

## Program Notes

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### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

In 1786, faced with dwindling performance opportunities, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart turned to writing chamber music, which enjoyed enormous popularity in Vienna. During the second half of the year, he composed prolifically in a variety of chamber music genres. Among the works that he produced was the Trio in E-flat Major, K. 498 (“Kegelstatt”) for clarinet, viola, and piano, which is dated 5 August 1786. He dedicated it to Franziska von Jacquin, who was one of his pupils and the sister of his close friend Gottfried. Mozart was a frequent visitor to the Jacquin residence, which was the site of weekly gatherings of family and friends seeking diversion in “discussions, games, and music-making.” The first performance of the new Trio took place at one of their Wednesday afternoon house concerts, with Franziska playing the piano, Mozart the viola, and Anton Stadler the clarinet. The rumour that the piece was composed during an afternoon game of skittles—hence the nickname “Kegelstatt” (or playground for skittles, an old European variety of bowling)—remains uncorroborated.

Mozart’s enthusiasm for the clarinet dated back to 1764, when he first heard the instrument in London. His friendship with the Viennese virtuoso Anton Stadler, whom he met in 1783, provided additional impetus for him to write for the clarinet. The publisher Artaria, recognizing that such a new instrument was unlikely to possess many devotees, designated Mozart’s composition as a “Trio for Harpsichord or Fortepiano with Violin and Viola accompaniment,” indicating that a clarinet might perform the violin part.

The “Kegelstatt” Trio is cast in three movements. The opening Andante, in sonata form, favours the clarinet and piano in the presentation and development of the two main themes, although the viola does play the second theme in the recapitulation. The second movement is a robust minuet. In the contrasting trio section, in minor mode, the viola becomes more active with agitated triplet accompaniment figuration. The main theme of the trio returns in the coda to the closing minuet. The finale, a seven-part rondo, exhibits the influence of the concerto style with virtuosic writing for all three instruments and equal distribution of thematic material.

### Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Robert Schumann’s “Year of Chamber Music,” 1842, began miserably, owing to his having to endure the first lengthy separation of his marriage, while Clara was on a concert tour in Germany and Denmark. In April he immersed himself in the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, which he and Clara studied closely at the piano. He completed the String Quartets, op. 41 and the Piano Quintet, op. 44 during the summer and early autumn, before setting to work on a piano trio and a piano quartet, both of which he intended to present to Clara for Christmas. The Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, op. 47, completed by late November, was performed in December at private soirées, with Felix Mendelssohn playing the piano on at least one occasion. The public première took place on 8 December 1844 in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, where the Quartet was the opening selection on Clara and Robert Schumann’s farewell concert prior to their departure for Dresden. Clara was at the piano. Publication followed in February 1845.

Schumann’s Piano Quartet has always been somewhat overshadowed by the more heroic Quintet. Clara, however, expressed obvious delight over the smaller work’s lyricism and freshness in her diary: “In the evening we played Robert’s E-flat Major Quartet for the first time at our house, and again I was really enchanted by this beautiful work, which is so youthful and fresh, as if it were his first” (April 1843). That the piano dominates the Quartet is hardly surprising given Clara’s extraordinary talents, but there are also moments when the violin, viola, and cello emerge from the thickly woven texture.

The Piano Quartet consists of four movements. The first movement is in sonata form, preceded by a slow introduction that returns strategically in the Allegro proper, perhaps reflecting Schumann’s study of Beethoven’s string quartets. The second movement is a scherzo with two trios. Several commentators have remarked on its resemblance to the scherzos of Mendelssohn. The Andante, in three-part form, starts

with a brief introduction, after which the cello plays a tender melody that is taken over by each instrument in turn and subject to ornamental variation, both here and in the closing section. The theme of the contrasting middle section is hymn-like. The finale demonstrates Schumann's contrapuntal facility, incorporating fugal writing in the exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda.

### César Franck (1822–1890)

When César Franck began work on his Piano Quintet in F Minor in 1879, he had not written any chamber music in almost forty years. Successful performances of some early chamber pieces, namely his trios, at the Société Nationale de Musique during the 1870s, along with encouragement from students and supporters, persuaded him to turn his attention in this direction again. The last three chamber works, the Piano Quintet in F Minor (1879), Violin Sonata in A Major (1886), and String Quartet in D Major (1889), are deemed among the most distinguished contributions to French chamber music of the time, and Franck is lauded for having achieved “a balance between his inherent emotionalism and his preoccupation with counterpoint and Classical forms.”

The première of the Piano Quintet, performed by Camille Saint-Saëns and the Marsick String Quartet at the Société Nationale on 17 January 1880, met with general astonishment. The audience was seemingly unprepared for “the dramatic intensity, the frequently tragic quality, of the new work,” coming from a composer who had previously devoted himself primarily to writing church music and improvising on the organ. Formalists were shocked by the Quintet's emotional force; those not bound by such considerations appreciated the intensity of its expression. Chief among its detractors was Saint-Saëns, who departed the stage abruptly at the end of the performance, leaving behind the manuscript that bore Franck's dedication to him. Even as progressive a composer as Franz Liszt suggested that the Quintet “in its search for dramatic expression” had exceeded “the legitimate bounds of chamber music.” Félicité Franck, knowing that the source of inspiration for the Quintet was her husband's infatuation with an attractive and talented composition student, Augusta Holmés, professed a lifelong aversion to the piece. Nevertheless, the Quintet's public success was so great that the Société Nationale broke its own rule and arranged for a second performance later that same year, but with a different pianist.

The Piano Quintet unfolds in three expansive movements. The first movement, in sonata form, begins with a slow rhapsodic introduction that alternates between two contrasting ideas: a dramatic, recitative-like gesture in the strings and a gentler, more lyrical melody in the piano. The opening theme of the Allegro proper is dominated by the dotted rhythmic motive of the introductory string gesture. The second theme, marked *tenero ma con passion* (“tenderly but with passion”), is introduced in the piano in D-flat major and repeated by the first violin in A-flat major (the relative major key). This theme recurs in each of the other movements, contributing to the cyclic form that is characteristic in virtually all of Franck's mature compositions. It returns in the middle of the second movement, a simple *Lied*, as well as at the end of the sonata-form finale, where it is heard in rhythmic augmentation. Notable throughout the Piano Quintet are the chromatic harmonic language, contrapuntal elaboration of thematic material, and adaptation of idioms from organ and orchestral writing.