

Program Notes: Romance

Notes on the program by Patrick Castillo

ROBERT SCHUMANN

(Born June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Saxony; died July 29, 1856, Eendenich, near Bonn)

Piano Trio no. 2 in F Major, op. 80

Composed: 1847

Published: 1849

Other works from this period: Piano Trio no. 1 in d minor, op. 63 (1847); *Drei Romanzen und Balladen* for Voice and Piano, op. 64 (1847); *Bilder aus Osten*: Six Impromptus for Piano, Four Hands, op. 66 (1848)

Approximate duration: 30 minutes

Robert Schumann, by any measure a quintessentially Romantic figure, was an artist with a lot to say. The biography of the pianist, composer, music critic, and erstwhile poet reads like a Goethe tale: his courtship and marriage to Clara Wieck made for one of music history's most intense love affairs; he meanwhile dealt with crippling mental illness, which prompted a suicide attempt and subsequent hospitalization in the Bonn asylum where he died at forty-six. And of course, there are the hundreds of compositions (as well as diaries and other writings) produced along the way. Schumann felt life's joys and trials with frightening intensity. His yen to express those feelings bore one of the most piercingly emotive bodies of work in the Western canon.

The Piano Trio no. 2 in F Major, op. 80, reflects the need for self-expression central to Schumann's artistic identity. The work consists of one deeply felt musical idea after another, flowing from the composer's pen with irrepressible energy. It is sprawling in form rather than Classically tidy, as if struggling to contain its own narrative. In this, the trio captures Romanticism's penchant for extremes as much as it manifests Schumann's fecund imagination.

The trio's first movement, marked *Sehr lebhaft* ("very lively"), mirrors the ambitious breadth and breathtaking splendor of a Caspar David Friedrich painting. Its brawny first theme, presented in galloping 6/8 time, has an impressive wingspan ranging across declamatory chords, surging legato lines, and invigorated charges of sixteenth notes. Schumann's music is often viewed through the lens of the composer's alter egos: Florestan, the extroverted hero; and Eusebius, the gentle, lyrical, and, in dated parlance, feminine counterpart to the masculine Florestan. This opening theme reveals the voice of Florestan through and through.

The movement's second theme arguably remains the purview of Florestan: though it begins softly, it retains the rhythmic vigor and adrenalized sixteenth-note figures that came before. Eusebius enters on the appearance of a third musical idea: a tender melody, voiced *piano e dolce*, shared between all three instruments (though still buoyed by a bubbling rhythmic energy). This melody quickly comes together with a fragment of the first theme and launches without warning—Schumann forgoes a repeat of the exposition—into the fraught development section.

Here we witness the composer's interest in counterpoint. Schumann had suffered a severe bout of depression in 1844; his gradual recovery early the following year was aided by the catharsis of counterpoint studies, which produced a set of Four Fugues for Piano, op. 72, and *Six Fugues on the Name BACH* for Organ, op. 60. Two years later, in the present F Major Trio, Schumann would use a defiant, fist-in-the-air gesture in the violin (derived from the movement's second theme) to begin an intricate fugato passage. The development concentrates primarily on this melodic idea, later incorporating the legato Eusebius melody, as well, to chart a broad emotive terrain. What at first appears to be developmental consideration of the first theme yields quickly to the unexpected arrival of the recapitulation. An extended coda gives further voice to Schumann's restless imagination.

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

The trio's slow movement (*Mit innigem Ausdruck*—"with heartfelt expression"), set in D-flat major, features a suave melodiousness. The rhythmic blur of pulsing triplets in the piano set against steady eighth notes in the strings creates a hazy reverie. A change of key to A major brings music first of sober focus, then of devastating loveliness, finally dissolving in a gossamer passage in c-sharp minor. A simple series of chords in the piano, decorated by quiet filigree in the violin, marks one of the trio's most magical moments.

A variation of the suave opening idea follows, now *lebhaft*, and recurs throughout the movement. Schumann goes on to revisit subsequent musical ideas, as well, stretching the canvas to encompass further harmonic territory. The final appearance of the opening musical idea shows it utterly transformed by the ravishing delicacy of Schumann's piano writing, as an ecstatic flow of thirty-second-note triplets flutters about the tune.

