

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78 (“Regensonate”)

Composed between 1878 and 1879, Johannes Brahms’s Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major stands as one of his most intimate and lyrical chamber works. Often referred to as the “Rain Sonata” (Regensonate), the piece draws inspiration from Brahms’s own song *Regenlied* (“Rain Song”), Op. 59, No. 3. This song, with its nostalgic reflection on childhood and memory, provides both thematic material and emotional atmosphere throughout the sonata.

The work was written during summers Brahms spent in the Austrian countryside, particularly in Pörschach, where the natural surroundings deeply influenced his compositional voice. Unlike virtuosic display pieces of the Romantic era, this sonata emphasizes poetic expression and close dialogue between violin and piano, treating both instruments as equal partners.

The sonata unfolds in three movements:

I. Vivace ma non troppo

The opening movement begins with a gentle, flowing theme introduced by the piano and soon echoed by the violin. The music evokes a sense of warmth and calm, yet beneath its surface lies a subtle complexity in rhythm and harmonic development. Brahms avoids overt brilliance, instead favoring a restrained, introspective character.

II. Adagio

The second movement offers a deeply expressive and contemplative contrast. It unfolds with hymn-like serenity, interrupted by a more agitated middle section. The dialogue between violin and piano becomes increasingly intense before returning to a peaceful close, suggesting a journey from reflection to emotional depth and back again.

III. Allegro molto moderato

The final movement brings back thematic material from *Regenlied*, unifying the entire sonata. Its gentle, rocking rhythm evokes falling rain and a sense of bittersweet nostalgia. Rather than a triumphant conclusion, the sonata ends with quiet resignation and poetic stillness.

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931)

Sonata No. 3 in D minor, “Ballade,” Op. 27

Composed in 1923, Eugène Ysaÿe’s Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27, are among the most significant works for solo violin since Bach. Each sonata is dedicated to a prominent violinist of the time; the Third Sonata, “Ballade,” is dedicated to George Enescu.

Unlike the other sonatas in the set, the “Ballade” is written in a single continuous movement. It begins with a *Lento molto sostenuto*, featuring improvisatory, recitative-like passages that evoke a sense of storytelling. This leads directly into the *Allegro in tempo giusto e con bravura*, where the music becomes energetic and virtuosic, filled with rapid passages, double stops, and dramatic contrasts.

Blending Baroque influence with a modern harmonic language, Ysaÿe explores the full expressive and technical range of the violin. The “Ballade” is both a powerful narrative work and a virtuosic showpiece, demanding not only technical mastery but also strong musical imagination.

Amy Beach (1867–1944)
Romance for Violin and Piano, Op. 23

Composed in 1893, Amy Beach’s Romance for Violin and Piano is a lyrical and expressive work that reflects her distinctive voice within the late Romantic tradition. As one of the first prominent American female composers, Beach was known for her rich harmonic language and gift for melody.

The piece unfolds in a single, flowing movement, characterized by a warm, singing violin line supported by a richly textured piano accompaniment. Its structure is free and rhapsodic, allowing the music to develop organically rather than following a strict formal design.

Marked by expressive phrasing and subtle emotional shifts, the Romance moves between moments of intimacy and gentle passion. Beach’s writing highlights the violin’s vocal quality, while the piano provides both harmonic depth and expressive dialogue.

Elegant and heartfelt, this work remains a beloved miniature in the violin repertoire, admired for its charm, lyricism, and emotional sincerity.

Henryk Wieniawski (1835–1880)
Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 15

Henryk Wieniawski’s Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 15, is a brilliant example of the 19th-century virtuoso tradition. Composed during his early career, the work showcases both his technical mastery as a violinist and his flair for expressive, idiomatic writing.

The piece is built on an original, lyrical theme, followed by a series of contrasting variations that highlight different aspects of violin technique. These include rapid passagework, double stops, harmonics, and elegant bowing styles, all demanding exceptional control and precision.

While virtuosic in nature, the variations also display charm and musical character, moving between playful, lyrical, and dazzling moods. Wieniawski balances technical brilliance with expressive nuance, ensuring the work remains engaging beyond its showpiece qualities.

A staple of the violin repertoire, this piece exemplifies Wieniawski’s ability to combine Romantic lyricism with dazzling virtuosity.