

Program Notes

Mozart's quartet KV 575 in D Major, usually known as the first of the Prussian Quartets, was written in 1789/90 for Friedrich Wilhelm II, King of Prussia. As he was an amateur cellist, Mozart wrote a relatively soloistic cello part for his aristocratic contractor. Remarkable in this piece are interesting motivic relationships between the first and the last movements and a frequent use of texture changes inspired by stylistic features of the divertimento. These were developed first in his string quintets KV 515 and 516 and then transferred to the genre of the string quartet, where he, with much inventiveness and creativity surmounted the difficulties which arose through the fact that there are fewer voices and therefore limited possibilities of voice exchanges. Interesting with respect to the three Prussian Quartets is the fact that Mozart, who always seemed to have so many ideas that his pen could hardly catch up with his music, considered the work on these quartets as "toilsome labor."

This feeling Brahms may have shared while composing his piano quintet in F Major op. 34, as aberrations characterize the course of this piece's creation. First being conceived as string quintet (1862), his self criticism as well as suggestions from Clara Schumann and Josef Joachim urged him to change it into a sonata for two pianos (1864) and eventually to a Piano quintet (1865). It is a typical work from Brahms's second period, called "First Maturity" according to the classification in the New Grove Dictionary. Important are thematic transformations where themes retain their basic features but are altered in character. It also shows signs of destabilization in several parameters; in rhythm, where syncopation and displacement of triads deemphasize harmonically important chords, and in harmony, when movements like the third and the fourth take unusually long to establish the tonality. Brahms has always considered Mozart as one of his paragons, arranging and playing his compositions frequently. His love for Schubert on the other hand, developed relatively late, but was lasting and intense.

Schubert's Notturmo in E-flat major, opening with a sweet melody in thirds which alternates with rhythmically and tonally contrasting sections, seems to have been designed as part of the Trio op. 99 in B-flat major and written in the end of 1827 in temporal vicinity to the song cycle Winterreise. "Schubertian" simplicity is one of the typical features of this piece; and simplicity, although in a much deeper sense, can also be attributed to the Cavatina from Beethoven's String quartet Op. 130. For Beethoven this movement was very significant, he reportedly said it always made him weep when he heard it. The recitative-like middle part in a remote key and an independent melody-accompaniment-relationship is set apart from the outer sections in relative diatonic harmony. The poignancy which this piece radiates makes it, despite its short duration the emotional center of the quartet and, through its thematically conceived expressive language, a signpost for Brahms and beyond.