

JOSE FRANCH-BALLESTER, clarinet
DAVID FUNG, piano

DOROTHY CHANG (b. 1970)
Afterlight for Clarinet and Piano
(approx. 8 minutes)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)
Sonata in F minor for Clarinet and Piano Op. 120 No. 1
Allegro appassionato
Andante un poco adagio
Allegretto grazioso
Vivace
(approx. 24 minutes)

- Intermission -

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
Fantasiestücke Op. 73
Zart und mit Ausdruck
Lebhaft, leicht
Rasch und mit Feuer
(approx. 11 minutes)

JÖRG WIDMANN (b. 1973)
Five Fragments for Clarinet and Piano
I. Äussert langsam
II. Presto possibile
III. Sehr langsam, frei
IV. Energiegeladen, sehr schnell

V. Langsam beginnen
(approx. 8 minutes)

FRANCIS POULENC (1899-1963)

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

Allegro tristamente

Romanza

Allegro con fuoco

(approx. 14 minutes)

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Dorothy Chang

Afterlight

Dorothy Chang was born in Winfield, Illinois in 1970, and after being educated in the United States, she joined the faculty of the UBC School of Music where she has taught and composed since 2003. Her catalogue of over 80 compositions features chamber and orchestral works as well as stage music for theatre and dance ensembles, often scored for a mix of Chinese and Western instruments.

Afterlight was composed in 2018, originally for soprano saxophone and piano and then adapted for clarinet. The compositional impulse for the work is encapsulated in the title, which she says refers


... to my own interpretation of the word *afterlight*: that of the “light” that remains when someone passes, in the form of memories, shared experiences, a sense of presence even when someone is gone.

This feeling of “lingering memory” is evoked in the evanescent sparkle of the piano’s atonal arpeggiations in the high register that open the work.

AFTERLIGHT

Dorothy Chang

Delicate and Shimmering $\text{♩} = 60$



Against this scintillating sonic backdrop, the clarinet enters in a mood of pensive reflection, sometimes lost in thought over a single long tone, at other times seeming to imitate the arpeggio-like “gapped” melodic lines heard in the piano.

$\text{♩} = 72$ *poco rit.* $\text{♩} = 66$



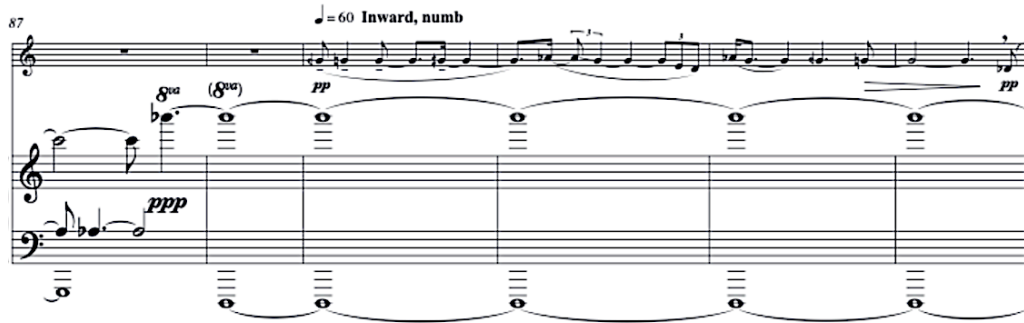
The “scattered” intervallic nature of both melody and accompaniment could be thought of as representing the scattered memories of a person no longer with us.

A solo clarinet cadenza leads into a more intense discussion of musical ideas, culminating in the work’s grand climax.

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This then issues into its diametrically opposed mood state: stunned disbelief.



There follows a return to the opening material and a slow fade into the unreachable realms of memory.

This work is a brilliant portrayal of the misty world of remembering. The two instruments generally stay out of each other's registers, and yet you have the feeling throughout that both are talking about the same thing, but at a remove that represents the distance between our thoughts and our past lives.

Jörg Widmann

Five Fragments for Clarinet and Piano

German clarinetist, conductor and composer Jörg Widmann is among the most frequently performed contemporary composers in the world today. And yet, as he confessed in an interview with the *Hamburger Abendblatt* (23 January 2021),

Mein Problem war immer: zu viele Ideen.

My problem has always been: too many ideas.

He is deeply immersed in the classical repertoire for his instrument, having recently recorded the Brahms Clarinet Sonatas Op. 120 with Sir András Schiff. But early in his career his creative work as a composer was radically experimental, a tendency well represented by his *Five Fragments for Clarinet & Piano* (1997).

