

Program Notes: Elegant Emotion

Notes on the program by Patrick Castillo

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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

String Quintet no. 5 in D Major, K. 593

Composed: December 1790, Vienna

Published: 1793

Dedication: *Un Amatore Ongarese (A Hungarian Amateur)*

Other works from this period: Symphony in C Major, K. 551, *Jupiter* (1788); *Così fan tutte*, K. 588 (opera) (1790); String Quartet in B-flat Major, K. 589, and in F Major, K. 590 (1790); Piano Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 595 (1791); String Quintet in E-flat Major, K. 614 (1791); *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)*, K. 620 (opera) (1791); Clarinet Concerto in A Major, K. 622 (1791)

Approximate duration: 28 minutes

The Quintet in D Major, K. 593, is the fifth of Mozart's six viola quintets, a chamber music genre that he largely pioneered. Haydn, the father of the string quartet, never composed such a quintet. (Some might argue for Luigi Boccherini, who composed numerous such works and, chronologically, beat Mozart to the punch; that Mozart's quintets outclass Boccherini's, however, is hardly debatable.) The genre offers a particularly suitable medium for Mozart's compositional language: his music is remarkable, among its myriad other wonders, for its melodic beauty and textural clarity. The addition of a second viola to the standard string quartet broadens the range of melodic, timbral, and textural possibilities. (Mozart, *nota bene*, was himself an avid violist, giving him keen insight into the family of instruments and a sensitive ear for inner voices; the string writing in these works is nonpareil.)

Mozart composed the D Major Quintet and the Quintet in E-flat Major, K. 614, within a year of his death. They were published posthumously, with the vague announcement upon publication that they were composed "at the earnest solicitation of a musical friend." The score was inscribed to "un Amatore Ongarese"—a Hungarian amateur. The composer's widow surmised that this was the skilled amateur violinist Johann Tost, who had also commissioned a number of Haydn's quartets. Aside from these vague details, little is known surrounding the genesis of these final two quintets. No matter—they are impeccably crafted works whose music can speak for itself.

The *Larghetto* introduction to the quintet's first movement presents a series of questioning statements from the cello, answered by the violins and violas. The *Allegro* proper soon begins with a jaunty first theme, marked by chuckling dotted rhythms and **syncopations**. Before this first theme has fully run its course, Mozart weaves an intricate, conversational texture, with each part actively asserting its voice. In fact, a contrasting second theme never truly appears; rather, Mozart eagerly develops the first theme group's multiple gestures in this manner, all at once, to round out the exposition. It is as though we are hearing the musings of a restless imagination unfold in real time. A lucid development section and standard recapitulation follow, but before the movement's conclusion, Mozart reprises the *Larghetto* introduction. This introspective music leads, just as before, to the jaunty *Allegro*, which stops abruptly after eight measures.

The quintet's second movement is a lush, lovely *Adagio*, rich with melodic allure. It is also a movement of exquisite textural subtlety, as in such moments as a call-and-response passage with violins and first viola, answered by violas and cello. Later, first violin and cello frame the ensemble with florid lines, decorated by ornate trills and turns and buoyed by repeated notes in the middle strings. This music shares that ineffable quality with the slow movements of Mozart's violin concerti that biographer Maynard Solomon has described as "inhabit[ing] a world of plenitude, [in which] beauty is everywhere for the taking...[T]he beauties succeed each

other with a breathtaking rapidity, their outpouring of episodic interpolations suggesting that we need not linger over any single moment of beauty, for beauty is abundant, it is to be found 'here, too,' and 'there, as well.'"

A graceful **minuet** follows, ending with a curious **canon**: lower strings follow violins, just one quarter note behind. The trio section serves less to contrast than to reinforce the minuet's sunny demeanor. Following this graceful dance, the quintet concludes with a spirited **rondo** finale.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

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

String Quartet in D Major, op. 44, no. 1

Composed: completed July 24, 1838

Published: 1839 (parts); 1840 (full score)

First performance: February 16, 1839, Leipzig

Other works from this period: Piano Concerto no. 2 in d minor, op. 40 (1837); *Serenade and Allegro giocoso* for Piano and Orchestra, op. 43 (1838); Sonata no. 1 in B-flat Major for Cello and Piano, op. 45 (1838); Piano Trio no. 1 in d minor, op. 49 (1839); *Lieder ohne Worte (Songs without Words)*, Book IV, op. 53 (1835–1841)

Approximate duration: 30 minutes

The three quartets of Opus 44, composed between 1837 and 1838, mark a happy time in Mendelssohn's life and career. The composer's numerous successes had installed him, not yet thirty years old, as the most renowned musician in Europe. In 1835, he was appointed Music Director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, which would grow into one of Europe's premier ensembles under his leadership. His contributions as a conductor during this time also included the first public performance of Schubert's *Great C Major Symphony*. And Mendelssohn had recently married.

