

Violinist William Hagen plays Dvořák and Brahms

William Hagen, violin
Orion Weiss, piano

DVOŘÁK

Four Romantic Pieces, Op. 75

I. Cavatina

II. Capriccio

III. Romance

IV. Elegy

(Approximate duration 14 minutes)

BEETHOVEN

Violin Sonata No. 7 in C minor, Op. 30, No. 2

I. Allegro con brio

II. Adagio cantabile

III. Scherzo

IV. Finale

(Approximate duration 22 minutes)

INTERMISSION

CLARA SCHUMANN Three Romances, Op. 22

I. Andante molto

II. Allegretto

III. Leidenschaftlich schnell

(Approximate duration 10 minutes)

BRAHMS

Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108

I. Allegro

II. Adagio

III. Un poco presto e con sentimento

IV. Presto agitato

(Approximate duration 22 minutes)

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904): Four Romantic Pieces, Op. 75

Despite the family's modest means, Dvořák's father - himself an amateur musician - encouraged his son to take up the violin at age six. Antonín eventually attended an organ school in Prague; after graduating, he taught and played viola in the city's Provisional Theater Orchestra, conducted by acclaimed composer Bedřich Smetana. Dvořák destroyed many of his early works, which performers criticized as obtuse and

technically awkward. However, the young composer soon found success by adopting the Czech nationalist style pioneered by Smetana. The majority of Dvořák's works, including the Slavonic Dances and Cello Concerto, refer to his Czech heritage either explicitly, in the titles, or implicitly, containing folk motifs or dance forms. Dvořák wrote his Four Romantic Pieces, Op. 75 in January of 1887, in between composing his seventh and eighth symphonies. He had recently met and promised to write a piece for his neighbor, Josef Kruis, a chemistry student and amateur violinist. The resultant piece became the famous Terzetto, Op. 74, which proved too difficult for Kruis to play. Thus, Dvořák began writing an easier trio, about which he wrote, "They are, of course, intended for amateurs, but didn't Beethoven and Schumann also sometimes write with very simple material? – and how!"

Immediately after finishing the work, Dvořák set about arranging it for violin and piano, producing what we today call Romantic Pieces. In fact, he forgot about the original trio version, which wasn't performed until 1938. The Romantic Pieces originally had descriptive titles, which Dvořák removed upon rearranging them for violin — otherwise, the pieces do not substantially differ from the trio. The *Cavatina* presents a sweet, song-like melody in the violin, accompanied by the piano's gently flowing rhythmic line. A far cry from the serenity of this opening piece, *Capriccio* is a vigorous folk-like dance in D minor. *Romance* harkens back to the work's opening; again, the violin's simple melody floats over the piano's busy figurations. However, Dvořák's melody here adopts a dark and impassioned character. The final piece, *Elegy*, is the most complex; an introspective, sorrowful theme undergoes a series of transformations. Multi-movement works do not usually end in slow tempos; Dvořák began writing a fifth movement but ultimately decided that the Larghetto made the perfect ending. It feels intensely personal. Overall, the Romantic Pieces are a gem that creates a marvelous range of moods within the small scope of the miniature genre.

L.V. Beethoven (1770-1827):

Violin Sonata No. 7 in C minor, Op. 30, No. 2

Beethoven wrote his first violin sonatas, a set of three (Op. 12) in 1797-98. Six more appeared by early 1803, making a fairly compressed time span for a medium in which Beethoven was to write just one more in 1812. All but the tenth was written before the composer was 32 years of age. Yet all of them, to varying degrees, show Beethoven straining at the reins that in his early years still tied him to the genteel world of

eighteenth-century classicism. Although we refer to these ten works as “violin sonatas,” in the original scores the music is invariably identified as being “for the fortepiano and a violin” (rather than the other way around). Such was usually the case with eighteenth-century works of this type, but it was hardly true with Beethoven, where we can see in even the first sonata the nearly equal partnership of the two instruments. In these ten sonatas, Beethoven explores the ways and means of combining two voices of unequal sound mass into a dramatic partnership and coherent unity, “a colloquy of reciprocal enrichment,” in Louis Biancolli’s words.

