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## **Program Notes for CMSFW September 17, 2016 Concert**

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### **“The Many Faces of Romanticism”**

#### **Four Pieces for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano from Op.83 Max Bruch (1838-1920)**

Mention Bruch’s name and three works come to mind: the Violin Concerto, the *Scottish Fantasy*, and *Kol Nidrei*.

As it happens, this gifted contemporary of Brahms was also a prolific composer of opera and oratorio, chamber and choral music, songs, and solo keyboard works. Chamber music was an early interest that he sustained throughout a long career. His Septet, composed in 1849 when he was all of eleven, shows astounding promise for a boy who had only begun composing two years prior.

The Op.87 pieces date from six *decades* later. Bruch composed them for his son Max Felix, an excellent clarinetist. The younger Bruch played the first performances in Cologne and Hamburg in 1909, earning critical praise that compared him favorably to Richard Mühlfeld, the Meiningen clarinetist who inspired Brahms’s last four chamber works.

Bruch’s combination of viola with clarinet and piano was still unusual. The most distinguished precedent was Mozart’s so-called *Kegelstatt* Trio, K.498 of 1786. Schumann had also written for the ensemble: his *Märchenerzählungen* [Fairy Tales], Op.132. A lesser known trio by Bruch’s older contemporary Carl Reinecke deserves to be heard more often.

In its entirety, Opus 83 consists of eight movements; however, Bruch counseled against programming the entire group, regarding them as independent pieces. Mr. Cohen, Mr. Young, and Ms. Chang have selected four. A free suite of character pieces, they have diverse key centers (sometimes within individual movements) and flexible form. Bruch elicits particular warmth from clarinet and viola, while the piano tends to maintain a supportive textural role. The opening piece, No.6, *Nocturne: Andante con moto*, is representative, with keyboard providing introductions to, and transitions between, big vocal solos for viola and clarinet. Bruch’s luscious themes shift ambiguously between minor and major mode. The duet writing is particularly graceful.

No.4, an *Allegro agitato* in D minor, bursts out of the gate at breakneck pace. Bruch fuses Mendelssohnian lightness with Schumannesque impetuosity. Alternating a nervous first theme with a more expansive second melody, Bruch delivers a movement of bracing virtuosity.

Bruch loved folk music and incorporated traditional tunes from many cultures into his music, including Scottish, Hebrew, Russian, Celtic, and Swedish. His Op.83, No.5, *Rumänische*

*Melodie* [Romanian Melody] falls into this category. Arpeggiated piano chords support a melancholy viola solo in F minor. When the clarinet joins, the texture becomes more imitative as the two upper voices converse freely. Their music swells to an expressive climax above swirling piano figuration. A unison restatement of the Romanian theme furnishes the mournful coda.

This afternoon's set concludes with No.3, *Andante con moto*. It opens with an accompanied recitative for viola in C-sharp minor, then switches to a reverent *Andante* in A major for clarinet and piano. After a reprise of the recitative, another key change heralds a closing duet.

At the encouragement of his publisher Fritz Simrock, Bruch arranged the Op.83 pieces in alternative versions for violin, viola, and piano, and clarinet, cello, and piano. His correspondence indicates he also considered harp as an alternative to piano. Though he never published such an arrangement, the keyboard arpeggiation of several movements does call harp to mind.

### **Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Violoncello, and Piano Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)**

An excellent performer, Hindemith played violin, viola, clarinet and piano, and also conducted. He was better known as a string player early in his career, and had become concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra by the time his was twenty. He was a member of several prominent string quartets as either second violinist or violist, achieving sufficient renown to abandon his opera orchestra work in 1923.

Beginning in 1921, he was associated with the newly-founded Donaueschingen Festival, which was conceived as a venue for the advancement of contemporary music. Hindemith played a seminal role in its programming and performances through 1926. His reputation as a composer grew during these years; indeed, he was dubbed one of the 'bad boys' of German music, experimenting with then radical techniques. By the mid-1920s, however, he had settled into a neoclassic style dubbed 'New Objectivity' by contemporary German critics. His music from this period emphasizes linear counterpoint and favors Baroque forms. Over the next decade, he consciously embrace the Austro-German heritage of classic and romantic music.

His Clarinet Quartet dates from 1938, a tumultuous time in Germany. Europe was on the cusp of world war. Hindemith was outspoken in his criticism and disapproval of Nazi ideology, and had fallen into disfavor with Hitler's cultural ministers. As early as 1933, they condemned his music as degenerate. In November 1934, they declared an official boycott of performances of Hindemith's music.