The joy that filled these years is nowhere more clearly translated than in the exuberance and brilliant virtuosity of the Opus 44 quartets. The Quartet in D Major was the last of the set to be composed, but, reflecting the composer's satisfaction with the work, it was published as Opus 44 Number 1. (Mendelssohn wrote to the violinist Ferdinand David, "I have just finished my Third Quartet, in D major, and like it very much. I hope it may please you, as well. I rather think it will, since it is more spirited and seems to me likely to be more grateful to the players than the others.")

A euphoric theme begins the quartet, with excited *tremolandi* in the second violin and viola cheering on the first violin's soaring melody. Warm, legato lines in all four voices follow, less exuberant but equally blissful. Recalling Beethoven's penchant for restless thematic development, or perhaps even foreshadowing Brahms's technique of developing variation, Mendelssohn returns to and extends the euphoric opening idea before proceeding to a new theme. In due course, the second theme appears: an understated idea, voiced pianissimo and in rhythmic unison. Yet the effervescent character of what came before seems somehow to still be contained in this contrasting idea, as though Mendelssohn were bringing to light different facets of the same gem. And indeed, this hushed musical idea leads naturally back to the opening melody—*tremolandi* and all—presented softly at first before erupting, fortissimo, to close the exposition. The ensuing development section dwells for some time on the legato gestures that previously appeared, now overlapping one another like rolling waves and exploring various harmonic territory. Mendelssohn follows this by fragmenting the opening theme and reassembling its shards into a brilliant mosaic.

Mendelssohn's penchant for Classical tradition is in evidence in the quartet's second movement: a minuet, per the models of Haydn's and

*Bolted terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 90.

Mozart's quartets, rather than the more modern scherzi of Beethoven's. As if to underscore the undisturbed serenity of the minuet's gently flowing melody, the music remains contentedly in D major rather than setting off for a new key. The movement's middle section modulates to gloomy b minor; the graceful quarter-note current quickens to eighth notes in the first violin above sustained chords in the lower strings. But, as in the first movement, contrasting ideas here seem to represent two sides of the same musical thought. Even as the mood turns introspective, the music remains serene rather than suggesting real turmoil.

The quartet lacks a true slow movement. Instead, Mendelssohn provides a beguiling *Andante espressivo ma con moto*. This elegant movement further demonstrates Mendelssohn's mastery of texture. An unhurried melody in the first violin is urged along by staccato sixteenth notes in the second and paced by pizzicati in the viola and cello. The texture expands, but the debonair character of the *Andante's* opening measures permeates the entire movement.

The quartet concludes with an ebullient *Presto* finale. The movement begins with a triumphant, fist-in-the-air series of chords issued by the full ensemble followed by an animated ascending eighth-note triplet run. A cheerful tune follows in the first violin; the second violin and viola accompany with quick repeated notes, recalling the sonic profile of the quartet's opening measures. Variants of these two musical ideas recur throughout the rest of the finale, their constant development dynamically propelling the finale to the work's final cadence. The bright optimism and *joie de vivre* that marked the time of the quartet's creation abound throughout, and the piece ends on a spirited note.

MIKHAIL GLINKA

(Born May 20/June 1, 1804, Novospasskoye, near Yelnya, Smolensk district, Russia; died February 15, 1857, Berlin)

Variations on a Theme of Mozart in E-flat Major for Solo Piano

Composed: 1822

Published: by 1856

Other works from this period: Sextet in E-flat Major for Piano, String Quartet, and Double Bass, *Grand* (ca. 1823); Symphony in B-flat Major, (incomplete) (1824); *Rokeby* (for stage) (1824); *Ne iskushay menya bez nuzhdi* (*Do Not Tempt Me Needlessly*) for Voice and Piano (1825)

Approximate duration: 10 minutes

Russian classical music's point of origin is more straightforwardly identifiable than that of perhaps any other region. While schools of composers, aesthetic movements, and other broad phenomena have coalesced to define German, Italian, French, and other musical traditions, Russian classical music begins with the early nineteenth-century composer Mikhail Glinka.

