



CONCERT PROGRAM VIII:

# The Solo Voice

## AUGUST 9 AND 10

Friday, August 9, 8:00 p.m., Stent Family Hall, Menlo School

Saturday, August 10, 6:00 p.m., The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The season comes to a riveting close as we celebrate the exuberance of Bach's music for solo instruments and the virtuosity of the soloist. With its origins as an orchestral concerto, Bach's Concerto for Violin and Oboe revels in the novelty of a double concerto, a masterly example of a virtuosic pairing of strings and wind instruments. Schubert's Rondo in A Major equally captures the essence of the virtuosic violin with its rambunctious finale. Mozart wrote his Twelfth Piano Concerto shortly after the death of Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel, a close friend and mentor. The program concludes with the Double Concerto for Violin, Piano, and Strings by Felix Mendelssohn, one of the most devoted heirs of Bach's legacy, responsible for launching the modern Bach revival.

### FÊTE THE FESTIVAL:

8:30 p.m., following the concert on August 10,

Palo Alto Art Center

Tickets are \$65. Please see the patron services team for availability.

### SPECIAL THANKS

Music@Menlo dedicates these performances to the following individuals and organizations with gratitude for their generous support:

August 9: The Jeffrey Dean and Heidi Hopper Family

August 10: The Martin Family Foundation

Samuel H. Gottscho (1875–1971). *Fireworks at the World's Fair, 1939*. Gelatin silver print. The Museum of the City of New York/Art Resource, NY

### JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Concerto for Violin and Oboe in c minor, BWV 1060 (ca. 1736)

*Allegro*

*Adagio*

*Allegro*

Kristin Lee, *solo violin*; James Austin Smith, *oboe*; Hyeyeon Park, *harpsichord*; Arnaud Sussmann, Benjamin Beilman, *violins*; Richard O'Neill, *viola*; Dmitri Atapine, *cello*; Scott Pingel, *bass*

### FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Rondo in A Major for Violin and String Quartet, D. 438 (1816)

Sean Lee, *solo violin*; Jorja Fleezanis, Benjamin Beilman, *violins*; Richard O'Neill, *viola*; David Finckel, *cello*

### WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

Piano Concerto no. 12 in A Major, K. 414 (1782)

*Allegro*

*Andante (after J. C. Bach)*

*Rondeau: Allegretto*

Gilbert Kalish, *piano*; Arnaud Sussmann, Jorja Fleezanis, *violins*; Richard O'Neill, *viola*; David Finckel, *cello*; Scott Pingel, *bass*

### INTERMISSION

### FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)

Double Concerto in d minor for Violin, Piano, and Strings (1823)

*Allegro*

*Adagio*

*Allegro molto*

Wu Han, *piano*; Benjamin Beilman, *solo violin*; Kristin Lee, Sunmi Chang, *violins*; Richard O'Neill, *viola*; Dmitri Atapine, *cello*; Scott Pingel, *bass*



At the arrival of the rondo proper, the solo violin presents the subject—an effervescent tune brimming with early nineteenth-century Viennese gaiety.



But Schubert is not content with the standard refrain-episode-refrain rondo format. Introducing an element of Classical **sonata form**, he presents a second theme, in the dominant key of E major, equally cheerful to the first, with a more rustic character.



A dramatic sequence in c-sharp minor follows, driven by virtuosic pas-sagework in the solo violin. But as quickly as it emerged, this ephemeral moment of **Sturm und Drang** slides back into the rustic second theme. The soloist leads this extended refrain—which more closely resembles the **exposition** of a sonata-form movement—to a closing tutti passage in E major.

From here, Schubert traverses a series of different keys and characters, in recurring elements of the refrain as well as in contrasting episodes highlighting the soloist. The writing is wonderfully rich throughout, both in the elegance of the rondo's design and in Schubert's glorification of the solo instrument. These elements mark this early creation by one of Western music's foremost geniuses as one of the most purely pleasing contributions to the Romantic violin repertoire.

—Patrick Castillo

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg; died December 5, 1791, Vienna)

### Piano Concerto no. 12 in A Major, K. 414

**Composed:** 1782

**Published:** 1785

**Other works from this period:** Symphony no. 35 in D Major, K. 385, *Haffner* (1782); String Quartet in B-flat Major, K. 458, *The Hunt* (1784); Piano Concerto no. 21 in C Major, K. 467 (1785); Symphony no. 38 in D Major, K. 504, *Prague* (1786); *Così fan tutte*, K. 588 (1790)

**Approximate duration:** 25 minutes

For Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, one of the Classical period's most gifted piano virtuosos as well as its finest composer, the piano concerto served as an essential creative outlet. He produced twenty-seven piano concerti over his lifetime, completing his first four at age eleven and his final one within a year of his death. The piano concerto medium would remain indispensable for Mozart throughout his career, and he would in turn prove vital to the development of its literature. In the mid-1780s—particularly between 1784 and 1786—Mozart played the dual roles of artist and impresario in Vienna to great success. He frequently presented concerts unveiling his latest compositions: typically a symphony, a chamber work, perhaps a keyboard improvisation, and a piano concerto. Mozart composed twelve of his twenty-seven piano concerti for these concerts. Expressly designed to showcase himself as both a composer and a virtuoso, these works crystallized the piano concerto medium. Writing for *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Cliff Eisen and Stanley Sadie identify the twelve concerti written during this period as “unquestionably the most important works of their kind.”

