

TIMOTHY RIDOUT, viola
JONATHAN WARE, piano

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Sonata No. 1 in F minor Op. 120 No. 1

Allegro amabile

Allegro appassionato

Andante con moto

Allegro

(approx. 24 minutes)

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Viola Sonata in C minor MWV Q14

Adagio – Allegro

Menuetto – Trio. Più lento – Tempo I

Andante con variazioni

Allegro molto

(approx. 28 minutes)

INTERMISSION

CLARA SCHUMANN (1819-1896)

Three Romances Op. 22

Andante molto

Allegretto

Leidenschaftlich schnell

(approx. 10 minutes)

CÉSAR FRANCK (1822-1890)

Sonata in A major (arr. for viola and piano)

Allegretto ben moderato

Allegro

Recitativo-Fantasia

Allegretto poco mosso

(approx. 30 minutes)

Sonata No. 1 in F minor Op. 120 No. 1

His special interest in the clarinet came late in life when, in 1891, he encountered the playing of Richard Mühlfeld, principal clarinetist in the court orchestra of Meiningen (Thuringia), noted for his warm tone and expressive playing. Brahms' last published chamber works were two sonatas, Op. 120, composed in 1894 for clarinet and piano (dedicated to Mühlfeld) and then re-issued by the composer in a version for viola. This was not a mere afterthought, as Brahms had intended the work to be played on either instrument from the outset, writing to his publisher when readying the work for publication: "I am planning to include *for clarinet or viola* in the title."

Despite being labelled as F minor — the key of Beethoven's stormy *Appassionata* Sonata Op. 57 and Brahms' own darkly passionate Quintet Op. 34 — the overall aesthetic direction of this work bends towards more optimistic emotions, in the major mode. The first movement, though turbulent in parts, resolves its fury by the end in a placid F major final cadence. The two middle movements are in the relative major of A flat. And the finale has no allegiance to the minor mode whatsoever, being centred in a cheerful and chipper F major from its opening bars. This is Brahms in the full “mellowness” of his last years.

The first movement *Allegro appassionato* contains a wealth of thematic material. It opens with an enigmatic passage in piano octaves that will, in typical Brahmsian fashion, feed motivic developments throughout the movement.

Allegro appassionato

The musical score is for a piece titled "Allegro appassionato". It is written in B-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked "Allegro appassionato". The score begins with a piano introduction. The right hand plays a melody with a long note followed by eighth notes, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The dynamics are marked "poco f" and "p".

This leads directly into the first theme, an expansively broad, yearning melody presented by the viola in deep-breathing phrases constructed, like those in the opening bars of the Fourth Symphony, from a series of wide melodic intervals.

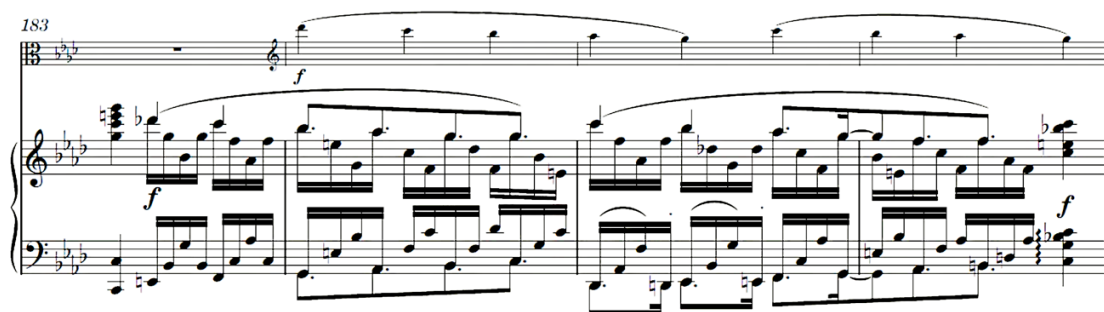


The second theme, also in the minor mode, could not be more different. Comprised of gruff little utterances in the low register, it introduces an element of irascible punchiness — a staple of the youthful Brahms — to what has been, so far, a fairly rhapsodic flow of musical ideas.



The development section is a further study in contrasts. Beginning in a wistful mood of innocent reverie, it erupts halfway through into volcanic passion, with the second theme, made sonorously grand in the scoring of the piano part, animating the lava flow. The eruption continues until the viola smooths out the waves of emotion with its re-introduction of the sweeping first theme to begin the recapitulation.