Rooted from a young age in Russian peasant, liturgical, and other musical traditions, Glinka was captivated by music by the time of his early adolescence. Hearing the Finnish-born composer Bernhard Crusell's Clarinet Quartet when he was ten or eleven years old pointed Glinka unequivocally towards his vocation. He would go on to encounter the music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Cherubini, and others from Western Europe throughout his teenage years.

In 1828, Glinka set off for a three-year stay in Italy, where he met Donizetti and Bellini and was subsequently drawn to Italian opera. (He also met Mendelssohn on these travels; chemistry between the two was apparently poor.) Glinka mastered the Italian operatic idiom, but by 1833, he found himself dissatisfied with composing in a style that felt alien. He endeavored from this point forward to compose "in a Russian manner" and thereby find his voice.

With a fundamental grasp of the lingua franca of Western European composers, Glinka, largely self-taught, cultivated a musical language that integrated a Russian character with classical and operatic styles. "As Pushkin assimilated elements from West European literatures and naturalized them

in Russia by means of his choice of subject matter," writes Russian music scholar Stuart Campbell, "so Glinka drew on the musical mainstreams of his day and acclimatized them in Russia." The idiom Glinka developed would be a guiding light to virtually all subsequent nineteenth-century Russian composers, encompassing the nationalist set known as "the Five" (Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov), Tchaikovsky, and others, and his greatest works are considered foundational to the Russian repertoire. Tchaikovsky credited Glinka's seven-minute orchestral fantasy *Kamarinskaya* with containing the entire Russian symphonic school, "just as the whole oak is in the acorn."

Glinka's *Variations on a Theme of Mozart* for Solo Piano (also playable on harp) reflects the composer's embrace of Viennese Classicism alongside his quest to develop a distinctly Russian style. The theme comes from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Glinka's original manuscript has been lost, but the work was written down from memory by the composer's sister, Lyudmila Shestakova, who played the variations herself, and henceforth published.

The short work comprises three variations on Mozart's theme and a coda. The keyboard texture and florid right-hand melodic writing of this and others of Glinka's sets of variations (on themes by Cherubini, Bellini, Donizetti, et al., as well as on Russian folk songs) might for some listeners resemble Chopin. These qualities reflect the influence of the Irish pianist and composer John Field, whose **nocturnes**—a form he invented—were the models for Chopin's. Field was an unlikely influential figure in Russian music in the first half of the nineteenth century: he first traveled to St. Petersburg in 1802 and, seduced by the city's artistic and cultural vibrancy, decided to stay. He remained in Russia for more than two decades, concertizing, teaching, and contributing to the development of a Russian school of pianism. Glinka encountered Field directly, taking three piano lessons from the Irish maestro while a teenager.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

(Born April 25/May 7, 1840, Kamsko-Votkinsk, Vyatka province; died October 25/November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg)

String Quartet no. 1 in D Major, op. 11

Composed: February 1871

Published: 1872

Dedication: Sergei Alexandrovich Rachinsky

First performance: March 28, 1871, by members of the Russian Musical Society

Other works from this period: *The Snow Maiden*, op. 12 (incidental music) (1873); String Quartet no. 2 in F Major, op. 22 (1874); *Swan Lake*, op. 20 (ballet) (1875–1876)

Approximate duration: 25 minutes

In 1865, Tchaikovsky graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatory, concluding his studies with Anton Rubinstein, the pianist, composer, and conductor who had founded the conservatory three years prior. Anton's brother Nikolay was at this time preparing to open an equivalent institution in Moscow and recruited Tchaikovsky to teach theory.

Tchaikovsky's first decade in Moscow was a formative period in his life and career. He became a prominent figure among Moscow's cultural elite, rubbing shoulders with the literati and other sophisticates. He encountered Balakirev and his circle of nationalist-minded composers, who took a contrasting view of composition to the Rubinsteins' academic approach. And he tackled his work with gusto (that is, his creative work; Tchaikovsky openly resented his professional duties for getting in the way of composition).

