

**Program Notes**  
**By Chris Morrison**

**“Lunch with Beethoven and Brahms”**  
**Wednesday, December 30, 12:00 p.m.**  
**South Reno United Methodist Church**

**Brahms: Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38**  
**(Composed 1862-1865, 25 minutes)**

In the early and middle 1860's, Brahms was composing a large amount of chamber music. Dating from this time are his first two piano trios, both string sextets, the first two piano quartets, and the beginning of his Piano Quintet, Op. 34 (it is said that Brahms wrote, and destroyed, many more chamber works during these and preceding years). Also dating from this time is the first of his two sonatas for cello and piano. He started composing the E minor Sonata in 1862 in Münster am Stein, while attending the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Cologne and vacationing with Clara Schumann and conductor-composer Albert Dietrich. Brahms had originally conceived of a four-movement form for this work, but was somewhat dissatisfied with how it was proceeding. So he set it aside for a time, only returning to it during the summer of 1865 in Baden-Baden, reworking two movements he had already completed, discarding another, and adding a new Finale. The completed Sonata was given its first performance in Leipzig on January 14, 1871.

Johann Sebastian Bach was one of Brahms's favorite composers, and one can hear hints of his *The Art of Fugue* in the first movement of Op. 38. The cello's intense, restless opening melody is accompanied by syncopated piano chords. The piano then takes the theme as the cello moves to its upper register. For much of this movement, though, the cello stays at the lower end of its range. The dialogue between the two instruments is often contentious, as they frequently switch between lead and accompanying roles. This opening movement is on a grand scale, and is about as long as the remaining two combined. There are hints of the Viennese waltz in the second movement, a dark-hued minuet with a lyrical central section. The spirit of Bach, and the first movement's feeling of contest between the two instruments, returns in the powerful third movement, a fugue in three voices.

**Beethoven: Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96**  
**(Composed 1812, 27 minutes)**

1812 was a busy year for Beethoven, as he completed his Symphonies Nos. 7 and 8 and enjoyed increasing fame as a composer throughout Europe. That year also saw the completion of the last of his ten Violin Sonatas, the Op. 96. The first nine were written much earlier, as Beethoven was forging his reputation as a composer. The mighty Violin Sonata No. 9, the “Kreutzer,” had been written back in 1803 and was a large-scale, virtuoso work that helped to herald Beethoven's “middle” period. It was only nine years later that he returned one final time to the violin sonata form, composing a work that essentially closes that “middle” period and gives some hints as to the new style that would materialize a few years later. The G major Sonata was written for the

French violinist Pierre Rode and was dedicated to Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's friend, student, and patron. Rode and the Archduke gave the work its premiere on December 29, 1812.

Sydney Finkelstein has written, "the mood [of Op. 96] is one of gentle lyricism, with but glimpses of the profound depths of experience and conquest of pain that had made possible the achievement of this serenity." The first movement is dominated by this contemplative tone, opening with a delicate idea decorated with trills. A march-like theme takes over, and a falling phrase becomes the basis of the development section, trills returning to signal the closing recapitulation of themes. The opening melody is subjected to one final exploration as the movement draws to a close. The richly harmonized main theme of the second movement resembles a hymn, marked by surprising, whimsical injections from the violin. It moves without pause into the lively third movement Scherzo. Rode, the work's original violinist, inspired the finale, a set of seven variations on a simple, cheerful theme. As Beethoven wrote to the Archduke Rudolph, "In our finales we like rushing and resounding passages, but this does not please R and – this hinders me somewhat." After five increasingly emphatic variations come a slow, decorative sixth, a boisterous seventh, and a humorous concluding Adagio-Presto combination.

