Vadim Repin, violin, with Andrei Korobeinikov, piano

Program Notes

Part: *Fratres*
Born in Paide, September 11, 1935

In 1960, while still a student at the Talinn Conservatory, Arvo Pärt won national attention for his *Nekrolog,* dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. It was the first work by an Estonian composer to use Schoenberg's twelve-tone system so it created something of a scandal. The notoriety had its rewards, however, as it brought Pärt commissions from state sources and from cellist Rostropovich. Soon tired of his serial phase, Pärt began a series of alternations between creative output and withdrawal to search for a new style. One of his explorations came up with the collage technique, resulting in such compositions as his *Collage on the Theme B-A-C-H* (1964) and Second Symphony (1966).

During the 1970s Pärt supported himself by writing some 50 film scores. His third symphony (1971) followed one of his "withdrawal" periods, in which he studied 14th – 15th century polyphony, from Machaut to Josquin. He followed another of his "creative silences" with *For Alina* (1976), a small piano piece of high and low extremes. Pärt said he reached a "new plateau" with this piece: "It was here that I discovered the triad series, which I made my simple, little guiding rule." He has written in this triadic style, which he calls "tintinnabuli" (after the bell-like resemblance of notes in the triad), ever since, with only slight modifications. From 1982, when he moved to Berlin, he has composed primarily religious works for chorus or small vocal ensembles.

Pärt composed *Fratres*, originally for string quintet and wind quintet, in 1977 for Hortus Musicus, an early-music ensemble in Tallinn. The title refers to the fraternal spirit of the Hortus Musicus. In the decades since then he has written versions of this popular piece for many different combinations: wind octet and percussion, strings and percussion, and string quartet—and versions in which violin, cello, or guitar take a solo role.

In the violin and piano version, the violin alone introduces the piece's essential hymnlike theme in its low register under virtuosic string crossings that transmit Pärt's triadic harmonies. The hymnlike additive theme—reminiscent of a style of medieval church singing called organum—recurs eight times in the piano, employing slight variants but always in the same contour and with the same rhythmic pattern. The violin weaves imaginative "variations" through and around this framework. Pärt employs a brief, low tolling in the piano punctuated by percussive strums of the violin to separate each recurrence. The dynamics create an arch form, moving from soft to loud and back, with a particularly climactic use of double-stop chords in the violin's central "variation." The piece concludes with the quiet tolling measures.

Brahms: Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108
Born in Hamburg, May 7, 1833; died in Vienna, April 3, 1897

In 1886 Brahms spent the first of three idyllic summers in the village of Hofstetten in the Swiss mountains where the Aare flows into Lake Thun. He wrote to his publisher Simrock of the wonderful view from his lodging—on one hand the ancient town and castle and on the other the amazing array of mountains of the Bernese Oberland. These inspiring surroundings contributed to his immense productivity that summer: he composed his F major cello sonata, his C minor piano trio, two of his most beloved songs ("Immer leiser" and "Wie Melodien zieht es mir"), his A major violin sonata, and all but the finishing touches of the present D minor sonata.

Unlike that summer's other three chamber works, which Simrock published the following year, the D minor sonata remained in manuscript until Brahms completed it during his third Hofstetten summer. In October 1888 he sent the sonata and over twenty new vocal works to his good friend Elisabet von Herzogenberg, who wrote back in ecstatic terms about the sonata. To Clara Schumann, another of his closest circle, he wrote that he then felt confident enough to have the sonata sent on to her—thus braving Clara's disapproval at not receiving it first—saying she might try it out with Naret Koning and with celebrated violinist Joseph Joachim, their longtime mutual friend. Clara played the work privately with Koning in Frankfurt on December 8, 1888, and Brahms tried it out himself at the home of his physician friend Theodor Billroth in Vienna four days later. The composer then gave the first public performance with violinist Jenö Hubay on December 21 in Budapest, where he had gone to conduct his fourth symphony.

The D minor violin sonata, Brahms's third and last, shows remarkable scope but also great concision. He cast the work in four movements rather than the three of his G major and A major sonatas, but so concentrated are his methods that it lasts just over twenty minutes, making it shorter than the G major and the shortest of his four-movement chamber works, except, perhaps, for the C minor trio. The sense of breadth arises out of his invoking such a wide dramatic range, from intimacy to brilliance.