These years produced Tchaikovsky's first three symphonies, his First Piano Concerto, and other important orchestral works (*Fatum*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, and others); *The Snow Maiden*, *Swan Lake*, and other stage works; songs and music for solo piano; and, in the arena of chamber music, his three string quartets.

Despite his ascendancy to social celebrity, Tchaikovsky's early years in Moscow were also marked by constant financial duress. In a pragmatic manner redolent of Mozart's and Beethoven's *Akademien*, Tchaikovsky independently presented a program in March 1871 to introduce new work and to raise personal funds. The program concentrated on solo and chamber music in order to avoid the costs of hiring an orchestra. With no major chamber work yet to his credit (a Quartet in B-flat Major was previously started and then abandoned after one movement), Tchaikovsky specially composed his String Quartet no. 1 in D Major. The work was performed by members of the Russian Musical Society and published the following year as Tchaikovsky's Opus 11.

With few significant Russian precedents in the string quartet genre, Tchaikovsky's Opus 11 betrays Western Classical models. Its lyricism evokes Schubert, echoes of whose *Death and the Maiden* Quartet might be heard in the second and third movements. The D Major Quartet's finale suggests Tchaikovsky's study of Beethoven's *Razumovsky* Quartets.

The warmly undulating chords that begin the D Major Quartet have given the work the occasional nickname *Accordion*. Tchaikovsky sets this opening chorale in a syncopated 9/8, with the beat elusive to the ear. But the gentle touch of the harmony and ensemble texture (*piano, dolce*) alleviates any feeling of unsettledness. A transition fueled by legato sixteenth-note runs leads to the second theme: not too distant in character from the first but of harder stock. The rhythmic ambiguity is dispensed with, the triple-meter gait is now confidently assured, and the quartet voices the tune *mezzo forte, largamente e cantabile*. In the paradigm of Robert Schumann, this music provides the Florestan (passionate and extroverted) to the first theme's Eusebius (more introverted). The transitional sixteenth notes continue to swirl about the melody, *piano e leggiero*.

The subsequent development section combines elements of the exposition but with the legato sixteenth-note motif transformed into a more incisive staccato gesture. It is a dramatic episode, reflecting Tchaikovsky's keen narrative instinct, as also demonstrated in his programmatic orchestral music (*Romeo and Juliet*, etc.) and stage works during this time. Those sixteenth-note flourishes color the return of the opening "accordion" theme, signaling that the recapitulation is not merely a reprise of earlier material but the arrival stage of the journey. The movement comes to a rhapsodic finish.

The quartet is most famous for its *Andante cantabile* second movement, in B-flat major. Based on a folk song, "Sidel Vanya," the music bespeaks a hushed nostalgia. The ensemble timbre underlines the melody's tenderness, as all four instruments play *con sordino* (with muted strings). A folk-like simplicity also marks the movement's secondary subject, in D-flat major, but this is music of a different character: at first, it is vaguely coquettish—then, as the music turns *pochissimo agitato*, subtle harmonic shading alters that coquetry into world-weariness. When the opening subject returns, what might have previously been heard as a tender lullaby intensifies to rapturous bliss before subsiding to *pianissimo, dolcissimo*. The secondary subject returns but now in the home key of B-flat major, and the movement ends with a whispered amen.

The scherzo answers the delicacy of the second movement with a bounding peasant dance. The trio section, rather than offsetting the scherzo's vigor with more serene music, barrels forward with even greater relish, powered by motoric oscillations in the cello. The third movement's folk character extends into the jubilant finale.

Music@Menlo

CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL AND INSTITUTE



MAKE A DIFFERENCE: VOLUNTEER!

Music@Menlo always needs a team of friendly, enthusiastic, and hardworking volunteers to help the festival run smoothly.

Music@Menlo volunteers ("Friends of the Festival") contribute their time in a variety of ways, including ushering at concerts, providing festival hospitality at the Welcome Center, helping with mailings, and hosting artists in their homes.

If you are interested in contributing your time and energy, please contact us at 650-330-2030 or info@musicatmenlo.org.