

## Program Notes

### **Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)**

#### **Sonata for Viola and Piano No. 2 in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2**

Near the end of his life, Johannes Brahms, who had once declared he would stop composing, found himself inspired anew by the sound of the clarinet—and, later, by the rich voice of the viola. His Op. 120 sonatas, originally written for clarinet but transcribed by Brahms himself for viola, offer a profound glimpse into his late style: introspective, lyrical, and full of warm, autumnal colors.

The second sonata, in E-flat major, is especially radiant. It opens with a flowing *Allegro amabile*, filled with generous, song-like themes. The *Allegro appassionato* middle movement contrasts stormy outbursts with tender interludes, before leading into the final *Andante con moto*, where Brahms spins a series of variations on a gentle theme. Throughout, the viola sings with a mellow, human voice, inviting the listener into an intimate conversation.

### **Béla Bartók (1881–1945)**

#### **Viola Concerto, Sz. 120**

The Viola Concerto was Béla Bartók's final work, left unfinished at his death in 1945 and later completed by his friend and colleague Tibor Serly. Written during Bartók's difficult final years in the United States, the concerto carries a touching sense of resilience, humor, and longing.

Structured in three movements that flow almost seamlessly, the concerto showcases the viola's versatility—its ability to whisper, dance, and proclaim. Folk-like melodies and rhythmic vitality animate the outer movements, while the central *Adagio* offers a deep, poignant meditation. Bartók's affinity for blending Eastern European folk idioms with classical form is evident throughout, creating a piece that feels both timeless and deeply personal.

Despite its origins in hardship, Bartók's Viola Concerto remains a celebration of life and the expressive power of music—a fitting tribute to the spirit of a composer who found beauty even in his final days.