Without question, this sonata from Beethoven’s Op.30, is one of the grandest in the violinist’s repertory. It is a work of drama, passion, power, and almost symphonic scope. The key of C minor immediately alerts us to music of serious import. Of Beethoven’s ten violin sonatas, this is the “biggest” in feel and scope. It is also one of just three, Nos. 5 and 10 are the others, to boast four movements rather than the standard three. The first movement opens with a darkly mysterious, almost menacing subject divided into several epigrammatic components; a subject eminently suitable for development later on. The strongly contrasting second subject in E-flat major, march-like yet playful, is introduced by the violin. The slow movement is one of heavenly beauty. The scherzo movement truly lives up to its title “joke” – witty, playful, full of rhythmic quirks and rough humor. The finale returns to C minor and, unusually for a large-scale work that opens in the minor tonality, finishes in the minor as well. Relentless dramatic tension and emotional strife mark this uncompromising movement.

Clara Schumann (1819-1896): Three Romances, Op.22

Schumann was at her height with composition when she was in the middle of her career. In the modern-day, her songs and piano trios are a particular favorite, alongside her *Three Romances for Violin and Piano*. This work was composed in 1853 and was first premiered in 1855. Clara Schumann famously said that “women are not born to compose”, however during this period, she composed quite a few of her most famous works. *Three Romances for Violin and Piano* was dedicated to close friend and virtuoso violinist, Joseph Joachim. Schumann and Joachim went on tour with this piece and they even played it before King George V of Hanover who absolutely loved the work. One critic said “*All three pieces display an individual character conceived in a truly sincere manner and written in a delicate and fragrant hand.*”

The first romance begins with a “gypsy pathos opening” which leads into a very emotional melodic framework. The brief central theme is then developed and embellished throughout this romance. This movement is incredibly passionate and the dialogue between the piano and violin is incredibly effective. The main theme is based loosely on arpeggios, with the final section of this movement referring to Robert Schumann’s *First Violin Sonata*.

The second romance is representative of all three movements as it embodies all the things that link these romances together. It is in G minor and is wistful in character. The main theme played by the violin is syncopated, and there is a melancholy atmosphere created throughout the movement. The middle section picks up in tempo and the use of embellishments gives this section a shimmering kind of feel. This movement is developmental, and the theme is varied a lot for how short this movement is. The closing section, which is back in G minor, reiterates the main theme before resolving with a charming pizzicato statement.

The third and final romance is the longest of the three, and it is remarkably similar to the first romance. Instantly there is a rippling accompaniment from the piano which is bubbly and fast-paced. The long melody played on the violin is very simple, but it fits very well with busy accompaniment. Schumann is very idiomatic with her violin writing in this work, which is why it is so popular within violin repertoire. The work is developmental from the start, and the main theme is changed in many ways with the use of dynamics, harmonies, and pizzicato playing. The accompaniment part is unrelenting, with its fast-paced arpeggiated motifs and constant moving parts. The end of the work is exceptionally beautiful, the tempo is broken, and the piece slows and beautifully resolves with the lower end of the violin register, and some rich tonic chords from the piano.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897): Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108

Brahms started writing his third violin sonata in 1886, almost immediately after finishing his Sonata No. 2 in A major during a summer holiday in Thun. However, it took another two years before he completed the work when he returned to Thun in 1888 for another vacation. He dedicated this sonata to Hans von Bülow, who was a pianist, famous conductor, and champion of Brahms’ music. This sonata was premiered in Budapest with

Jenő Hubay on the violin and the composer himself at the piano in 1888.

This work is the most dramatic amongst the three violin sonatas; it has a great variety of musical characterizations within a relatively short span of its four movements. In the first movement *Allegro*, the violin plays a lyrical but *sotto voce* theme while being accompanied by a ruminating murmur in the low registers of the piano. Immediately after the violin's closing cadence of the first subject, the piano proceeds to enter with an explosively heroic chordal reenactment of the soaring theme, driving the music to a more affable second theme. In the development section, the piano hovers over the dominant A pedal for almost 50 bars beneath the mysterious motivic deliberations of the violin. The development seamlessly gives way to the recapitulation, where the violin restates the theme but in an octave lower, and the piano plays an elaborated version of the original accompanying figure. The recapitulation continues, this time with a low D pedal followed by a final *sostenuto* statement of the first subject across three octaves that lands itself in the key of D major.