Mozart composed his Piano Concerto no. 12 in A Major, K. 414, in 1782. It is the second of a trio of piano concerti that Mozart composed shortly after his move to Vienna. In a letter to his father, Mozart wrote of

these three: “These concerti are a happy medium between what is too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without being vapid. There are passages here and there from which the connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction; but these passages are written in such a way that the less learned cannot fail to be pleased, though without knowing why.” Mozart goes on to offer the following biting cultural assessment, which his music perhaps aimed to address: “The golden mean of truth in all things is no longer either known or appreciated. In order to win applause one must write stuff which is so inane that a coachman could sing it, or so unintelligible that it pleases precisely because no sensible man can understand it.”

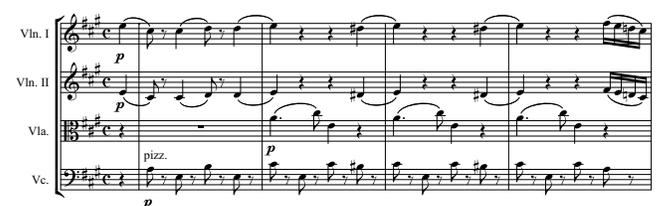
Though the A Major Concerto predates Mozart's most celebrated piano concerto period, compositionally, it nevertheless belongs in the same realm as the twelve concerti of 1784–1786. The work demonstrates all of the hallmarks of Mozart's mature compositional language in the genre: the piano writing is in equal measures logically expressive and brilliantly virtuosic; the dynamic between soloist and orchestra is pitch-perfect—and, moreover, has an intimacy suggestive of chamber music. Indeed, the concerto exists in an arrangement for piano and string quartet which Mozart prepared in the hopes of promoting the concerto for private home performances.

The first movement *Allegro* presents a wealth of thematic ideas, testifying to the depth of Mozart's melodic imagination. The movement contains no fewer than six distinct melodic ideas, the first theme marked by ascending **arpeggios**, followed by a descending dotted-rhythm figure, like a slinky coming down a flight of stairs.



Mozart then immediately extends the ascending-descending contour of this opening tune.

Next comes a gently crooning melody, above light **pizzicati** in the cello.



Again, Mozart extends the figure just introduced into a new idea, this one closing the orchestral exposition and ushering in the soloist's entrance.

With the pianist having entered the picture, the concerto proceeds essentially from the blueprint of melodic ideas laid out by the strings, but with the pianist elaborating on those ideas, adding soloistic flourishes, as if coloring in a rough pencil sketch.

In standard Classical sonata form, the opening exposition, where the movement's main themes are introduced, is followed by the **development** section, where said themes are worked over in different keys and transformed in different ways. In this movement, at the arrival of the development section, Mozart instead continues inventing new melodies, beginning with an elegant tune introduced by the piano and subsequently transformed into a more troubled idea in the darker key of f-sharp minor. The development focuses only on these new ideas presented by the piano and never actually touches on the themes of the exposition. Writing about this in his seminal book, *The Classical Style*, the pianist and scholar Charles Rosen comments,

“This is not lavishness: Mozart uses melodies at once so complex and so complete that they do not bear the weight of development.”

The *Andante* second movement is based on an **overture** by Johann Christian Bach, Johann Sebastian’s youngest son and an important childhood friend and mentor to Mozart. Johann Christian Bach had died on New Year’s Day of 1782, the year of this concerto. Mozart wrote that his passing marked “a sad day for the world of music.” His fondness for Johann Christian, and his grief over his death, can be felt in the *Andante*’s tender opening. Mozart casts the melody in the strings, to be played *sotto voce*.

The finale is a lighthearted rondo, a welcome reprieve following the heartrending slow movement. The alternating episodes complement the refrain’s cheerful demeanor, and Mozart moreover picks ups elements of the refrain throughout, lending the proceedings an organically flowing quality.