A flirtatious third movement follows, its **offbeat** accents and slick melodic character answering the sentimental slow movement with seductive mystery. A more animated middle section contrasts this music's swagger but remains piano, never fully emerging from the shadows. If a Friedrich hangs in the trio's first movement, perhaps a Goya sits in the third. Schumann marks the outgoing finale *Nicht zu rasch* ("not too fast"), but the movement demonstrates an inexorable energy nevertheless. An eighth-note ***moto perpetuo***, uninterrupted almost from beginning to end, paces the finale, bringing the work to an exhilarated finish.

GABRIEL FAURÉ

(Born May 12, 1845, Pamiers, Ariège; died November 4, 1924, Paris)

Romance in B-flat Major for Violin and Piano, op. 28

Composed: 1877

Published: 1883

Dedication: Arma Harkness

First performance: February 3, 1883

Other works from this period: *Après un rêve* (*Levati sol che la luna è levata*) in c minor, op. 7, no. 1 (1877); Violin Concerto in d minor, op. 14 (1878–1879); Piano Quartet no. 1 in c minor, op. 15 (1876–1879); Ballade in F-sharp Major for Solo Piano, op. 19 (1877–1879)

Approximate duration: 6 minutes

Gabriel Fauré noted that at the first hearing of his Romance for Violin and Piano, op. 28, the work "was received with much grinding of teeth." This was at the home of Louis and Pauline Viardot, prominent figures among the Parisian cultural elite (Pauline was a singer and composer herself), to whose daughter, Marianne, Fauré was briefly engaged. "At second hearing," Fauré continued, "the lights began to go on, and at third hearing, it provoked comparison with a limpid stream coursing through green meadows! What a pity one cannot always begin with the third hearing."

The limpid stream is certainly audible; the romance's untroubled opening, marked by gently arcing melodic figures in the violin (played *dolce e tranquillo*), is serenity incarnate. History recognizes Fauré as the greatest composer of *mélodie* (French song); while this Romance for Violin and Piano lacks voice and text, the same penchant for intimacy and

emotive immediacy for which Fauré stood unexcelled in the composition of *mélodie* likewise permeates this work.

What begins innocuously, however, soon takes flight with virtuosic derring-do. A fast section in g minor visits a heady bout of ***Sturm und Drang*** on the idyllic scene. (*Nota bene*: The work's **concertante** violin writing prompted a later orchestration by Philippe Gaubert. A full-bore cadenza even precedes the return to the opening section in B-flat major.) It may be these emblems of Romanticism—not only the middle section's dramatic power but also its unapologetic proximity to *dolcezza e tranquillità*—that brought about the Viardots' consternation. At times resembling a concerto disguised as salon entertainment, the romance packs a sudden explosiveness that may indeed waylay the listener. Even today, this quality defies the popular image of Fauré as the elegant vignettist. In addition to his achievements in *mélodie* and miniatures, as this work reveals, Fauré likewise possessed a voice of utmost Romantic depth.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

(Born September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves; died May 1, 1904, Prague)

Pisně milostné (Love Songs), op. 83

Composed: December 1888

Published: 1889, Berlin

Other works from this period: *Slavonic Dances* for Piano, Four Hands, op. 72 (1886); Piano Quintet in A Major, op. 81 (1887); *Jakobín*, op. 84 (opera) (1887–1888); Piano Quartet no. 2 in E-flat Major, op. 87 (1889); Symphony no. 8 in G Major, op. 88 (1889)

Approximate duration: 15 minutes

Just as his piano, chamber, and orchestral music offers a Central European analog to the equivalent work of his German Romantic counterparts, Dvořák's songs, which number over one hundred, follow in the **lied** tradition of Schubert and Schumann, peppered with the accent of his Bohemian heritage. Many of these use texts by contemporaneous Czech poets; the *Pisně milostné* (*Love Songs*), op. 83, set eight poems by the Moravian poet and novelist Gustav Pflieger-Moravský. With an acuity likewise redolent of Schubert, Schumann, and Dvořák's mentor, Johannes Brahms, Dvořák captures the cadence and character of his countryman's words in the melodic and rhythmic profile of his musical settings. Naturally, the singular meter and inflection of the Czech language, as opposed to the German texts set by Schubert, et al., suggest a musical garb to match. Witness the irresistible Bohemian flair of *Kol domu se ted' potácím* (*Around the House Now I Stagger*).

