

DARK MATTER

3:30PM

SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 2024

REARDON THEATRE



Johannes BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)
Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60

1. *Allegro non troppo*
2. *Scherzo. Allegro*
3. *Andante*
4. *Finale. Allegro comodo*

Helena Rathbone *Violin*
Christopher Moore *Viola*
Timo-Veikko Valve *Cello*
Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

Grażyna BACEWICZ (1909 – 1969)
Piano Quintet No. 1

1. *Moderato molto espressivo – Allegro – Tempo I*
2. *Presto*
3. *Grave*
4. *Con passione*

Orava Quartet
Daniel Kowalik *Violin*
David Dalseno *Violin*
Thomas Chawner *Viola*
Karol Kowalik *Cello*

Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

Johannes BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)
Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60

1. *Allegro non troppo*
2. *Scherzo. Allegro*
3. *Andante*
4. *Finale. Allegro comodo*

Along with the First Piano Concerto, Brahms' three piano quartets all have their origins in the mid to late 1850s, a time of life-changing emotional upheaval for the young composer. In the space of less than three years, Brahms met and developed a close relationship with Robert and Clara Schumann, but then after Robert's attempted suicide a few months later, Brahms moved to Düsseldorf to help Clara with the care of her seven children, all the while trying to reconcile his burgeoning love for her with his respect and admiration for her husband, who finally died in July 1856.

As the darkest and most dramatic of Brahms' piano quartets, it is the Third Piano Quartet that most reflects the intensity of this turbulent period. Its composition proved so thorny that while the first two piano quartets were finished in 1861, the third was only finally completed in 1875. Brahms implicitly acknowledged the influence of his romantic preoccupations with Clara on the music when he wrote to his publisher, "...you might display a picture on the title page. Namely a head – with a pistol pointing at it. Now you can form an idea of the music! I will send you my photograph for this purpose!" Brahms was referring tongue-in-cheek to Goethe's *Werther*, where the protagonist, tortured by unrequited love for a married woman, shoots himself in the head.

The quartet opens starkly with a single forte chord in the piano, like the toll of a bell, answered by strained, sighing figures in the strings which immediately develop into a transposed version of the 'Clara' theme – a personal musical motif used by Schumann for his wife. Despite the warmth of the second subject and flashes of heroic energy in the development, the movement ends darkly in C minor. Brahms disperses this sombre atmosphere with the ensuing scherzo, whose driving, pulsating rhythms and capricious shifts of mood evoke some kind of fantastical cavalcade.

A feeling of calm and tranquillity is finally reached in the idyllic third movement, an amorous andante ushered in with a luminous solo on the cello, which soon becomes a duet with the violin. Brahms' good friend and first biographer Max Kalbeck saw in this movement a covert declaration of love for Clara Schumann. The finale flows gently into being with a whimsically graceful melody in the violin over a bubbling quaver accompaniment in the piano. Though outbursts of agitation and stormy passion pervade the movement, Brahms always undercuts the frenzy, keeping the music enshrouded in a veil of twilight mystery. © Douglas Rutherford, 2024

Grażyna BACEWICZ (1909 – 1969)

Piano Quintet No. 1

1. *Moderato molto espressivo – Allegro – Tempo I*
2. *Presto*
3. *Grave*
4. *Con passione*

Pioneering composer, virtuoso violinist and writer of novels and short stories, Grażyna Bacewicz is hailed for her music's technical brilliance, eloquent lyricism, and seamless fusion of neoclassical elements with Polish folk styles. Dating from 1952, the First Piano Quintet was written immediately in the wake of a number of major works, including the Fourth Violin Concerto, the First Cello Concerto, the Second Symphony and the Fourth String Quartet, for which she won first prize at the International Composers' Competition in Belgium. As with all of her greatest works, the quintet displays an assured mixture of tradition and experimentation, exquisite formal design and raw expressive power.

The first movement opens – and closes – with a mysterious prologue/epilogue, variously brooding and ecstatic. In between sits the main allegro section, which balances fast, rhythmic material in a neoclassical style with slower, lyrical, more romantically-infused music. The second movement is an intensely astringent scherzo based on the *oberek*, a Polish folk dance similar to the *mazurka*. The tragic third movement holds the quintet's most expressive music, with anguished melodies in the strings over heavy chords in the piano building to an impassioned lamentation. The finale suddenly erupts in a state of hysteria, though eventually the tumult gives way to a deep, undulating figure in the piano, over which the cello spins an alluring melody. The tension between these two opposing themes drives the music forward, culminating in a fiercely energetic coda. © Douglas Rutherford, 2024