—Patrick Castillo

## FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(Born February 3, 1809, Hamburg; died November 4, 1847, Leipzig)

### Double Concerto in d minor for Violin, Piano, and Strings

**Composed:** 1823

**First performance:** July 3, 1823

**Other works from this period:** Piano Quartet no. 2 in f minor, op. 2 (1823); Symphony no. 1 in c minor, op. 11 (1824); Sextet in D Major, op. 110 (1824); Octet in E-flat Major, op. 20 (1825); *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*, op. 10 (1825)

**Approximate duration:** 36 minutes

In the decades following his death in 1750, Bach’s music fell, if not quite into obscurity, into some measure of neglect. But in 1824, the fifteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn received from his grandmother what would be a gift of great historic consequence: a copy of the score to Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*. Five years later, Mendelssohn’s obsession with Bach and his particular affinity with this work culminated in a celebrated performance of the passion at the Berlin Singakademie. The performance—led by the brilliant twenty-year-old conductor Felix Mendelssohn—revitalized interest in Bach’s music throughout Western Europe, thus crediting Mendelssohn as the author of the modern Bach revival.

Mendelssohn composed his Concerto in d minor for Violin, Piano, and Strings in 1823, as a fourteen-year-old prodigy. The well-to-do Mendelssohn family regularly staged Sunday morning musicales at their home throughout Felix’s youth as a vehicle for his (and his sister Fanny’s) blossoming gifts; the Double Concerto was composed for and premiered at one of these events. Though composed during Mendelssohn’s adolescence, the concerto exhibits the craftsmanship of a tremendously precocious composer. Not surprisingly, the prodigious young Mendelssohn caught the attention of Western Europe’s musical community through these musicales and came to be regarded by many as the second Mozart. Astonished at his rapid development, Mendelssohn’s teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter noted, “He is growing beneath my eyes.”

At the time of the Double Concerto’s composition—one year prior to his discovery of the *St. Matthew Passion*—Mendelssohn was very much under the spell of Bach, as much as he was absorbing the musical innovations of his own time, particularly the late works of Beethoven. The Double Concerto reflects this dichotomy between the Baroque influence on Mendelssohn’s music and the emerging Romantic energy that would come to define the nineteenth century. Moreover, in addition to the synthesis of Baroque and Romantic elements, another striking element of the work is Mendelssohn’s treatment of the two soloists: the violin, a brilliant, melodic

instrument, is generally entrusted with music of soaring lyricism, while the piano, Mendelssohn exploits for its massive sonority, combining powerful chordal textures with dazzling runs up and down the keyboard.

Also noteworthy about the concerto is its sheer youthful exuberance. One can hear in this work how much music the young, insatiably curious Mendelssohn had swirling around in his head—and it all comes out, unapologetically, in this no-holds-barred concerto.

The work begins with the strings issuing a contrapuntal theme, reminiscent of a Bach fugue but infused with the spirit of Romantic *Sturm und Drang*. As the theme unfolds, the contrapuntal texture grows increasingly intricate.

Mendelssohn introduces a long-breathed second theme, in F major—a markedly Romantic contrast to the compact first theme. The orchestral exposition ends with a return to the Bachian **counterpoint** of the opening measures, but the piano’s furious entrance rips the music from its Baroque reverie back into the era of Beethoven.

The soloists unite the Baroque and Romantic idioms, with the piano presenting the Bachian first theme in its left hand as a foundation for the overt Romantic gestures in the right hand and the violin. The rest of the ensemble follows suit.

The soloists soon take over the lyrical second theme; the strings answer with a fragment of the Bachian theme, which, in short order and seemingly out of nowhere, plunges the music into showy salon fare. One of this movement’s greatest delights lies in discovering how the young and, at times, cheeky Mendelssohn inventively wed together all of these elements: Baroque counterpoint with Romantic *Sturm und Drang*, profundity with showmanship, heroism with salon music.

Later in the movement, Mendelssohn introduces another dramatic turn: a declamatory **recitative** in the violin, theatrically set above piano tremolando. It’s easy to imagine this music, in another era, as the soundtrack to a love scene in a silent film. This dreamy music segues abruptly back to the frenetic energy that came before, from which Mendelssohn steers the first movement to its final measures.

Mendelssohn follows the fireworks of the concerto’s expansive first movement with a heartfelt *Adagio*. After the initial tutti statement of the theme, most of the movement is given over to an intimate dialog between the two soloists. The full ensemble comes together again only for the movement’s magical conclusion. The warm texture of the strings, playing *sotto voce*, surrounds the soloists with an ethereal glow.

The final movement begins with an impassioned statement uttered first by the piano, which is then joined by the solo violin. The full ensemble responds with emphatic terseness. The fiery energy of this music is countered by the brighter, elegant second theme. Throughout the proceedings, whether tempestuous or calm, Mendelssohn spotlights the soloists with passages of pyrotechnic virtuosity.

—Patrick Castillo