But more than that, images and poetical ideas come to life through Dvořák's vivid musical imagination. In the sixth song of the Opus 83 set, *Zde v lese u potoka* (*Here in the Forest by a Brook*), a limpid texture and pregnant fermatas evoke the poet's solitude. Midway through, anxious *tremolandi* in the piano, restlessly vacillating between minor triads and seventh chords, underpin the lines *Ten kámen stoupá a padá / Bez klidu pod vlou. / A proud se oň opírá, / Až kámen zvrhne se.* ("And that stone beneath the waves always rises and falls. The stone battles the waves and finally overturns.") The *tremolandi* remain in the left hand of the piano accompaniment even as the tumult subsides and the metaphor comes home: *Kdy vlna života mne ze světa Odnese, kdy, ach, vlna života mne odnese?* ("When will the waves of life finally sweep me away from this world?")

A similar matrimony between verse and setting is in evidence in the last of the set, *Ó, duše drahá, jedinká* (*Oh Dear Soul, the Only One*). Here, Dvořák sets the most candidly lovesick text of the cycle:

Oh dear soul, the only one
That still lives in my heart:
My thoughts hover about you,
Though evil fate separates us.

Oh, were I a singing swan,
I'd fly to you

And in my final sighing would
Sing out my heart to you, swooning.

The softly cascading piano figurations surrounding the quarter-note vocal melody, sung *mezza voce*, arm these words with a beguiling sincerity.

Commenting on the mastery of Schubert (Dvořák's favorite composer) in the realm of art song, Schubert's friend Josef von Spaun remarked, "Every one of his songs is in reality a poem on the poem he set to music." Though his voice is filtered through the unique lens of his cultural heritage, Dvořák exhibits a comparably penetrating approach to the genre in these well-loved settings.

SERGEI RACHMANINOV

(Born March 20/April 1, 1873, Oneg, Russia; died March 28, 1943, Beverly Hills, California)

Ne poy, krasavitsa, pri mne (Sing Not to Me, Beautiful Maiden), op. 4, no. 4

Composed: ca. 1892–1893

Published: 1893

Dedication: Nataliya Alexandrovna Rakhmaninova

Other works from this period: Piano Concerto no. 1 in f-sharp minor, op. 1 (1890–1891, rev. 1917); Prelude in c-sharp minor for Piano, op. 3, no. 2 (1892); *Trio élégiaque* in d minor for Piano, Violin, and Cello, op. 9 (1893, rev. 1907, 1917)

Approximate duration: 5 minutes

Ne poy, krasavitsa, pri mne comes from Rachmaninov's set of Six Songs, op. 4, composed between 1890 and 1893. The set is among the composer's early music, contemporaneous with the famous Prelude in c-sharp minor, op. 3, no. 2, among other piano works; the First Piano Concerto (later revised); and the **symphonic poems** *Prince Rostislav* and *The Rock*. (This period also came shortly before the ill-fated First Symphony, whose disastrous premiere notoriously sent Rachmaninov into a three-year creative crisis.)

Like the solo piano music of this period—and, indeed, not surprisingly for the composer who also ranked among his generation's greatest pianists—the Opus 4 songs demonstrate characteristically idiomatic keyboard writing. Though sparse relative to the hellfire of the c-sharp minor Prelude, the piano accompaniment has a clarity of texture that surrounds the piercing vocal melody with Schubertian incisiveness. (This evening's performance features a version of the work with obbligato viola.)