Although he was not Jewish, his wife Gertrude had Jewish blood. The Nazis started persecuting her family about the time that Hindemith began work on his opera *Mathis der Maler*, widely considered to be his most important composition of the 1930s. Nazi propaganda and policies resulted in the first performance of the opera being banned in Berlin. Instead, it took place in Zürich in 1935.

By this time, Hindemith had begun to think about leaving Germany permanently. He and Gertrude settled first in Switzerland in 1938. By 1940 they were in New York. The Clarinet Quartet barely preceded the outbreak of war, and was first performed in the Swiss Canton of Valais in June 1938.

Audience members who know their chamber music will recognize its instrumentation – clarinet, violin, cello, and piano – as matching that of Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* [Quartet for the End of Time]. Hindemith's piece actually preceded Messiaen's by two years. The two works could not be farther apart in conception.

By the mid-1930s, Hindemith was a firmly neoclassical composer working within traditional sonata structures. His harmonic language may be described as expanded tonality, and each of his movements has perceptible contrasts in key centers. He believed strongly in the power of melody, and also in the standard structural building block of four-measure phrases. The opening *Mäßig bewegt* [Moderately quick] features three clearly defined themes, all based on the interval of a fourth. Piano opens, then each of the other three instruments has its turn with the first theme in a contrapuntal texture. All four instruments share the lyrical second theme. Eventually the themes are layered and accelerated, in a technique musicians call *stretto*.

Clarinet begins *Sehr langsam* [Very slow] with a tentative theme tinged with nostalgia. The texture becomes dense, eventually building to a stormy middle section in this tripartite movement. Hindemith's climax is striking for the low registers he writes for clarinet and strings. They play in open octaves, while the piano complements with chords and intricate embroidery. When the clarinet theme returns, Hindemith alters its accompaniment; this is no straightforward repeat. We hear the music differently because of the journey we have traveled in the central portion.

Hindemith's finale comprises three sections and a coda, each in a different tempo. The form is loosely related to a rondo, but the contrasts are striking. After the stately, march-like beginning, he moves to brilliant writing in a tarantella-like segment full of momentum. There follows a processional introduced by piano. When the others respond, piano plays staccato octaves in its upper register. The coda is a sprint, racing forward with fierce, atavistic rhythms to conclude the quartet with high drama.

Throughout the quartet, Hindemith favors the clarinet and violin in the melodic foreground, relegating the cello and the piano to more supportive roles. That stated, his emphasis on counterpoint gives each instrument plenty of rich material, and his imaginative textures never shortchange an individual player. This Quartet deserves to take a more prominent place in the chamber music literature.

**Quintet in A major for Clarinet and Strings, K.581  
Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)**

In his letters, Mozart alludes to this work as "Stadler's quintet." Anton Stadler, the leading clarinetist in Vienna in the 1780s, was a friend and colleague of the composer. Stadler played in the court orchestra in Salzburg, and Mozart probably met him no later than 1784. Mozart obviously admired Stadler greatly, for he composed at least one other chamber work (the Trio for clarinet, viola and piano, K.498) and the beloved Clarinet Concerto, K.626, specifically with Stadler in mind. Stadler's instrument was actually a basset clarinet, a forerunner of the modern instrument with a slightly lower range. Mozart first heard basset clarinets years before leaving Salzburg to settle in Vienna. He was delighted with the novel, reedy timbre of the new instrument. In letters to Leopold, he wrote with enthusiasm about the advantages of adding clarinets to scoring for full orchestra.

The particular genius of the clarinet quintet lies in the way Mozart has interwoven the woodwind sound with the string quartet. He does not treat the clarinet as a solo instrument, nor does he merge it with the strings so as to subjugate its individual timbre. Rather, Mozart takes maximum advantage of the clarinet's warm reedy color to contrast with the strings. With his remarkable gift for clarity and balance, Mozart gives each of the five players moments in the spotlight.

The Clarinet Quintet adheres to the standard four movement format for large chamber works and symphonies. From a structural standpoint, it is unusual because Mozart composed two trios (instead of one) for the *Menuetto*, and because of the splendid variation set which concludes the quintet.

In the opening Allegro the themes are shared equally by the first violin and the clarinet. In the later movements, theme entrances are distributed still more democratically. Even the viola, sometimes forgotten in an ensemble, has the opportunity for a solo in the last movement's variations. It is the piquancy of the clarinet, however, that ultimately gives this wonderful quintet its warm lyricism and delicate beauty.