The first movement opens *sotto voce* with the violin singing high above a restless accompaniment. His quiet, extended theme provides a great foil for the passionate eruption that ensues before the gentle second theme. But the movement's most striking feature is its development section, which takes place over an insistent pulsing low note in the piano—his longest pedal point since the celebrated one in the third movement fugue of his Requiem. This harmonic anchoring of what would traditionally be a harmonically unstable section led to his ingenious transfer of that adventurousness into the recapitulation.

The gorgeous slow movement owes its economy to one of Brahms's simplest forms—basically a melody and its elaborated restatement. Yet the spacious, lyrical line and the luxurious harmonic flow leave no impression of terseness. Brahms sweetens the intensity of each section's peak with the violin playing parallel thirds, a sonority he loved, with the added phrase of descending thirds in the second section casting a glow that subsides like a musical sunset.

The scherzo begins with a quintessentially Brahmsian combination of playfulness and mystery. An impassioned outburst midway through the movement suggests a contrasting trio, which instead turns out to develop ideas from the first section. The return of the playful opening contains some charming variants and a "puff-of-smoke" ending.

Brahms's finale is the most impassioned and vehement movement of any in his violin sonatas, despite his contrasting of the turbulent main theme with a more subdued chorale-like idea begun by the piano alone. The movement's dramatic qualities have led some to speculate that it may have roots in one of the destroyed sonatas of his youth. The most striking structural feature is the entrance of what seems to be a restatement of the dramatic opening in the home key but which soon turns into development, boasting some of Brahms's most persistent syncopation. When the recapitulation proper begins, Brahms cleverly picks up just where that earlier restatement left off. His fiery coda demands virtuosity and all-out sound from both players.

Grieg: Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in G major, Op. 13
Born in Bergen, Norway, June 15, 1843; died in Bergen, September 4, 1907

On June 11, 1867, despite familial disapproval on both sides, Grieg married the love of his life, his cousin Nina Hagerup, a talented singer whom he had met three years before. The following month he penned his G major violin sonata "in the euphoria of my honeymoon." He wrote to his friend Gottfred Mattison-Hansen on July 30: "In these three weeks I have written a new violin sonata that I am looking forward to hearing when my countryman Svendsen comes in the near feature. He is the only one, in fact, to whom I dare give it. The other violinists all hate me, apparently out of envy." Violinist and conductor Johan Svendsen did come to Oslo in October to conduct his D major symphony, and Grieg dedicated the new sonata to him.

The short two years since his first violin sonata had brought huge changes into Grieg's life: he had settled in his native Norway after studying in Leipzig, launching his career in Copenhagen, and making his first trip to Italy, and, following a concert of his works in October 1866, he had begun to be recognized as one of his country's foremost musicians. Influenced by violinist Ole Bull, Grieg had realized that his chief aim should be to follow a path of nationalism and he began incorporating Norwegian folk idioms into his compositions. Along with fame came not only the envy he mentioned, but also a lack of understanding or acceptance of his evolving chromatic harmonic language and his mixture of Germanic and Norwegian elements. "It might appear as if I were fortunate in the new circumstances that surround me, but . . . . most people hate my compositions, even the musicians."

Grieg's perceptions aside, the premiere of his second violin sonata drew an enthusiastic reception. The performance took place on an "Edvard Grieg Music Evening" on November 16, 1867, not with Svendsen but violinist Gudbrand Böhn, a colleague at the Music Academy, and Grieg at the piano.

The second violin sonata radiates Norwegian folk idioms without using outright quotations. The outer movements show the influence of Norway's most common folk dance, the *springar*, in triple meter with regional variants of short-long and long-short rhythms both apparent. Grieg also

imitates the *hardanger* fiddle, the chief instrument associated with the *springar*, especially at the end of the middle movement.

