

## RACHEL SWERDLOW

*viola*

## JOSEPH ADAM

*piano*

*Sonata No. 1*, op. 240

Entrée

Française

Air

Final

Darius Milhaud

1892–1974

*Sonata in E-flat Major*, op. 120, no. 2

Allegro amabile

Allegro appassionato

Andante con moto

Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

The French composer **DARIUS MILHAUD** was enormously prolific as a composer, writing more than 450 numbered works; paradoxically, his legacy is little recognized, and few musicians have any knowledge of even a handful of his works, let alone an encyclopedic overview of his output. Milhaud was thirty years younger than Debussy, being a contemporary of Francis Poulenc, George Auric and Arthur Honegger, with whom for some time he formed the well-known *Groupe des Six*. The six composers wrote typically French music with a wink of the eye, quoting idioms and styles of the past, undermining existing rules, and sprinkling serious classical music with touches of ballroom, café-chansons and jazz, and in Milhaud's case, Latin American influences (Milhaud spent 1917–1919 in Brazil as the personal secretary to Paul Claudel, France's ambassador to Brazil). Conspicuous in all this was their interest in the musical heritage, in dated forms, in the clear lines of classicism. Brought up in a Jewish family in Aix-en-Provence, after the Nazi invasion of France Milhaud saw no option but to leave his homeland and immigrate to the USA, where he was offered a teaching post at Mills College in Oakland, California. During his seven American years he was very active as a teacher and composer, despite problems deriving from a rheumatic complaint that had plagued him since he was young.

Milhaud's three works for viola and piano, including the *Sonata No. 1*, op. 240, date from 1943-44. In this piece Milhaud glances back at the Baroque suite, despite the title "sonata;" it is an exercise in the noble art of re-inventing thematic and melodic elements borrowed from the baroque tradition. Milhaud claimed the work was based on "unpublished and anonymous themes of the eighteenth century," and it brings to mind other 20th-century works of a similar nature, such as Igor Stravinsky's *Pulcinella Suite* or Ottorini Respighi's *Ancient Airs and Dances*; though it's also quite possible that the themes were Milhaud's own, and given an invented lineage, much as Fritz Kreisler's "discoveries" of unknown baroque violin pieces were in fact his own original compositions.

The first movement starts in the manner of a minuet in strict canon between the viola and piano, and the second is clearly a German 'allemande' dance, even though Milhaud ironically called it a 'Française'. Thus, from the New World, Milhaud created a light-footed homage to the Baroque music of 'old' Europe, with references to the French style, and to Johann Sebastian Bach in the first and third movements. The final movement is a combination of a Corrente with a central Bourée and features an extremely complex interplay of rhythmic shifts towards the end, when the piano proceeds in duple cross rhythms while the viola stubbornly continues in triple meter. As a whole, the Sonata comes across as a light-hearted homage to Baroque instrumental music, with references to the French style, especially in the first and third movements, and to J. S. Bach. There are nice ironic touches in the harmonic structure, the handling of rhythm, and the use of thematic material of varied origins.

Chamber music played a vital part in the creative work of **JOHANNES BRAHMS**. Throughout his career, he was intensely attracted to this form of composition, and he produced a substantial number of works for various ensembles, most often combinations of two instruments, but also as many as six. He wrote for the usual combinations, such as violin and piano and the string quartet, but he also experimented with unusual ensembles like horn, violin, and piano (*Trio*, op. 40) and sextets of pairs of violins, violas, and violoncellos (*Sextets*, op. 18 and 36). His chamber works rank among the most significant and at the same time the most intimate and personal contributions Brahms bestowed upon the music world.

How irresistible an attraction chamber music was for Brahms is revealed by an episode which occurred in the last years of his life. After he had passed his sixtieth birthday, Brahms, always prone to ruthless self-criticism, insisted that his creative work had come to a stop. He turned to a project that required more technical skill than real inspiration and arranged a number of folk songs for voice and piano. When he delivered the manuscript to his publisher, he ominously remarked that he had thus expressed his "adieu as a composer."