Brahms loved to create textures bristling with cross-rhythms, but this final section features a rippling four-against-three passage that is remarkable even for Brahms.



This rocky ride completed, the remainder of the sonata guides us hand-in-hand through gentler emotional terrain, beginning with a serene and evocative *Andante un poco Adagio* slow movement.



This exquisitely delicate movement is pervaded by a sense of longing created by its appoggiatura-laden bird-song melody, perched atop slow-to-resolve, widely spaced harmonies that float like sonic lacework in tonal space.

The *Allegretto grazioso* movement that follows evokes the gentle swaying of the *Ländler*, the Austrian rural equivalent of the Viennese waltz.



Brahms subtly promotes this swaying sensation by regularly switching between bars with the long note on the first beat and those with the long note on the second beat. Country dancing is even more explicitly evoked in passages featuring a bass drone and a hefty “stomping” rhythm.



A “raindrop” middle section of soft syncopations tumbling down from the upper reaches of the piano register provides a brief repose from all this dancing activity.

The finale is a congenial rondo that opens with a three-note “knock on the door” and accompanying 8th-note chatter, a motive that will ring in your ears in many guises before this movement is through.



This “motto” opening is of course just a fanfare to introduce the rondo refrain melody that will alternate with intervening episodes in the course of the movement. And what a carefree, tripping little melody it is, eminently suitable for humming in the shower or whistling to oneself while gardening.



Notice how craftily Brahms incorporates the three-knock “motto” motive into the bass line, as if it were the underlying topic in every musical conversation.

And indeed, while the movement unfolds in an alternating series of refrains and contrasting episodes in an A-B-A-C-B-A pattern, this three-note motto motive is so pervasive, in so many guises, that virtually every set of three long notes in the score — no matter what the pitch and where the notes occur — seems to remind us of it, even in the closing measures.



Felix Mendelssohn

Viola Sonata in C minor MWV Q14

Mendelssohn's *Viola Sonata in C minor* is a youthful work, its manuscript dated 24 February 1824, just after the composer's fifteenth birthday. It had remained largely unknown until the 1950s, when it was discovered in the archives of the Berlin State Library and then eventually published in 1966.

In its setting in the "troubled" key of C minor, its cyclical linkage between movements, and its massive end-weighting in a finale longer than the previous movements combined, it reveals the young composer's infatuation with the most famous works of Beethoven. And yet, in its transparency of texture, its lightness of touch and compositional ingenuity, it amply foreshadows the qualities for which the mature composer was later to be known.

The work comprises three movements: a sonata-form first movement with slow introduction, a minuet movement, and, to conclude, a set of variations of remarkable emotional range.

The first movement's slow introduction, tasked with building up suspense before the arrival of the first theme, is handled largely by harmonic wanderings in the piano. The viola adds little to the unfolding mystery.



All that changes, however, when the exposition begins and the viola bursts out of the starting gate, Pathétique-Sonata-style, heading for the sky.



This volley of arpeggio action is soon contrasted with a chatty but less wide-ranging second theme in the major mode. In the development section, both themes engage in a polite little sparring match, contrapuntally speaking, until an eerie calm settles over the proceedings that announces — to those who have heard this kind of set-up before — that the recapitulation is just around the corner.

Given the restless energy of this movement and its mock vehement tone, the only surprise awaiting the ears of listeners is just how quietly it ends.

Perhaps that is because there is no change in key for the following *Menuetto* and the serious young man composing this work has still more to say in C minor.



This dance-inspired movement is dominated by the alternation of a quirky “tie-over-the-bar” opening theme, with its chromatically descending bass line, and a smoother melody less prone to such frequent “sneezing”.

The contrasting *Trio* section could not be more contrasting, almost resembling the stolid, starchy pacing of a Lutheran chorale. Full marks to the young Mendelssohn, however, for his mastery of chromatic harmony.