In speaking of this work, he confessed to having tired of large-scale forms in favour of the “reduction, abridgement and concentration” of impactful miniatures. Moreover, he wanted the clarinet and piano, his two favourite instruments, to “become strange to him once again.”

The attainment of this goal will be effortless for contemporary audiences as the score is spiked, from start to finish, with what are known as “extended techniques,” i.e., unusual ways of playing the instrument to produce surprising new sounds.

One of the extremes to which he drives his instrument is extremes of range and dynamics, as exemplified in *Fragment I*.

quasi niente (!)

sfz in p

con tutta la forza

stumm / mute

lunga

lunga

lunga

ppp

8b

ped. * ped. *

*) Tasten stumm niederdrücken. Mit der anderen Hand ruhiges *gliss.* über die Saiten des Bereichs. Jeweils nach dem *gliss.* jeden Ton ins Ped.
Press keys down mutely. Slide very calmly over the strings in this area with the other hand. Press the pedal briefly after the gliss.

**) Mit Fingerkuppen auf tiefen Saiten trommeln. /
Drum with fingertips on the lower strings.

Fragment IV delights in extreme registral displacement, to create an almost pointillistic texture.

Musical score for *Fragment IV*. The score consists of three staves. The top staff begins at measure 15 and features a series of notes with extreme registral displacement, marked with dynamics *f*, *ff*, and *fff*. The middle and bottom staves also contain notes with dynamics *ff* and *fff*. The score includes various articulations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins. A small text note at the bottom right of the score reads: "Why does Trump say the US 'already won' the Iran war? | The Bottom Line".

And *Fragment V* explores widely spaced sonorities with extreme dynamics.

V

Musical score for *Fragment V*, featuring Klarinette (B) and Klavier parts. The score includes detailed performance instructions such as *(accel. - -)*, *langsam beginnen / start slowly*, *poco vibr.*, *molto espr. ord. 3*, *solo espr.*, *weich / soft*, *tr*, *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mf*, *ppp*, *tr*, *poco*, *ppp*, *tr*, *poco*, and *ppp*. The score also includes dynamic markings like *p*, *ff*, *dal niente ppp*, *poco pp*, and *pp*. The Klavier part features widely spaced sonorities and extreme dynamics.

This is not a work where you go away humming the tunes, but rather one in which you learn more about the sound-creating potential of these two instruments than you ever thought possible.

Johannes Brahms

Sonata in F minor for Clarinet and Piano Op. 120 No. 1

At a time when European music was turning towards large programmatic orchestral works performed in grandiose public concerts, Brahms continued to write music created from just the basic building blocks of the tonal system, music intended for private performance by small ensembles in front of an audience of connoisseurs. In so doing, he stimulated the growth of a rich new literature of chamber works that featured hitherto neglected instruments such as the clarinet and viola in a leading role.

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.

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The Sonata in F minor Op. 120 No. 1 is in the four canonical movements of the classical tradition: a sonata-form first movement, a serene and poetic slow movement, a gentle, dance-like intermezzo (Brahms' stand-in for the Beethovenian scherzo) and, to conclude, a wonderfully upbeat rondo.

Despite being in 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 feed motivic developments throughout the movement — because with Brahms the Classicist, *everything is motivic*.

Allegro appassionato

The image shows the beginning of the first movement, 'Allegro appassionato', of Brahms' Sonata in F minor, Op. 120 No. 1. The score is written for piano and clarinet. It starts in F minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. The piano part begins with a series of piano octaves, marked 'poco f'. The clarinet part enters with a melodic line, also marked 'poco f'. The piano part then moves to a more active accompaniment, marked 'p'.

This leads directly into the first theme, an expansively broad, yearning melody presented by the clarinet in deep-breathing phrases constructed, like those in the opening bars of the composer's 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 clarinet 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.

Andante un poco Adagio

The score shows a piano melody in the right hand with a 'poco f' dynamic. The left hand features a bass drone with a 'poco f' dynamic. The music is in a slow, evocative tempo.

This exquisitely delicate movement is pervaded by a sense of longing created by its appoggiatura-laden birdsong 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.

Allegretto grazioso

The score shows a piano melody in the right hand with a 'p' dynamic. The left hand features a bass drone with a 'p' dynamic. The music is in a moderate, graceful tempo.

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.

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The score shows a piano melody in the right hand with a 'f' dynamic. The left hand features a bass drone with a 'f' dynamic. The music is in a moderate, graceful tempo.

