

PROGRAM

Johannes Brahms

Viola Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 120 No. 2

23"

- I. Allegro amabile
- II. Appassionato, ma non troppo Allegro
- III. Andante con moto

-- INTERMISSION 5" --

Dimitri Shostakovich

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147

35"

- I. Moderato
- II. Allegretto
- III. Adagio

PROGRAM NOTES

Johannes Brahms

Viola Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 120 No. 2 (1894)

Known as a virtuosic pianist and a meticulous composer, Johannes Brahms was hailed as one of the leading composers of the Romantic era, often regarded as one of the “Three Bs” alongside Bach and Beethoven. Originally written for the clarinet, the two viola sonatas constitute some of the last chamber works that Brahms wrote.

As compared to the stormy F-minor sonata, the second sonata comprises much sweeter, gentler lines that reflect the romanticism of Brahms’ compositional style. This lyricism is displayed in the opening melody of the *Allegro amabile*, which presents a graceful theme that is continually developed and transformed throughout the movement.

The fiery scherzo melody of the second movement is complete with rich accompaniment in the piano. In contrast, the *Sostenuto* trio section introduces a charming theme that moves into something more resolute in nature, before returning to the scherzo.

The *Andante con moto* takes a theme-and-variation approach, transforming the dotted rhythm theme into six variations, each with its own distinctive texture and mood. Closing off the sonata is a joyous and triumphant flourish in the home key of E-flat major.

Dimitri Shostakovich

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147 (1975)

This sonata is the final work that Shostakovich wrote, completed only weeks before his death. The musical material reflects the turbulent life of the composer during the reign of the Soviet Union, expressed through moments of despair and grim humor.

The *Moderato* begins with a sparsely textured open string *pizzicato* in the viola, later joined by a mysterious atonal passage in the piano. The quiet atmosphere is broken by a dramatic outburst carried by both instruments, before returning with an echo of the opening to close off the movement.

Contrasting both of the outer movements is the sarcastic scherzo of the *Allegretto*. Instances of bitonality are used throughout, as a means of injecting humor. Much of the march- and dance-like motifs were drawn from *The Gamblers*, an earlier, unfinished opera by the composer. As a final hint toward the comic nature of the scherzo, the movement's ending comes abruptly, leaving it unresolved.

The *Adagio* is often regarded as a homage to Beethoven, including notable quotations from the earlier composer's *Moonlight Sonata*. After all the darkness and turmoil of the past half an hour of music, the sonata resolves on a quiet C major chord, bringing closure to what Shostakovich himself described as a "radiant" finale. Despite that, however, the last *morendo* marking seems to indicate the composer's knowledge of his impending demise, bringing a somber end to the work.