**Afternoon Sonatas No. 1**  
**Wednesday, December 30, 2:00 p.m.**  
**South Reno United Methodist Church**

**Ysaÿe: Cello Sonata, Op. 28**  
**(Composed 1923, 12 minutes)**

Regarded as one of the greatest violinists of his day, Eugène Ysaÿe also composed a fair amount of music, most of it for his own instrument. The virtuoso Six Sonatas for violin, Op. 27 of 1923-24 are probably the best known of his works. He also taught the likes of Fritz Kreisler and Nathan Milstein during his years at the Brussels Conservatory. Himself a student of two of the nineteenth century's greatest violinists, Henryk Wieniawski and Henri Vieuxtemps, Ysaÿe's early performances drew the attention of the likes of César Franck, who wrote his famous Violin Sonata in A major for him as a wedding present (Ysaÿe would also be the dedicatee of new works by Debussy, Saint-Saëns, and Chausson). In later years Ysaÿe founded a concert series, headed a string quartet, and in 1918 became the conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony, a post he held for five years.

Ysaÿe was also a capable violist and cellist, and provided extensive bowings and performance information for his only work for solo cello. Dedicated to Maurice Dambois, cellist in the Ysaÿe Quartet and Trio, the Cello Sonata is in four brief movements influenced, not surprisingly, by Johann Sebastian Bach's six suites for cello. The opening Grave is followed by an elegant Intermezzo. The In modo di recitativo acts as a suspenseful introduction to the Finale, a brilliant display piece that shares some melodic material with the opening movement.

**Schulhoff: Sonata for Solo Violin**  
**(Composed 1927, 12 minutes)**

In Erwin Schulhoff's exciting solo sonata, written after his return to Prague from a London and Paris concert tour in 1923, one can hear manifested the conflicting elements haunting so many modernist composers in the first half of the 20th century. Schulhoff's music incorporates aspects of jazz, in particular his use of syncopated rhythms, the Second Viennese School in his abandonment of traditional melodic contours throughout much of the sonata, and Czech folk music in the complex but accessible harmonic language and mixed meters of the Allegro and Scherzo. Throughout his career as a concert pianist and composer he had struggled finding a distinctive voice and, while successfully navigating the conflicting musical cultures of the day, his overwhelming political drive (after the First World War socialism, and later, Soviet-style communism) meant he was never afraid of using a populist, accessible musical vocabulary in his works. While this gives some of his music the character of a musical potpourri his later works, of which the violin sonata is one, find an integrated spirit through the unifying presence of the folk idiom, which drives the work with its exciting rhythmic vitality and challenging displays of virtuoso bravura. (*Note by Louis Niebur, UNR Music Professor, 2009*)

**Rachmaninov: Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 36**  
(Composed 1913, 21 minutes)

Remembered as one of the great pianists of the twentieth century, Sergei Rachmaninov is also one of the most performed of Russian composers. Building on his early musical studies with his mother, Rachmaninov attended both the St. Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories. In Moscow he met the legendary Piotr Tchaikovsky, who became a mentor to the young musician. Rachmaninov's pianism soon attracted attention, leading to a furious round of concert appearances, including tours of the United States and Europe. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, he left Russia for good, eventually making the United States his home. The power, clarity, and lyricism of his piano playing (abetted by his huge hands) became legendary, and concert performances eventually became his main focus – to the exclusion of composing, as he completed just six works in the last quarter century of his life. He became an American citizen just before his death in Beverly Hills in 1943.

At the end of 1912, having just completed an extensive series of concerts in Moscow, Rachmaninov took his family on a brief holiday in Switzerland before moving to Rome for a time. Two of his daughters became ill, however, and after they were treated in Berlin, the family moved to the Rachmaninov country estate in southern Russia. There, while also hard at work on his choral work *The Bells*, Rachmaninov composed his Piano Sonata No. 2, completing it in September 1913. Its opening Allegro agitato begins dramatically with a plunge into the bass register, two abrupt chords, and a falling figure in the left hand. Years later Rachmaninov found the high drama and extravagance of this movement a bit much, and in his 1931 revision cut some 120 bars, thinning textures and removing a few virtuoso gestures. The second movement follows without a pause, moving from melancholy to an ecstatic climax before the Finale, which mixes hints of a satirical march with a big lyrical tune and powerful virtuoso display.

