

## FREIMANN 1 – A Closer Look

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 – History Center

Sunday, October 29, 2023 – Rhinehart Hall

The 2023-24 Freimann series is built around the theme of “Brahms and the Romantic Spirit.” Our opening program features music from three distinct periods, beginning with the Neo-Romanticism of Barber, then exploring the late- and mid-Romanticism of Dvořák and Schumann.

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) was a leading figure in American music for much of the last century. He twice received the Pulitzer Prize for Music, earning many commissions and premiere performances by top orchestras and soloists. His Adagio for Strings is among the most well-known classical works of all time, and his Violin Concerto will be presented this season on the March Masterworks concert. Barber’s Summer Music for Wind Quintet, Op. 31, written in 1956, is his only work for that ensemble, and has since become a staple of the repertoire. Commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Detroit, the work was originally conceived for three winds, three strings and piano, but evolved into its final form through interaction with his colleagues in the New York Woodwind Quintet.

Summer Music is through-composed in a single movement, progressing through several sections. The opening music is marked “Slow and indolent,” with brilliant cadenza-like figures in the flute and clarinet played over a lazy pairing of bassoon and horn. This leads into “With motion,” the piece’s main theme built from descending semi-tone figures. Gradually the ponderous music that recalls summer’s heat and humidity brightens into sunnier figures marked “Lively, still faster.” These contrasting moods alternate and develop, eventually leading into a section marked “Joyous and flowing” which then brings the work to a quiet, Fall-like end.

Largely through the efforts of Brahms, the music of Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) became widely known and loved, and he has become the preeminent Czech composer. One of his greatest works, Symphony #7 in D minor, will be featured along with Barber’s Violin Concerto in March. During his 3-year visit to America, while he was director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, Dvořák produced his “New World” Symphony, “American” String Quartet and the Cello Concerto. His Terzetto for 2 Violins and Viola in C major, Op. 74 comes from an earlier time, written in 1887 for two of his friends, with Dvořák himself taking the viola part.

Although lacking the foundational cello, the Terzetto is nevertheless an energetic and lyrical work, equal in stature to many of the more well-known string quartets. The interplay among the three treble instruments results in a more transparent texture, even though the writing is often very demanding. Many of Dvořák’s hallmark devices are in evidence throughout the work, such

as the pentatonic passages that close the “Larghetto” and the “*Dumka*” three-against-two rhythms that pervade the “Scherzo.”

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was one of the predominant composers of the Romantic period, his tragically short lifetime about equidistant between those of Beethoven and Brahms. After studying law and literature, he chose a career in music. His piano teacher Friedrich Wieck predicted Schumann would become the best concert pianist in Europe, but a hand injury while in his 20’s caused him to redirect his focus toward composition. Not long afterward he married Wieck’s daughter Clara, whose own Piano Trio will be performed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Freimann concert. Clara became a brilliant piano soloist and toured extensively for decades. After Robert’s mental decline and death her friendship with Brahms was legendary, as witnessed by their lengthy correspondence.

Written in 1842, Schumann’s Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47 opens with a brief contemplative passage, “Sostenuto assai”, that leads into a lively “Allegro ma non troppo” filled with melodic interplay and sudden dramatic shifts of harmony. These two sections recur throughout the movement, each time growing in intensity. The second movement “Scherzo: Molto vivace” opens with breathless perpetual motion, in which the piano and strings take turns leading the chase. This gives way to a flowing, melodic Trio I in which piano and strings again vie for the lead. The incredible longing expressed in this music is occasionally interrupted by snippets of the opening Scherzo. After a brief return to the Scherzo proper, the Trio II presents syncopated chords, hinting at a calmer texture, after which the initial perpetual motion sneaks back in to end the movement.

The “Andante cantabile” that follows offers a complete change of mood, and could be an apt poster child for the Romantic Spirit that inspired this season’s Freimann series. Focusing on the expressive qualities of first the cello, then joined by the violin and later viola, the piano demures in a peaceful accompaniment. But before long the piano begins to take over the melodic role, leading into a calm, chorale-like section. A return to the opening music, with added decoration from the violin and piano, leads to a subdued close. After three forceful chords, the energetic “Finale: Vivace” bursts forth with brilliant passage work in which all four instruments share the spotlight. A lyrical central section maintains the forward momentum and gradually leads back into the opening music, with the 3-chord motif as a catalyst. Increasing excitement then brings the Quartet to a heroic conclusion.

— Adrian Mann

FREIMANN 1 – At A Glance

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Samuel Barber – Summer Music for Wind Quintet, Op. 31

- Commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Detroit
- Written in the 1950's, it became a staple of the wind quintet repertoire
- Barber's only work for this ensemble

Antonín Dvořák – Terzetto for 2 Violins and Viola in C major, Op. 74

- Energetic and lyrical string chamber work, favoring the treble range
- Written in 1887 for two friends with the composer on viola
- Contains music recalling his Slavonic Dances and “American” quartet

Robert Schumann – Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47

- Composed in 1842, a year he devoted to writing chamber music
- Premiered by Schumann's wife Clara Wieck
- Helped establish the piano quartet's importance and influence