

Edvard Grieg - *Quartet in G minor, Op. 27*

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) composed his String Quartet in G minor, opus 27, in the fall of 1877 while visiting Loftus, in the Hardanger district in Norway. More and more Grieg fell in love with the Norwegian countryside and began producing works based on his surroundings. Grieg was never comfortable with the chamber music forms, especially in the outer movements. In this Quartet he employs thematic unity to define the form, rather than chordal structure. Many places in this work foreshadow impressionism, using small melodic fragments to unify the movement along with instances of non-functional harmony. The work's lyrical qualities are undeniable, yet it still feels like a work in progress, constantly searching for resolution.

Antonin Dvorak – *Serenade for Strings in E, Op. 22*

Antonin Dvorak(1841-1904) wrote his Serenade for Strings in E, opus 22 in the year 1875. He had been composing works to submit to the Austrian State Stipendium, a contest to help support young musicians. Two of the judges in this competition were Johannes Brahms and Hanslick and Dvorak was awarded the top prize. This brought Dvorak's works to the attention of Brahms, who then arranged for the publisher Simrock to publish some of Dvorak's works. Other works were published at the same time by Bote & Bock, including the Serenade. There was sufficient music then published to begin Dvorak's climb to international success. The music is certainly romantic, with just a twinge of nationalistic color that is the trademark of Dvorak.

Max Bruch – *Octet for Strings in B flat major*

Max Bruch (1838-1920) composed this work at the age of 82, just several months before his death. Although written in the 20th Century, it retains the form and orchestration of the late romantic period and is firmly within the stylistic period of Bruch's greatest popularity. This work was performed for the first time in 1996.

Jeeyoung Kim – *“Engraft” for Erhu and Strings*

In the words of the composer: Engraft means to incorporate in a firm or permanent way. As an artist who was born and raised in Korea, I believe I have been engrafted into the cultural fabric of America over the past 20 years. This piece represents the journey to the resolution of a personal and artistic struggle to define what it means to assimilate.

In the beginning, strong and dynamic chords are played by strings to represent culture shock when I first came to America. The erhu (traditional Chinese instrument which is two-stringed bowed musical instrument) symbolizes my Asian roots. The ensemble has a musical journey through a traditional Korean rhythmic pattern (gut-gori, ut-moro, and dong-san-puri), alongside Western patterns. The two cultural paradigms seem unable to reconcile in the beginning. As they interact, they build chi (energy) throughout the piece. In the end, the once disparate elements combine and the engrafting is complete.

Albert Markov - *Rhapsody after Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess"*

The tradition of using music from an opera or stage work for a set variations dates from the 17th Century, including Mozart, Beethoven, and up through Fritz Kreisler. The Violin Virtuoso, Composer and Conductor Albert Markov composed this set of variations for Violin Solo and Orchestra based on the popular George Gershwin Opera, "*Porgy and Bess*". The difficulty of this work for the violin soloist is of the highest order, limiting performances to only true virtuosi.

W.A. Mozart – String Quartet No. 19 in C major, K. 465

The last of Mozart's (1756-1791) "Haydn" Quartets (C major, K. 465) quickly gained the nickname "Dissonance" for the adventurous harmonic excursions of its slow and tense introduction. Some music dealers in Italy returned the scores to the publisher because they thought the rich chromaticisms were mistakes; the Hungarian Prince Grassalokovics was so incensed by the work's tonal audacities that he tore up the parts from which his household quartet were performing; and even Haydn expressed some initial shock, but defended the bold prefatory chords by saying, "Well, if Mozart wrote it, he must have meant it." Actually, the introduction's heightened expression, a quality increasingly evident in the works of Mozart's later years, is simply the perfect emotional foil for setting off the sunny nature of much of the music that follows.

Dmitri Shostakovich – *String Quartet No. 8 in c minor, Po. 110*

Of the three string quartets (6-8) composed by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) between 1956 and 1960, Quartet #8 in c minor is by far the best. It incorporates the autobiographical thematic material derived from the composer's name, D-S-C-H, a motive he had already used in his Tenth Symphony. In fact, there are quotes from many other works by Shostakovich throughout the entire quartet. The second movement, Allegro molto, is especially driven and dissonant, followed by a more relaxed third movement, Allegretto, which is much more lyrical and introspective. This work was dedicated, "in the memory of the victims of fascism and war..."

Astor Piazzolla – *Oblivion*

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) and Argentinian composer wrote this hauntingly beautiful work in 1982. His displacement of the basic beat from four groups of two eighth-notes to two groups of three plus one group of two eighth-notes gives the work an uneven feel, but at the same time a gentle swaying that unifies the simple harmonic lines and the soaring melody.

Pietro Mascagni - *Intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana"*

Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945) entered Sonzogono's contest in 1888 for one-act operas with his verissimo opera "Cavalleria rusticana", and was one of three winners of the the grand prize. This exciting, earthy opera took Italy by storm, and was an instant international success, and is still in the repertoire of most opera houses today. The lovely intermezzo is a welcome break from the harsh lives and problems of the people of rural Sicily at the time, and depicts Sunday morning when all go to church.

Johannes Brahms – String Quintet No. 2 in G major, Op. 111

Although settled in the bustling musical center of Vienna by 1869, Brahms (1833-1897) nevertheless favored more peaceful rural retreats during the summer months. One such venue, Bad Ischl in Upper Austria, proved so inspiring that Brahms returned there a number of times. It was at Ischl that Brahms wrote his two published string quintets. The Quintets show Brahms standing at the pinnacle of the composition of chamber music, their gentle pastoral character being subtly shaded by a profoundly melancholy introspection. The G-major Op. 111 Quintet is considered to be one of Brahms's most cosmopolitan works, incorporating a variety of idioms from Italian to Slavic to even his love of Hungarian gypsy music.