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.

Vivace

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 three long notes in the score — no matter what the pitch and wherever they occur — seem to remind us of it, even in the closing measures.

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Francis Poulenc Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

Mozart meets Stravinsky — in a Paris cabaret. As unlikely as such a meeting might be in historical terms, it is about as good a description as you can find for the musical style of French composer Francis Poulenc. The directness of his writing, its exuberance of expression, bright sense of tonal colour and theatrical flair owe much to Stravinsky, while his love of balanced phrases, clear formal proportions and transparent textures point fondly back to Mozart. Like his fellow composers in the group known as Les Six, he steered clear of both the vaporous aesthetic refinement of Debussy's Impressionism and the weighty emotional rhetoric of German Romanticism, finding his inspiration instead in the naive sentimentality, carefree tunefulness and lively wit of the music hall, the circus and the cabaret.

Poulenc was first and foremost a melodist, one of the great melodists of the 20th century. His melodic lines are rhythmically square and full of wide intervals, giving them a light, breezy quality. His harmonies are conventional but often extended with added 9ths, 11ths and 13ths, which he treats as tonal colour rather than functional tones that need resolving. This pastel tonal palette of blurry overtone notes fits in perfectly with his love of a “wet” piano sound, drenched in pedal.

* * *

The *Sonata for Clarinet & Piano* (1962) was Poulenc's last completed work. It was premiered in 1963 at Carnegie Hall by Benny Goodman with Leonard Bernstein at the piano. The work displays the composer's trademark good humour, often devolving into impishness, interlarded with melodies simply perfumed with French charm.

The first movement, oxymoronically labelled *Allegro tristamente* (sadly gay), leaps and hops into the business at hand with an almost cartoonishly sassy introduction

I. ALLEGRO TRISTAMENTE

Allegretto ♩ = 136

The musical score is presented in three staves. The top staff is for the Clarinet, the middle for the Piano, and the bottom for the Bass. The time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 136 beats per minute. The dynamics are marked 'ff' (fortissimo). The music begins with a sassy, rhythmic introduction.

before announcing its wandering first theme,

①

p

pp

8ve bassa

which soon adopts a dotted rhythm and continues to wander, over a complacent regular accompaniment in the piano.

②

p

p très doux

Rather than following the German model of sonata form, Poulenc prefers the pattern established by French Baroque composers whereby a contrasting middle section stands in for the “development.”

Poulenc’s middle section begins serenely but is soon animated by this antic arpeggio motif of a distinctly Prokofievian stamp:

⑧ surtout sans presser

p

p doucement monotone

mf

A brief recap of the introduction and first theme then brings the movement to a whimsically mysterious close.

The second movement *Romanza* begins with a teasing recitative and introduction that hints at the gloriously nostalgic melody that will be the movement's main concern.

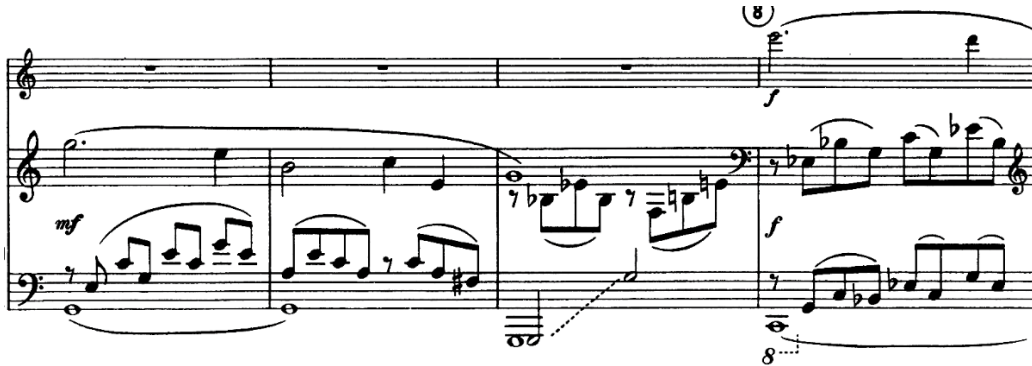
Through a frequent exchange of melodic sighs between the clarinet and piano this melody imprints itself on the listener's ear in the most relaxed way possible.

The *Allegro con fuoco* finale opens with the bustling energy and festive atmosphere of a big-tent circus.

III. ALLEGRO CON FUOCO

This movement is full of bright clarion calls,

interrupted from time to time with patches of carefree melody shared between piano and clarinet.