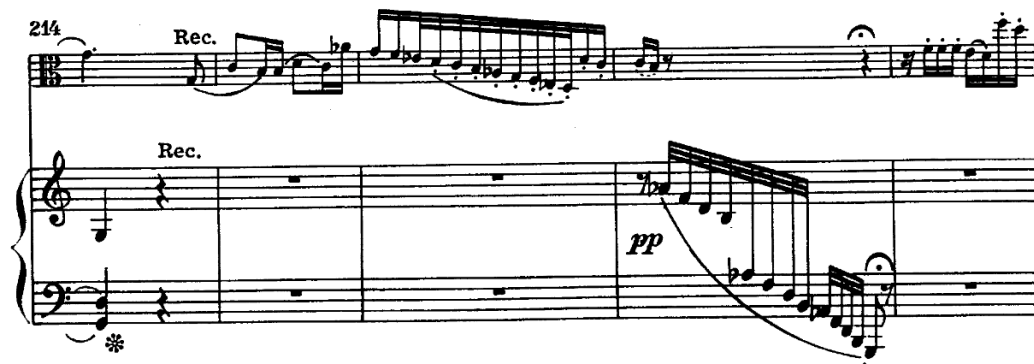
The last movement *Andante con variazioni* seems reluctant to abandon the musical motives used in the preceding *Menuetto*. Its variation theme is marked by the same suspension over the bar line and elements of the chromatically descending bass, as well.



The eight variations that follow are presented not as separate entities but as part of a continuous flow, with no separation between them, in the manner of Beethoven's

Variations in C minor for piano. They start out following traditional procedure by filling in the theme's harmonic template with ornamental filigree and offering a bit of chatty by-play between the instruments. But in Var. 6, the mood changes as the piano begins to roam much more expansively over the keyboard, setting up a change in the very *character* of the movement.

This is confirmed in the aggressive dotted rhythms of Var. 7 and moves into full-on fantasy territory in the last variation, which emerges in the tone colours of a pure and luminous C major. Here we enter a completely different sound world, perhaps inspired by the magical transformations of timbre and texture in the final variations that conclude Beethoven's Sonata in C minor Op. 111. This is a sound world in which vast walls of keyboard sound pulse and shimmer while scraps of thematic material swim about in the swirling mix, culminating in a dramatic viola recitative.



This leads into an increasingly furious coda that gradually recalls the work's original inspiration in the serious character of the C-minor tonality and, in an accelerating whirlwind of 16th notes, brings the movement to an emphatic close.

Clara Schumann

Three Romances Op. 22

When in 1853 Robert Schumann was admitted to a sanatorium after his suicide attempt, the world lost two fine composers, not one, because from that point on, his wife Clara — the love of his life and mother of their eight children — virtually ceased composing. She had a unique voice as a composer, quite separate from that of her husband, but for the next forty years she devoted herself to caring for her family and promoting her husband's works in her position as one of Europe's most respected and admired concert pianists. Her *Three Romances for Violin and Piano*, the last work she composed in that fateful year 1853, gives us the measure of what was lost.

While this work was written for and dedicated to the legendary concert violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), with whom Clara often performed it on tour, it nevertheless is a classic example of *Hausmusik*, music to be played at home, by the hearth, before an audience of friends and loved ones. These *Three Romances* are broadly lyrical without aspiring to achieve dramatic intensity or aiming to make grand statements of any kind. Each begins in an unassuming manner and ends peacefully. There is a Biedermeier warmth and coziness in each that reminds one of

Mendelssohn, while the depth of sonority coming from the middle and lower registers is distinctly Brahmsian.

The *Andante molto* represents well the heartfelt sincerity of feeling in the set as a whole with its warm harmonic drapery, its striking conversational intimacy between the instruments and its melodic lines dimpled with endearing chromatic appoggiaturas.

The image shows the musical score for the *Andante molto* movement. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a Violine staff and a Klavier staff. The Violine staff is marked *Andante molto* and the Klavier staff is marked *pp*. The second system continues the music, with the Violine staff starting at measure 5. The music is in a minor key and features a mix of duple and triple groupings within the bar line.

The composer's way of alternating duple and triple groupings within the bar line gives the melodic flow the naturalness of human speech.

The *Allegretto* movement opens with a plaintive melody in the minor mode made all the more expressive by the yearning intensity of its repeated large leaps.

The image shows the musical score for the *Allegretto* movement. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a Violine staff and a Klavier staff. The Violine staff is marked *Allegretto* and the Klavier staff is marked *p*. The second system continues the music, with the Violine staff starting at measure 5. The music is in a minor key and features a mix of duple and triple groupings within the bar line.

In the middle section, however, these same melodic gestures turn buoyantly cheerful when placed in the major mode and embellished with trills.