Grieg readily admitted that he struggled with the larger forms, particularly sonata form—an exaggeration (like his perception that most people hated his music), otherwise how could he have written this piece in three weeks? This oft-repeated admission, alongside his acknowledged genius in writing miniatures, has led countless commentators to belittle his more extended structures. The sonata's first movement argues for his mastery. Following a pensive opening—the only long slow introduction in any of his sonatas—a full sonata form unfolds buoyantly, based on its dancing main theme and a poignant contrasting theme. His relatively brief development section with its far-flung harmonic excursions combines both themes, capped by a recapitulation with further variants and a grand coda.

The pensive slow movement unfolds in three-part form—minor-mode outer sections, which offer interior variation of the opening soulful idea, and a charming, delicate middle section in the major mode. After the piano introduces the main theme in both outer sections, it turns to folkish "strumming" as the violin enters. The violin's cadenza-like flourish at the close suggests the *hardanger* fiddle.

Grieg's dance-like closing movement displays another well-constructed form—an ingenious sonata rondo. His exposition contrasts a lively theme, initiated by a folklike open-fifth drone and punctuated by piano roulades, with a waltzlike rising idea, both of which he treats to a mini-development and recap before launching his middle section. Here, instead of a larger development proper, Grieg inserts a mysteriously beautiful episode, beginning in a remote major key but soon exploring minor-mode variants. He caps his condensed recapitulation with a bravura coda whose concluding chords offer a final harmonic twist.

Ravel: Sonata for Violin and Piano in G major
Born in Ciboure, Basses Pyrénées, March 7, 1875; died in Paris, December 28, 1937

Violinist Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, one of Ravel's closest friends, frequently advised him on the instrument's capabilities. She lent her expertise in connection with the composer's Duo for violin and cello (1920–22) and with *Tzigane* (1924), which he wrote for Hungarian violin virtuoso Jelly d'Arányi. "Come quickly," read his telegram to Jourdan-Morhange while working on *Tzigane*, "and bring the Paganini Caprices with you." In between, in 1923, he had decided to write a sonata for violin and piano specifically for his friend, promising, "It won't be very difficult and it won't sprain your wrist."

Ravel's remark notwithstanding, the violin sonata proved quite challenging to perform, and also turned out to be a struggle for the composer, who took four years to complete it. "What a lot of trouble your confounded sonata has given me," he wrote to Jourdan-Morhange. The greatest impediment to the sonata's progress, however, had been the opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, the above-mentioned *Tzigane*, and various vocal pieces including *Chansons madécasses*, all of which he completed before the violin sonata was finally ready for its first performance on May 27, 1927. By a sad turn of fate, Jourdan-Morhange was not able to premiere "her" sonata due to motor problems with her shoulder. The work nonetheless found a brilliant interpreter in violinist

and composer George Enescu, who was accompanied by Ravel himself.

Fully aware of the great differences between the violin and piano, Ravel wanted to see how far he could exploit their distinct qualities. “It was this independence I was aiming at,” he declared, “when I wrote a sonata for violin and piano, two incompatible instruments whose incompatibility is emphasized here, without any attempt being made to reconcile their contrasted characters.”

Employing the outer framework of sonata form, Ravel permits some sharing of materials in the first movement; the piano’s first theme, for example, is repeated in a variant by the violin, as is the following staccato phrase. More often, though, the contrast of instrumental colors is emphasized, as in the condensed recapitulation when the violin floats its lyrical line over reminiscences of the opening ideas.

The second movement was inspired by Afro-American blues, which had become the rage in Paris. During his visit to the United States in 1928, Ravel commented on his use of the blues in his recently completed sonata saying, “To my mind, the ‘blues’ is one of your greatest musical assets,” emphasizing that a composer’s idiosyncratic style will inevitably shape such borrowed materials. Ravel achieved his blues effects by imitating the strumming of a guitar, by having the violin slide between pitches, and by incorporating “blue” notes (flatted third and seventh scale degrees) and syncopated rhythms.

In the final movement the dazzling perpetual motion of the violin contrasts with the piano’s chordal accompaniment, again emphasizing their dissimilarity. Ravel cleverly reintroduces material from the first two movements. The staccato phrase from the first movement, for instance, appears at the outset and a prominent theme from the blues is woven into the recapitulation. The movement closes in a barrage of arpeggiated double stops in the violin and a final flourish in the piano.

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