Balancing the dark and mysterious mood of the first movement, the *Adagio* opens with a lyrical aria in the violin accompanied throughout by the piano. The character of this movement is romantic and nostalgic, stated *espressivo* in the violin part right at the beginning. This melody goes through modulations and crescendos that lead to a passionate climax, played in thirds on the violin. The movement ends with a brief echo of the opening theme that leads to a final, reflective cadence in the key of D major.

In contrast to the second movement, the piano takes center stage in this *scherzando* third movement *Un poco presto e con sentimento*. Off-beat chords and pizzicatos in the violin part, coupled with light yet fleeting runs in the piano part creates a magical ambience. The *Presto agitato* finale begins in a stormy fashion, with the violin playing vigorous double stops while the piano plays big powerful chords. The theme in the violin begins on the same note as the first movement, but unlike the *sotto voce* theme, here it is presented in a very persistent manner. A range of textures from throbbing syncopations to eerie unisons ensures a variety of ideas pulsing throughout the movement. The turmoil finally unleashes into a full-fledged return of the first subject that leads into a thundering conclusion in the home key of D minor.

ARTIST BIOS

William Hagen

William Hagen has performed as soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician across the United States, Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In 2022/23, William performs with orchestras around the United States, makes his debut with the Orquesta Filharmónica de Bogotá, and performs as soloist and chamber musician in several countries in Europe.

As soloist, William has appeared with the Chicago Symphony, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Detroit Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony (HR Sinfonieorchester), San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Utah Symphony, and many others around the globe. As recitalist and chamber musician, William has performed at venues such as Wigmore Hall and the Louvre, and collaborated with artists such as Steven Isserlis, Gidon Kremer, Edgar Meyer, and Tabea Zimmerman, among others. He maintains an active schedule on both sides of the Atlantic, making frequent trips to Europe and cities around the US to play a wide range of repertoire.

In 2020, William released his debut album, “Danse Russe,” with his good friend and frequent collaborator, pianist Albert Cano Smit. The album is available on all streaming platforms.

A native of Salt Lake City, Utah, William began playing the violin at the age of 4, studying the Suzuki method with Natalie Reed and then Deborah Moench. He studied with Itzhak Perlman and Catherine Cho at the Juilliard School, Christian Tetzlaff at the Kronberg Academy, and was a longtime student of Robert Lipsett, studying with Mr. Lipsett for 11 years both at the Colburn Community School of Performing Arts and at the Colburn Conservatory of Music. In 2015, William won 3rd prize at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels.

William performs on the 1732 “Arkwright Lady Rebecca Sylvan” Antonio Stradivari, and on a violin bow by Francois Xavier Tourte, both on generous loan from the Rachel Barton Pine Foundation.

Orion Weiss

One of the most sought-after soloists and chamber music collaborators of his generation, **Orion Weiss** is widely regarded as a “brilliant pianist” (The New York Times) with “powerful technique and exceptional insight” (The Washington Post). He has dazzled audiences with his passionate, lush sound and performed with dozens of orchestras in North America including the Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and New York Philharmonic. Recent seasons have seen Weiss in performances for the Lucerne Festival, Denver Friends of Chamber Music, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, 92nd Street Y, and at the Aspen, Bard, Ravinia, and Grand Teton summer festivals.

Other highlights include a performance of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, a live stream with the Minnesota Orchestra, the release of his recording of Christopher Rouse's Seeing, and recordings of Gershwin's complete works for piano and orchestra with the Buffalo Philharmonic and JoAnn Falletta. Weiss can be heard on the Naxos, Telos, Bridge, First Hand, Yarlung, and Artek labels.

Known for his affinity for chamber music, Weiss performs regularly with violinists Augustin Hadelich, William Hagen, Benjamin Beilman, and James Ehnes; pianists Michael Brown and Shai Wosner; cellist Julie Albers; and the Ariel, Parker, and Pacifica Quartets. In recent seasons, he has also performed with the San Francisco Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. A native of Ohio, Weiss attended the Cleveland Institute of Music and made his Cleveland Orchestra debut performing Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 in 1999. That same year, with less than 24 hours' notice, Weiss stepped in to replace André Watts for a performance of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Weiss's list of awards includes the Classical Recording Foundation's Young Artist of the Year, Gilmore Young Artist Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and more. In 2004, he graduated from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Emanuel Ax. Learn more www.orionweiss.com.