

Program Note

J. S. Bach - Cello Suite No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1008, Prelude

The Prelude from Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suite No. 2 in D Minor is a remarkable display of Bach's ability to craft profound emotional depth using a single melodic line. Composed during his time in Köthen around 1717-1723, this suite is one of six originally written for unaccompanied cello. However, its timeless appeal has led to adaptations for various other instruments, including the viola. The Prelude begins with a series of arpeggiated figures that immediately set a somber and introspective mood. As the piece unfolds, it evolves into a rich harmonic exploration, allowing for moments of expressive freedom despite its apparent simplicity. Its improvisatory character, combined with its intricate structure, provides the performer an opportunity to explore contrasts between tension and release, evoking a journey through both meditative calm and underlying intensity. Playing this piece on the viola adds a unique warmth and depth, bringing out the dark, resonant qualities of the instrument, making the music's emotional layers even more poignant.

Franz Schubert - Sonata D 821 "Arpeggione"

Franz Schubert's Sonata in A Minor, D 821, known as the "Arpeggione Sonata," was composed in 1824 for the arpeggione—a short-lived instrument that combined elements of both the guitar and the cello. Though the instrument itself faded into obscurity, the sonata has continued to captivate audiences, often performed today on the viola or cello, where it takes on a new richness and expressive depth.

The sonata unfolds over three movements, each showcasing Schubert's unique gift for melody and emotional expression:

I. Allegro moderato

The first movement opens with a lyrical, song-like theme introduced by the viola, setting a gentle and reflective tone. This theme is reminiscent of Schubert's Lieder, characterized by its flowing lines and expressive phrasing. The dialogue between the viola and piano creates an intimate atmosphere, with the piano providing delicate arpeggios that enhance the melodic warmth of the viola. As the movement progresses, there are moments of both tenderness and tension, with dynamic shifts that explore a range of emotions. In the development section, listen for the more agitated passages where the viola takes on a stormier character before the movement resolves with a return to the opening theme, now imbued with a deeper sense of poignancy.

II. Adagio

The second movement, in the key of E major, stands out as a moment of introspection and calm. The viola begins with a serene, lyrical melody that is both tender and contemplative. The piano accompaniment remains gentle and understated, creating a sense of spaciousness that allows the viola's expressive line to shine. Throughout this movement, subtle harmonic shifts evoke a feeling of longing and nostalgia. The interaction between the viola's melodic phrases and the piano's supportive chords creates a heartfelt dialogue, reminiscent of an intimate conversation. This movement's delicate beauty is a testament to Schubert's ability to convey profound emotion through simplicity.

III. Allegretto

The sonata concludes with a lively Allegretto, showcasing Schubert's playful and lighthearted side. This movement features a dance-like theme that captures the spirit of a folk dance, full of rhythmic vitality and joyful energy. The viola presents the main theme with a sense of playful exuberance, while the piano accompaniment dances alongside. As the movement progresses, Schubert introduces variations of the main theme, filled with

syncopations and unexpected turns, creating a delightful interplay between the instruments. One of the most charming moments comes when the viola presents a lively variation, almost as if improvising on the spot, leading to a spirited and jubilant conclusion.

Together, these two works—a Baroque masterpiece by Bach and a late Classical gem by Schubert—offer a profound exploration of emotional depth and lyrical beauty. While Bach's Prelude delves into introspective and contemplative territories, Schubert's Sonata balances tender lyricism with joyful dance-like themes. In both pieces, the viola's rich, warm timbre allows for a uniquely expressive performance, inviting the listener to experience a journey through contrasting moods and timeless musical expression.