**Mendelssohn: Cello Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 58**  
(Composed 1843, 25 minutes)

1843 was a year of personal stress for Mendelssohn. He had just completed a frustrating three-year stint in Berlin handling musical matters for King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, and was heading with his family back to Leipzig, where he quickly returned to the directorship of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra (which he had led from 1835 to 1840) and began work on the founding of the Leipzig Conservatory. In the midst of this time of transition he completed some of his most beloved music, including the Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (including the famous "Wedding March," but not the Overture, which he had composed in 1826 as a precocious seventeen year old). The Cello Sonata in D major was also a product of this year. Completed in June and written for his brother Paul, a banker and skilled amateur cellist, the Sonata received its first performance in Leipzig on November 18, 1843.

The first movement combines lyricism with propulsive energy, as the cello initially takes the lead with an extraverted melody. The piano takes over for a restatement of this theme and another, more lyrical idea, and these two themes become the basis of the rest of the movement, with its big gestures and virtuoso opportunities for both instruments. A playful theme in pizzicato cello and staccato piano notes dominates the second movement, which also features a more songful second subject over a surging piano accompaniment. Bach's aria "Es ist vollbracht" from the *St. John Passion* provides the harmonies for the chorale theme, accompanied by rippling arpeggios in the piano, which opens the Adagio third movement. This hymn melody is followed by a dramatic recitative for the cello, marked in the score "passionate and animated." Mendelssohn's famous "Spinning Song" is evoked in the lengthy finale, a vivacious conversation between two instruments mostly based on that opening theme.

**Masterworks Concert No. 3**  
**Wednesday, December 30, 7:00 p.m.**  
**South Reno United Methodist Church**

**Dvorak: String Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 97**  
**(Composed 1893, 32 minutes)**

In 1892, at the height of his popularity in Europe, Dvorák accepted the invitation of the philanthropist Jeanette Thurber to become director of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York. Quickly finding himself overwhelmed by New York and homesick for his native Bohemia, Dvorák spent much of the following year's summer vacation with fellow Czech settlers in the small settlement of Spillville, Iowa. While he found the Iowa landscape a little strange – "Few people and a great deal of empty space," as he put it – Dvorák found great pleasure in his nearly daily contact with the Kickapoo Native American community there. In his first month in Spillville he composed the well-known String Quartet in F major, Op. 96, the "American," and within days had started work on the E-flat major Quintet – also sometimes called "American," and likewise completed in a matter of weeks. Both the Quartet and Quintet were premiered in Boston on New Year's Day, 1894 by the Kneisel Quartet, probably the best-known American string quartet of the day.

Like the "American" Quartet, the E-flat major String Quintet features transformations of Native American melodies along with more recognizably Czech elements – including much material

based on the pentatonic scale, the five-note scale common to much of the world's folk music, including the songs of Dvorák's native Bohemia and the African-American songs he had encountered in New York. It is said that the second theme of the Quintet's first movement is derived directly from one of the Native American melodies Dvorák heard in Spillville, and much of the melodic material of this movement relates to the pentatonic scale. The ostinato repeating figures of the second movement, while evocative of Bohemian folk music, may well also be related to Native American drumming. This spirited music is contrasted with a more mournful central section. The Larghetto third movement is a set of five variations on a wistful double theme, half in the major and half in the minor – interestingly enough, part of this melody was originally conceived as a setting of the familiar words “My Country, 'Tis of Thee” by S.F. Smith, which Dvorák had thought might become a new American National Anthem! After this relatively restrained music, the jaunty Finale, even with its lyrical interludes in the minor, brings the Quintet to an enthusiastic close.