This pessimistic attitude dissolved, however, as ideas for new chamber music compositions gradually took shape. During his 1894 summer holidays spent in Bad Ischl, Austria, Brahms composed two sonatas for the clarinet and piano. Together with the *Clarinet Trio* and *Quintet* written there three years earlier, they constituted Brahms's inspiration from the artistry of Richard Mühlfeld, principal clarinetist in Hans von Bülow's orchestra at the ducal court in Meiningen. In arranging these sonatas for the viola, Brahms was not merely being practical but giving expression to an old instrumental predilection. Like the cello, the viola had often come in for preferential treatment in his music. In the first movement of the *Deutsches Requiem*, completed in 1868, and the whole of the even earlier *Second Serenade* for orchestra, Brahms had experimented with an entirely violin-less string section. Now he gave the viola two sonatas in Classical style, in a way that could hardly have been more convincing, musically and technically, had the pieces been conceived for viola from the first.

Most prominent violists in the 20th century were convinced that the viola version of these sonatas probably had been entrusted to some anonymous arranger employed by Brahms' publisher Fritz Simrock, and felt free to introduce their own "improvements" to their editions. Several generations of violists learned these sonatas from editions undertaken by great violists such as William Primrose, Lionel Tertis, and Milton Katims that followed this philosophy. Much of the dissatisfaction with Brahms' viola parts was his tendency to transpose occasional passages down an octave from the clarinet original, and it was perhaps felt that it was an unnecessary concession to players of lesser ability. His transpositions were determined rather by the different tonal characteristics of clarinet and viola, and reveal his sensitive composer's ear, rather than any practical compromise. The great English music theorist and commentator Donald Francis Tovey wrote that the viola version is:

on quite a different plane from the use of a viola as substitute for the clarinet in the quintet and trio, though Brahms authorized the issue of parts so transcribed. But in the trio and quintet the relation of the clarinet to the string parts makes it impossible to alter the position of anything, and transcription accordingly reveals all the points where the viola fails to represent a clarinet. But with these sonatas, Brahms could use a free hand... the piano part is unaltered, but the viola part is a fine demonstration of the dif-

ferent characters of the instruments. The viola is querulous and strained just where the cantabile of the clarinet is warmest. The lowest octave of the clarinet is of a dramatic blue-grotto hollowness and coldness, where the fourth string of the viola is of rich and pungent warmth. A comparison of Brahms's viola part with his original clarinet part makes every difference of his kind vividly real, and these viola versions deserve frequent performances in public.

An interesting aside – Brahms also made a version of these two sonatas for violin and piano, and clearly regarded them as independent works, as he revised not only the original clarinet parts much more extensively than he did for the viola version, but also rewrote the piano part to achieve a thoroughly convincing violin and piano idiom. Though occasionally recorded, these versions are rarely if ever performed.

The *Sonata in E-flat* is compactly constructed. It unusually dispenses of both a distinct opening sonata-allegro movement and slow movement, combining the two into a single movement. Marked “Allegro amabile,” the only time Brahms ever used this tempo marking, it is imbued with the noble and serene beauty one admires in Brahms's mature compositions. The center of the work is an impetuous, agitated Allegro appassionato in the parallel E-flat minor; a kind of dark-hued scherzo is presented here, its middle section in B major conjuring up the broadly conceived, highly emotional tunes used by Brahms in his youth. A delightfully folk song-like set of variations serves as the finale. The fifth variation, in tempo allegro, invokes an excited mood, and after an episode of somewhat calmer character, Brahms's valedictory chamber music work ends with a coda of cadenza-like brilliance.

**RACHEL SWERDLOW** has been a member of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra viola section since 1987. Originally from New York, she attended Juilliard's Pre-College Division, the Curtis Institute of Music, and graduated with highest honors from the State University of New York at Stony Brook with a B.A. in Music History and Theory. She earned a Master's degree in viola performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she also taught music history to undergraduates, and coached chamber music in the school's Prep Department. Rachel's principal teachers include Eugene Becker, John Graham, and Isadore Tinkleman.

Rachel was a Fellow at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, attended the Taos, N.M. Chamber Music School and The Quartet Program in Troy, N.Y. She served as principal viola of the Santa Rosa Symphony and the Colorado Philharmonic, and is a regular participant in the Grand Teton Music Festival. She has taught viola at the Cornish College of the Arts and coached at Music Northwest, Chamber Music Madness and Yakima Music en Accion, an El Sistema program in Eastern Washington. Rachel is the founder of the Seattle Chamber Players and a co-founder of the Fulton Street Chamber Players. She has twice rafted down the Grand Canyon, playing string quartet concerts inside canyons and on the river. Rachel has performed as a guest artist with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, running, and working on her old house.