The song sets a text by Pushkin: "Sing Not to Me, Beautiful Maiden." The song's title and the ardent expressive character of Rachmaninov's setting might leave the impression of a jilted lover's torch song. But the prevailing sentiment is, rather, one of homesickness.

Do not sing, Oh Beauty, before me,
The melancholy songs of Georgia!
For they remind me
Of a different life, of a distant shore.

Alas, they remind me,
Your cruel melodies,
Of the steppes, and night,
And under a moonlight, of features of a faraway, poor maiden.

For Rachmaninov, who loved Russia deeply and ached for his homeland after fleeing in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, it was a short distance indeed between a lover's longing for his beloved and a Russian's nostalgia for home.

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

(Born July 3, 1854, Hukvaldy, Moravia; died August 12, 1928, Moravská Ostrava)

Pohádka (Fairy Tale) for Cello and Piano

Composed: 1910, rev. 1912, 1913 (lost), 1923

Published: 1924

First performance: March 13, 1910

Other works from this period: *Presto* for Cello and Piano (1910); *V mlhách (In the Mists)* for Solo Piano (1912); *Šumařovo dítě (The Fiddler's Child)*, Ballade for Orchestra (1912)

Approximate duration: 12 minutes

While celebrated alongside Smetana and Dvořák as one of Czechoslovakia's greatest composers, Leoš Janáček likewise had a deep affinity for Russian culture. He visited Russia multiple times, spoke the language, and had a known fondness for Russian music and literature. He counted Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Lermontov, Tolstoy, and Vasily Zhukovsky among his favorite writers.

Russian literature directly influenced Janáček's work on multiple occasions, most famously in the conception of his First String Quartet, subtitled *The Kreutzer Sonata* after the Tolstoy novella. Another instance is *Pohádka*, Janáček's duo for cello and piano originally written in 1910 (and revised multiple times thereafter)—a programmatic work based on Zhukovsky's *Skazka o tsare Berendyeye (The Tale of Tsar Berendyey)*. Per the composer's paraphrase in his preface to *Pohádka*:

Once upon a time there lived Tsar Berendyey, who had a beard down to his knees. He had been married for three years and lived with his wife in perfect harmony; but God still hadn't given them any children, which grieved the tsar terribly. One day the tsar felt the need to inspect his kingdom. He bade farewell to his consort and for eight months he was on his travels.

Pohádka (literally "Fairy Tale" or, more simply, "A Tale") offers something of a musical montage of scenes from the Russian fable, rather than a strict narration. The work fittingly reflects a sense of childlike wonder, as is characteristic of much of Janáček's chamber music (e.g., *Mládi* for Wind Sextet, a reminiscence of the composer's youth, or the **Concerto** for Piano, Winds, and Strings, which illustrates a fantastical menagerie).

Pohádka is cast in three movements. The first, marked *Con moto*, begins with an enchanting piano introduction, punctuated by **pizzicato** gestures in the cello. This music immediately ignites the listener's imagination, transporting the ear to a time long ago, in a land far, far away. The piano and cello **phrases** alternate eight times, with the harmonic profile of each iteration becoming increasingly intriguing, as if drawing the listener deeper into the story.

An animated transition, urged forward by bowed sixteenth-note patterns in the cello and expectant piano *tremolandi*, arrives at an *Andante* passage. An introspective lyricism takes hold. Throughout, Janáček's arresting instrumental textures lend the music a wispy, fairy-tale haze. The music subsequently turns more enigmatic, as the melody becomes fragmented and nearly inscrutable. The movement closes with an agitated salvo of thirty-second notes, parried back and forth between cello and piano.

The second movement, also marked *Con moto*, begins with a playful game of leapfrog (with the cello again playing pizzicato, echoing the outset of the first movement).

The music suddenly slows. The piano issues a delicate, legato melody, swathed in a glimmering sixteenth-note texture; the three-note tail to the leapfrog gesture becomes the point of departure for a countermelody in the cello.

Soon thereafter, Janáček combines these two musical ideas, setting the pizzicato figure against the piano's flowing melody, in the left hand, while the right hand interjects the leapfrog gesture.