**Goetz: Piano Quintet in C minor, Op. 16**  
(Composed 1874, 25 minutes)

Born in Königsberg, Hermann Goetz only started studying music seriously in his teens, obtaining a degree at Berlin's Stern Conservatory (where he worked with the famous conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow). Goetz spent some ten years in Switzerland as a critic, teacher, organist, pianist and conductor. But he only really dedicated himself to composing during the last three years of his life, when he was forced to withdraw from other musical activities due to increasing difficulties with tuberculosis. This, combined with overwork, led to his early death just days before his thirty-sixth birthday.

For many years, Goetz's relatively conservative music was almost completely forgotten. Only in the 1990s was his compositional output – including two operas, a symphony, a violin concerto, and several chamber works – examined in any depth. Scored for the so-called “Trout” ensemble of piano, violin, viola, cello and bass (made famous in Franz Schubert's beloved “Trout” Quintet), Goetz's Piano Quintet in C minor is one of his most highly regarded works. It was also his last chamber work, and its often tragic tone might be seen to reflect Goetz's sufferings with his tuberculosis. This is evident from the work's opening moments, funereal music that leads into the more dramatic main body of the first movement. Greater warmth is evinced in the second movement, and the third is a cross between a dance and a march, framing the cello's cheerful melody at the heart of the movement. Propelled by dance-like syncopations, the fourth movement is all nervous energy.

**Respighi: Piano Quintet in F minor**  
(Composed 1902, 18 minutes)

Respighi's vivid and colorful orchestral works, particularly the Roman trilogy (*The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*), are among the best loved and most frequently performed of the twentieth century. He received his first musical training in his hometown of Bologna, then moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, where he played viola in the city's Imperial Orchestra and studied with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. He didn't start composing seriously until he was in his twenties. After a few years spent as a touring violinist and violist, he took a

teaching post at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia, where he subsequently became director in 1924. But his fame as a composer led him to leave the Conservatorio two years later. From that point on Respighi devoted himself to composition, with the occasional foray into conducting and providing piano accompaniment for singers, including two very successful tours of the United States in 1925-26 and 1932.

Respighi produced his Piano Quintet while he was a student in St. Petersburg. One can occasionally hear small hints of the work's Russian provenance, such as hints of tolling bells. The first movement begins with a unison statement played by the four strings. The piano replies with a second subject, and the remainder of the movement develops these two themes with dramatic dynamic leaps and changes of key. The short second movement is in ternary (ABA) form, with a central section given to the piano. Following without pause, the third movement begins with a lively tune in the piano, quickly answered by the strings. Another piano interlude leads to a return of music from the second movement before the burst of energy that concludes the Quintet.

**Schumann: Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47  
(Composed 1842, 28 minutes)**

Robert Schumann tended to spend extended amounts of time on particular genres. Having focused on piano music through most of the 1830s, he spent most of 1840 (the year he married his longtime love Clara Wieck), for instance, writing songs, and 1841 was a year for orchestral music. 1842 proved to be his chamber music year. Towards the beginning of that year Clara left home for a concert tour of Denmark, and her absence plunged Schumann into a depression. He spent several weeks closely studying string quartet scores by Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn, in between extended bouts of "beer and Champagne." But when Clara returned, Schumann plunged back into composing, and within six remarkable months, he composed the three Op. 41 string quartets, the Op. 44 Piano Quintet, and, finally, in October and November, the Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47.

The work starts slowly and tentatively – an effect described by one writer as “groping toward the light” – before the vigorous main body of the first movement. The lively Scherzo features three statements of the main theme, with two contrasting interludes in between, the second of which has a distinctively off-kilter feeling due to the syncopated rhythm. For one passage in the passionate third movement, Schumann takes the unusual step of having the cello tune its C string down to B-flat so that it can provide a pedal note under the violin and viola's scale-like melodies. At first remaining in the background, providing accompaniment to the other instruments, the piano moves to prominence in the movement's central section. The finale opens with fugue-like counterpoint, with the theme taken up in turn by viola, piano, and violin, then subsequently developed more fully and with great energy.