**JOSEPH ADAM** was first appointed Cathedral Organist at St. James Cathedral in 1993, and was named Director of Music in 2018. There he leads a program that includes three adult choirs and three youth choirs that provides music for nearly 600 services annually, as well as an extensive concert series that presents a wide range of choral and organ programs. A dedicated educator, for twenty years he taught organ and harpsichord as a faculty member at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma. Continuing this work, he was named Artist in Residence in Organ at the University of Washington in 2019. As Resident Organist of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra since 2003, he has performed regularly in the keyboard section of the orchestra, undertaking organ, harpsichord, piano and celesta parts, as well as annual solo recitals. His playing received international attention when he was awarded the First Prize in the St. Albans International Organ Competition in 1991, one of the most prestigious organ competitions in the world. His subsequent performances have included recitals in notable venues throughout Europe and America. During the coming season, he will be a part of a series of recitals at St. James Cathedral that will present performances of the complete organ works of Louis Vierne in celebration of the 150th anniversary of

the composer's birth. His performances last season included recitals at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, St. Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha, and Stanford University. He also gave performances of the Poulenc Concerto and Respighi Suite for Organ and Strings with the North Carolina Symphony at the new Cathedral of the Holy Name of Jesus in Raleigh. Joseph Adam holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in piano performance from The University of Iowa, and the Performer's Certificate in Organ from the Eastman School of Music; he is a Candidate for the DMA at the University of Washington, and concertizes as a member of the Windwerk Artists cooperative.

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# Livestreamed Concerts & Musical Prayer ❖ Fall, 2020

## St. James Cathedral ❖ Seattle

### *Friday Musical Prayer in the Cathedral*

Join us each Friday evening at 6:30pm as our Cathedral Musicians and friends present meditative music to soothe the soul and bring a quiet end to a busy week.

**October 16** ♦ Meaghan Guterman, *soprano*, with Joseph Adam, *organ & piano*

**October 23** ♦ Paul Taub, *flute*

**October 30** ♦ Eliza Woodyard, *soprano*, with Samuel Libra, *organ*

**November 6** ♦ Mark Hilliard Wilson, *guitar*

**November 13** ♦ John Carrington, *harp*

**November 20** ♦ Alexander White, *trumpet*, with Joseph Adam, *organ*

*The Cathedral Music website will have updates and additions to this schedule as it develops.*

### *The complete organ works of Louis Vierne*

The French composer Louis Vierne, organist of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris from 1900 until his death in 1937, left us an invaluable legacy in his compositions for the organ. We continue our observance of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vierne's birth with a survey of his music written for the King of Instruments. Each program is livestreamed at 7:00pm and is approximately forty minutes in length.

**Wednesday, October 21** ♦ Joseph Adam, Cathedral Organist ♦ *Fantasia Pieces, Book I*

**Thursday, November 19** ♦ Samuel Libra, Cathedral Associate Organist ♦ *Symphony No. 4 in G Minor*

**Tuesday, December 1** ♦ Joseph Adam, Cathedral Organist ♦ *Symphony No. 6 in B Minor*

**Date TBA** ♦ Joseph Adam, Cathedral Organist ♦ *Symphony No. 5 in A Minor*

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### *Chamber Music for strings and piano by Johannes Brahms*

The chamber music of Johannes Brahms is among the most treasured and beloved music composed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Join us in these programs, each featuring one of the sonatas written for strings and piano, with musicians from the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. Each program is livestreamed at 7:00pm, and is approximately forty-five minutes in length.

**Tuesday, October 27** ♦ Walter Gray, *violoncello*, with Joseph Adam, *piano* ♦ Herbolzheimer: *Five Elegies for solo Cello* ♦ Brahms: *Sonata in F Minor*, op. 99

**Tuesday, November 10** ♦ Roberta Hansen Downey, *violoncello*, with Joseph Adam, *piano* ♦ Clarke: *Sonata* ♦ Brahms: *Sonata in E Minor*, op. 38

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