In the last movement, marked *Leidenschaftlich schnell* (passionately fast), the piano largely abandons its conversational role, preferring instead to simply furnish the harmonic background to the violinist's wide-ranging and intensely lyrical melodic line.



The rippling, strumming and plucking of the piano's frequently changing accompaniment patterns provides an underlay of textural contrast within this unusually rapturous *romance*.

César Franck

Sonata in A major (arr. for viola and piano)

It will be a while yet before the *Huffington Post* is read by musicologists as a scholarly journal, and yet Alan Elsner, the Huff Po reporter hot on the trail of breaking news in 19th-century Belgian music, is not wide of the mark when he observes in a 29 Nov. 2011 article that:

There is a kind of breathless religious ecstasy to Franck's music—soaring themes; simple, pure harmonies; those ceaseless, swirling, gliding accompaniments. This, one feels, is truly the music of the angels.

The work inspiring such shortness of breath and heady spiritual delirium in the intrepid journalist is, of course, Franck's *Sonata in A major for violin & piano*, a work often played by violists and cellists, as well. It was composed as a wedding present for the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931) and was in fact performed at the violinist's wedding in 1886 by Ysaÿe himself and a wedding-guest pianist.

The *Allegro ben moderato* first movement floats in a world of harmonic uncertainty. It opens with a number of dreamy piano chords, each followed by a simple chordal interval, as if giving the pitches to the instrumentalist, who then obliges by using them to create a gently rocking, barcarolle-like melody, the outline of which will infuse much of the work as a whole.

Allegretto ben Moderato.

Violon.

Piano.

pp

molto dolce

This theme, played by the violin over a simple chordal accompaniment from the piano, builds in urgency until it can hold it no more and a second theme, played by the piano, takes centre stage in a lyrical outpouring of almost melodramatic intensity but ending in a dark turn to the minor.

a tempo sempre forte e largamente

The violin will have none of it, however, and dreams both sleepwalkers back to the major mode for an amicable review of the two themes, both in the home key. The serenity of this movement results from its rhythmic placidness, often featuring a sparse, simple chordal accompaniment in the piano and little rhythmic variation in the wandering pastoral “de-DUM-de-DUM” triplets of the violin.

Where drama breaks out for real is in the *Allegro* second movement, one of the most challenging in the chamber repertoire for the pianist. This sonata-form movement bolts from the starting gate with a swirling vortex of 16ths in the piano, fretting anxiously over a theme in the mid-range that is soon picked up by the violin.

passionato

mf

Its worrisome collection of motives is based on the same small-hop intervals that opened the first movement but reversed in direction and cast in the minor mode. A sunnier mood prevails in the second theme



which, however, ebbs away as both instruments take stock of the ground covered in a sober interlude marked *Quasi lento*.

The development section engages in a full and frank discussion of the two themes until the convulsive agitation of the opening theme returns in the recapitulation. Despite the turbulence roiling at the heart of this movement, it manages to pull a major-mode ending out of a hat for its final cadence.

The slow third movement, a free-form meditation marked *Recitativo-Fantasia*, is bruised with the memory of the first movement's bliss. Its piano opening is almost a bitter parody of the sonata's very first bars.



As this thematic material is brooded over, the violin tries to change the subject several times in distracted flights of fancy, but eventually agrees to join with the piano in a ruminative journey that passes through nostalgic reminiscence to end in heart-wrenching pathos.

The searing intensity of the octave-leap “wailing” motif at the end of this movement is the most profound moment in the sonata. No major-mode ending here.

All tensions are eased, all hearts healed, however, in a last-movement rondo that offers up a simple tuneful melody in continuous alternation with brief sections of contrasting material.



This tune, so harmonically rooted as to suit being presented in strict canonic imitation (like a round), is shaped from the melodic outline of the theme that opened the sonata, bringing its cyclical journey full circle. Even the “wailing” motif from the previous movement is recalled to the stage to give it, too, a happy ending.

British musicologist David Fanning got it right when he intuited the celebratory meaning beneath Franck’s remarkable use of imitative counterpoint for the end of this “wedding present” sonata:

It is hard to resist reading this as a musical symbol of married bliss, especially when the dialogue is placed even closer together, at a distance of half a bar rather than a full bar, on the deliriously happy closing page.

Program notes by
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