Tara Helen O'Connor, flute

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TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)
Flute Sonata in B minor, BWV 1030 (ca. 1736–7)

I. Allegro
II. Adagio
III. Rondeau

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Flute Sonata in B minor, BWV 1030 (ca. 1736–7)

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, on March 21, 1685, and died in Leipzig, Germany, on July 28, 1750.

The Sonata in B minor is considered by many to be the crowning achievement of Bach's compositions for solo flute. The work survives in a manuscript in the composer's own hand, circa 1736. An earlier version of the harpsichord part exists in the key of G minor. However, it is uncertain as to exactly when Bach composed that G minor version, and whether it was, in fact, part of a sonata for flute, or perhaps, written for some other instrument.

The 1736 date coincides with a period of increased composing activity by Bach in Dresden. That fact, coupled with the extreme technical demands of the work, suggest that Bach composed the B minor Sonata for the singular virtuoso talents of Pierre-Gabriel Buffardin (1693-1768). Buffardin, principal flautist in the Court in Dresden, was considered the premiere transverse flute virtuoso of his day. Bach probably first met Buffardin in 1717 during the composer's visit to Dresden. We can assume Bach, like everyone who heard Buffardin, was greatly impressed by the flutist's stunning dexterity and almost superhuman breath control. Bach may well have composed several works for Buffardin, including the Partita in A minor for Solo Flute, BWV 1013 (ca. 1722-3).

I. Andante—The cornerstone of the Sonata is the magnificent, extended Andante, with remarkably expressive flute writing comparable in breadth and eloquence to the vocal music in Bach's great St. John and St. Matthew Passions. The Andante is also notable for the intricate harpsichord accompaniment, often echoing the flute's outpouring of melody.

II. Largo e dolce—The central Largo e dolce is in binary form with a repeat of each section. This slow-tempo movement continues in the same lyrical vein as its predecessor, but without, perhaps, the Andante's searing intensity.

III. Presto—The concluding movement, a supreme challenge for both the flute and harpsichord, divides into two principal sections. The first, an animated Presto, is marked by intricate contrapuntal writing for the performers. A lively dance (Allegro), set in two repeated sections, concludes the B minor Sonata.
Black Anemones, for Flute and Piano (1980)

Joseph Schwantner was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 22, 1943.

In 1980, American composer Joseph Schwantner set verse by Agueda Pizzaro (b. 1941) to music. Schwantner’s Two Poems of Agueda Pizzaro premiered at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall on November 25, 1980, with soprano Lucy Shelton, and pianist Margo Garrett. Schwantner created a version of the second poem, Black Anemones, in which the flute performs the soprano’s lyrical, wide-ranging music.

The surrealist poem is a narrative by a child whose mother is watching her sleep. The title of the poem, in Barbara Stoller Miller’s English translation, comes from the lines:

You call me blind, you touch my eyes with Black Anemones.

Fantasie, Opus 79 (1898)

Gabriel Fauré was born in Pamiers, Ariège, France on May 12, 1845, and died in Paris, France, on November 4, 1924.

Approx. performance time: 4 mins.

SMF performance history: SMF premiere

In 1893, the legendary flutist Paul Taffanel (1844-1908) was appointed professor at the Paris Conservatoire. In 1898, Taffanel commissioned his colleague, Gabriel Fauré, to write a piece for the Conservatoire’s annual flute competition. Taffanel requested Fauré to compose whatever work he chose. Taffanel only required that the work be short (under six minutes), and focus upon elements he prized in flute performance. Fauré composed his Fantasie for flute and piano in the summer of 1898. While the Fantasie’s original manuscript was lost, it is clear from correspondence that Taffanel made, with Fauré’s approval, some modifications to the work. Although originally created as a competition piece, the Fauré Fantasie has long been a favorite of concert flutists and their appreciative audiences.

The Fantasie comprises two episodes. In the first (Andantino), the flute sings a flowing, dolce melody, in 6/8 meter. A buoyant Allegro in 2/4 showcases wide-ranging flights by the flute, culminating in a final ascent.

Flute Quartet No. 1 in D Major, K. 285 (1777)

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

Approx. performance time: 14 mins.

SMF performance history: SMF premiere

In September of 1777, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart left his home in Salzburg to begin an 18-month journey throughout Europe. Mozart, who felt his talents were not appreciated in his native city, hoped to find steady employment elsewhere. Mozart’s journey took him to Munich, Augsburg, Mannheim, and finally, to Paris.

While in Mannheim, Mozart made the acquaintance of a Dutch visitor to the German city, a surgeon and amateur flutist by the name of Ferdinand Dejean (1731-1797). Dejean commented on his slow progress in completing Dejean’s commission: “you know that I become quite powerless whenever I am obliged to write for an instrument which I cannot bear.”

In light of Mozart’s opinions expressed above, this quote from a letter he wrote to Leopold in December of the same year bears repeating: “Ah, if only we had clarinets too! You cannot imagine the glorious effect of a symphony with flutes, oboes and clarinets.”

Pursuant to Dejean’s commission, Mozart composed two Flute Concertos—in G Major, K. 313, and in D Major, K. 314 (the latter, an adaptation of the composer’s Oboe Concerto in C Major). He also composed two Flute Quartets, K. 285 in D, and K. 285a in G. Mozart completed the D Major Quartet on Christmas Day, 1777. Despite Mozart’s protestations about composing for flute, the D Major Quartet is a lovely, and at times, eloquent, work.

In addition to the flute, the Quartet is scored for violin, viola, and cello.

I. Allegro—The flute immediately presents the Allegro’s sprightly principal theme. The subsidiary themes that follow maintain the cheerful mood of the opening measures. For the most part, the development section resides in the minor key. The flute launches a forte version of the initial theme, the start of the recapitulation, leading to the energetic final bars.

II. Adagio—The slow-tempo second movement, in B minor, is in the character of a serenade. The flute, over pizzicato accompaniment, sings the yearning melody. The finale ensues after a single measure of rest.

III. Rondeau—The concluding movement, returning the home key of D Major, is a Rondeau (Mozart uses the French term Rondeau), a movement based upon a recurring melody. The flute introduces that vivacious melody at the outset, and it proceeds to alternate with various episodes. A final iteration of the melody brings the Quartet to a spirited conclusion.