

## PROGRAM NOTES by Stephen Rodgers

pitch—clearly a reference to the development section of the previous movement. After a restless, volatile, and playful Scherzo, Brahms returns to the turbulence of the opening. The final movement is agitated and frenzied, relieved only briefly by a recurring chorale-like theme. It is also one of the most thrilling and virtuosic chamber movements Brahms ever composed.

### Piano Trio in C major, Op. 87

The final work on our program is the second of Brahms's three piano trios. In a work of this kind—for not just two chamber musicians but three—a composer of course has even more freedom to explore the interaction of the instruments. One of the most striking aspects of this piece is that Brahms so often creates not so much a dialogue *among* the three instruments as a contest *between* them: the piano functions as one unit, and the violin and cello function as another. Listen, for example, to the opening of the first movement, where the violin and cello begin with a melody played in octaves and the piano enters only belatedly, even awkwardly: the violin and cello play in 3/4, but the piano's rhythms suggest 2/4; the two groups are speaking at cross-purposes. The moods and techniques of the trio vary considerably, from the lilting first movement to the theme-and-variations second movement with its decidedly gypsy/Hungarian tone to the scherzo that one writer has aptly described as sounding like "Mendelssohn in a dark mood." But the contest between these two forces (piano contra violin and cello) recurs throughout. Brahms clearly recognized the novelty of the piece, and he made pains to point it out to his publisher. "You have not yet heard such a beautiful trio from me," he wrote, "and very likely have not published its equal in the last ten years."

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**concert four:** Monday, November 30, 2015  
Clarinet Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 120 No. 2  
Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38  
Trio for clarinet, cello and piano in A minor, Op. 114

**concert five:** Monday, February 29, 2016  
Horn Trio in E-flat major, Op. 40  
Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25

**concert six:** Monday, May 23, 2016  
Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 120 No. 1  
Piano Quartet in A major, Op. 26



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Season 114, Program 83



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## In Beall with Brahms concert three

Fritz Gearhart, violin  
Steven Pologe, cello  
Alexandre Dossin, piano

Beall Concert Hall  
Monday, May 18, 2015 | 7:30 p.m.



## In Beall with Brahms, concert 3

### Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78

Vivace ma non troppo  
Adagio – Più andante – Adagio  
Allegro molto moderato

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

Allegro  
Adagio  
Un poco presto e con sentimento  
Presto agitato

Fritz Gearhart, violin  
Alexandre Dossin, piano

INTERMISSION

Piano Trio in C major, Op. 87

Allegro moderato  
Andante con moto  
Scherzo: Presto  
Finale: Allegro giocoso

Fritz Gearhart, violin  
Steven Pologe, cello  
Alexandre Dossin, piano

## Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78

In the summer of 1878, while vacationing in the beautiful southern Austrian town of Pörttschach, a 55-year-old Johannes Brahms sat down to compose a sonata for piano and violin. He had tried many times before to write a piece in this genre, with no success. (In 1853 Brahms wrote a single scherzo movement, which appeared in the so-called F.A.E. Sonata, a sort of “sonata by committee” in which each movement was written by a different composer. But in the next fifteen years no full-fledged violin sonata had fallen from his pen.) Perhaps it was the success of his beloved Violin Concerto, Op. 77, or perhaps it was the urging of his friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim, for whom he wrote both pieces—in any case, Brahms found the inspiration to see this violin sonata through to completion. The result is a work of true radiance and depth, at once bright and sorrowful. The main theme of the first movement is broad and sweeping, and as sunny as the setting in which it was composed. The constant sixteenth notes of the piano accompaniment become a kind of theme of their own throughout the sonata. The violinist Midori has suggested that the piano’s sixteenths evoke “a gentle flow of water, perhaps of rain or of tears”—a fitting description considering that in the middle movement Brahms references two earlier songs that are in fact about rain and tears: “Regenlied” (Rain Song) and “Nachklang” (Echo), both from his Op. 59 collection. Indeed, tears lie at the heart of this otherwise radiant work. The center of the middle movement contains a kind of funeral march, wedged between the more consoling outer sections. It is the joyous final movement, however, that provides the greatest consolation. Brahms composed this sonata shortly after the death of his 24-year-old godson Felix, the youngest child of Robert and Clara Schumann, and also a violinist. When Clara Schumann played through the finished manuscript, she said, “I could not help bursting into tears of joy over it. . . . I wish the last movement could accompany me to the next world.”

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

If Op. 78 was Brahms’s first successful foray into the genre of the violin sonata, Op. 108, written off and on between 1878 and 1888, was his last. While sorrow and sunshine mingle in the earlier work, here it is mystery and turbulence. The first movement is dark, ruminative, and at times fragmented, as though the music were wandering from one thought to another. The real mystery, though, comes in the development section of this movement, where the piano sounds an ominous low A for almost fifty measures, as the violin floats above. What might have sounded like a rigid composition exercise in the hands of another composer—“write a development section with a single pedal point throughout”—becomes in Brahms’s sonata a stunning exploration of the expressive effects of stasis and motion. The world of the Adagio second movement could hardly be more different from that of the first movement: mystery gives way to lyricism, darkness to light. Essentially an aria for the violin, the movement unfolds in two broad arcs, with the violin playing an expansive melody and then repeating it an octave above. Not all is undisturbed, however: listen for the short transition between the two statements of the theme, where the violin settles onto a low A while the piano plays a pedal point on the same