others to adapt these works for performance by various solo instruments and ensembles. The captivating folk rhythms and melodies of Albéniz's two Spanish Suites have long earned favor with a broad spectrum of audiences.

The titles of the eight movements of the First Suite española designate both a musical region and type of music. This concert features three excerpts from the Suite.

III. Sevilla (Sevillanas); Allegro moderato—The sevillanas is a vibrant gypsy flamenco dance in triple meter. Two presentations of the sevillanas frame a central episode (Meno mosso) that has an improvisational character.

IV. Asturias (Leyenda); Allegro ma non troppo—The brilliant Asturias, subtitled Leyenda (Legend), evokes the irrepressible spirit of the flamenco. An episode that Albéniz directs be played in a “singing manner; broadly, but sweetly” (cantando largamente ma dolce) offers contrast.

VII. Castilla (Seguidillas); Allegro molto—Castilla spotlights the seguidilla, a vibrant Spanish dance in 3/4 time, here with an insistent, strumming accompaniment.

Quejas, o La maja y el ruiseñor from Goyescas (1909–11)

Enrique Granados was born in Lleida, Spain, on July 27, 1867, and died in the English Channel on March 24, 1916. 

Approx. performance time: 6 mins.
SMF performance history: SMF premiere

1896 marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great Spanish painter Francisco Goya (1746-1828). That year, Spanish pianist and composer Enrique Granados wrote to a friend:

I have fallen in love with Goya, with his palette. With him, with the Duchess of Alba; his mistresses, his models, his quarrels. That rose-white of the cheeks contrasting with the light and dark velvet trimmings; those supple waists, hands of mother-of-pearl, and jasmine resting on black marble—they intrigue me. I would like to combine the sentimental, the amorous, the passionate, the dramatic, and the tragic, as Goya did.

The Granados tribute to Goya and his era materialized in a series of works for solo piano collectively titled Goyescas, and subtitled Los majos enamorados (The Majos in Love). Between 1909-11, Granados composed six pieces, divided into two parts. Part I comprises four pieces, with a pair of works in Part II. Granados premiered Part I at the Barcelona Palau de la Música Catalana on March 11, 1911. Granados gave the first performance of Part II in Paris, at the Salle Pleyel, on April 2, 1914.

In 1913, Granados created the opera Goyescas, featuring music from the solo piano works. Granados intended for the premiere of his opera to take place in Paris, but the onset of World War I made that impossible. Instead, the premiere took place at New York’s Metropolitan Opera on January 28, 1916, the first opera ever performed in Spanish by that company. Granados attended the premiere. During the journey home, Granados and his wife were killed after their boat was torpedoed by a German submarine. The eminent British music critic Ernest Newman wrote: “The death of Granados was the greatest loss the artistic world of Europe has sustained by reason of the War.”

Quejas, o La maja y el ruiseñor (Laments, or the Maja and the Nightingale) juxtaposes a young woman's plaintive song (Andante menancólico) with the bird's lovely response.

L’isle joyeuse (1904)

Claude Debussy was born in St. Germain-en-Laye, France, on August 22, 1862, and died in Paris, France, on March 25, 1918.

Approx. performance time: 7 mins.
SMF performance history: 27/3/17

Claude Debussy compared his L’isle joyeuse (The Joyous Island) to Jean-Antoine Watteau’s 1717 painting, L’Embarquement pour Cythère (The Embarkation for Cythera). When Debussy composed the work in 1904, he was residing on his own joyous island, the Isle of Jersey, with his beloved Emma Bardac. Debussy noted that the work “joins together force with grace,” making it “difficult to play.” The Joyous Island is one of Debussy’s most exuberant and brilliant works for solo piano.