The cello grows agitated, recalling the pizzicato figure from the first movement, now remade into an anxious exclamation in its upper register. But from this cauldron of disquiet, the music quickly emerges in a blaze of blinding light. The movement ends with a smiling reminiscence of the opening measures, as if waking happily from a vivid dream. The contented demeanor of this music extends into the *Allegro* finale, a happy march that expands into a luxurious sunlit stroll.

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH

(Born September 12/25, 1906, St. Petersburg; died August 9, 1975, Moscow)

Seven Romances on Poems of Aleksandr Blok for Soprano, Piano, Violin, and Cello, op. 127

Composed: 1967

Published: 1969

Dedication: Galina Vishnevskaya

First performance: October 23, 1967, Moscow

Other works from this period: Violin Concerto no. 2 in c-sharp minor, op. 129 (1967); Symphony no. 14, op. 135 (1969); String Quartet no. 13 in b-flat minor, op. 138 (1970)

Approximate duration: 25 minutes

Shostakovich suffered from chronically poor health throughout his life. In 1965, he was diagnosed with a form of poliomyelitis, which deteriorated his nerve endings and bones. A chain smoker since adolescence, Shostakovich was kept in a cardiologic clinic for one month and suffered a heart

attack the following year. During his frequent stays in hospitals, he was ordered by doctors to avoid the strain of composition; during these times, he read voraciously as a means of keeping his mind active and engaged. The poems set in the *Seven Romances on Poems of Aleksandr Blok* were chosen during one of these hospital stays.

Completed in February 1967, the Aleksandr Blok songs were Shostakovich's first compositions following his heart attack. The work was written for three of the composer's closest friends and collaborators: violinist David Oistrakh, cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, and soprano (and Rostropovich's wife) Galina Vishnevskaya. Shostakovich had been inactive as a pianist for several years when he completed the Blok settings, but he nevertheless hoped for the opportunity to perform the suite with this ensemble of friends and wrote the hauntingly stark piano part with his physical limitations in mind.

Rostropovich recalled the genesis of the suite:

All the works that Shostakovich wrote for me and for Galina appeared spontaneously. Possibly you could say that the exception was the *Seven Romances on Poems by Blok*. I had asked Dmitry Dmitriyevich to write some vocalises which Galina and I could perform together. When I made this request, he made no response. When he had finished the cycle, he said to me, "Slava, you understand, you see, I wanted to satisfy your request—I found some suitable texts to set. And I wrote the first song as you wanted, *Ophelia's Song*, for voice and cello. But then I started the second song with a whacking great pizzicato on the cello, and I realized that I didn't have sufficient instruments to continue, so I added the violin and piano."

The cello's long, sustained melodic line to start *Ophelia's Song*, with no chordal support from the piano, colors the vocal line with a bleak sense of despair appropriate to the text.

On parting from your sweetheart, my beloved,
You promised to love me.
Departing for that hated land,
You swore to keep your promise.

There, beyond cheerful Denmark,
Your native shores lie in darkness...
An angry, vociferous wave
Washes teardrops from the rocks.

My beloved warrior, all dressed in silver,
Will not return...
In the sepulcher his ribbon and black plume
Will wave fretfully.

While the instrumental combination changes from song to song, a like morose air pervades the entire suite. The second song replaces the cello with the piano, which begins with a series of grim parallel octaves in the bass register. The text of the third song, *We Were Together*, calls for a solo violin accompaniment, which lends Shostakovich's setting a fitting element of romance.

We were together, I remember it...
The night was troubled, a violin sang.
In those days you were still mine,
Growing more lovely by the hour.

Through the soft murmur of streams,
Through the mystery of a woman's smile,
A kiss beckoned to our lips
As the violin beckoned to our hearts...

Later in the suite, grief yields to fury, as in the fifth song, *The Storm*. Witness the striking effect of the violin playing *sul ponticello* (near the bridge) to produce a frenzied sound above the piano's turbulent rhythm. The full ensemble comes together only for the seventh and final song, *Music*.