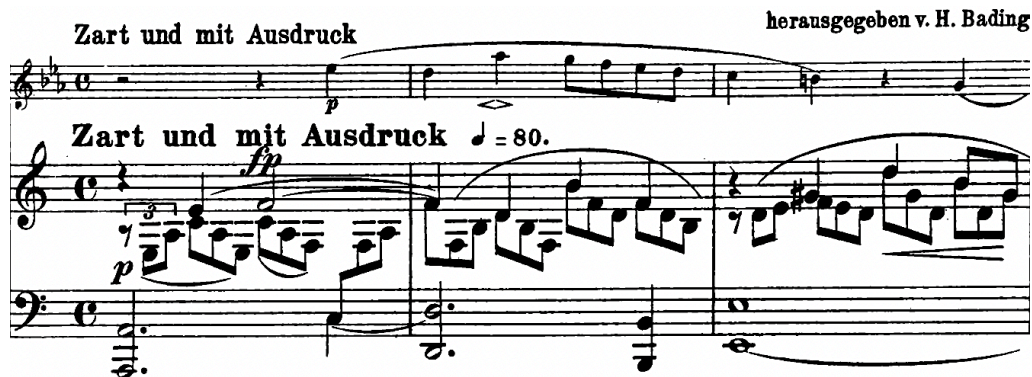
And then a return to the hopscotch-y melodic acrobatics of the movement's opening wraps up this sonata with a wink and a smile.

Robert Schumann Fantasiestücke Op. 73

Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* (Fantasy Pieces) were written in a spurt of inspiration over just two days in February of 1949. They were intended for the home entertainment market, to be performed by professional musicians or talented amateurs in a private setting before family and friends.

Each piece is in ternary (A-B-A) form, and each features a gentle mood of domestic dreaminess, with nary a note of real anger in any bar, just a gentle progression from inner reverie to joyous uplift.

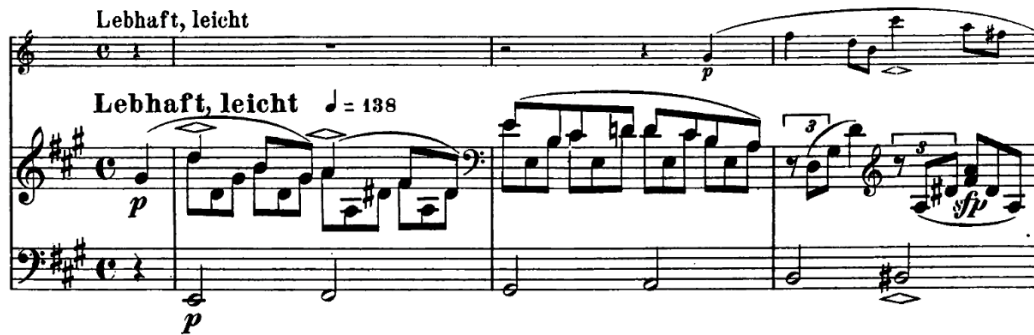
The first piece, labelled *Zart und mit Ausdruck* (Tenderly with expression), establishes a pattern of gentle, rippling triplets in the piano part that will be a major feature of all three movements.



While in a minor key, this first movement is anything but forlorn, largely because of extraordinarily chummy relations between piano and clarinet, which often echo each other's melodic musings in passages such as this.



The second movement, marked *Lebhaft leicht* (Lively, light) differs little in mood, with piano and clarinet singing out vocally inspired melodies cheek-to-cheek in a spirit of rapturous unanimity.



And the way they complete each other's thoughts, like an old married couple, is if anything even cuter and more engaging in this movement.



What had been understated contentment in the first two movements breaks into outright unbuttoned optimism in the finale, the coy, sighing cadencing of the opening theme being merely a stimulus for onward melodic motion.

Rasch und mit Feuer

Rasch und mit Feuer ♩ = 160

Even contrasting passages in the minor mode sound more wistful than sad, slipping in and out of the major mode frequently as they sweep rhapsodically on.

B

The movement ends with an accelerating coda, with the piano trading in its rippling triplets for frothing 16ths as the clarinet sings its little heart out in phrases of increasing joyous urgency.

Coda

Mit Pedal

It is worth noting that by ending this afternoon's recital with this work, our artists are honouring the memory of Brahms who, after performing his two Sonatas Op. 120 with clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld at a private concert, chose to end the event with Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* Op. 73.

Donald Gíslason 2026