

ROCKPORT
CHAMBER
MUSIC
FESTIVALBARRY SHIFFMAN, *artistic director*

SUNDAY, JUNE 11 :: 5 PM

Schubert & Schumann

Gilles Vonsattel, *piano* | Andrew Wan, *violin*
Barry Shiffman, *viola* | Desmond Hoebig, *cello*
Kebra-Seyoun Charles, *double bass*

PIANO QUARTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 47 (1842)

Robert Schumann (1810–56)

Sostenuto assai – Allegro ma non troppo

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Andante cantabile

Finale: Vivace

:: INTERMISSION ::

PIANO QUINTET IN A MAJOR, OP. 114, D. 667 (C1819) (TROUT)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Allegro vivace

Andante

Scherzo. Presto

Tema con variazioni. Andantino

Allegro giusto

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Festival Partner

PIANO QUARTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 47

Robert Schumann (b. Zwickau, Saxony, June 8, 1810; d. Eendenich, nr. Bonn, July 29, 1856)

Composed 1842; 28 minutes

1842 was Robert Schumann's year of chamber music. It followed 1839, a year of mostly piano music, 1840, his year for song, and 1841 when he produced his first symphonies. 1842 proved to be exceptionally productive. After intensive study of the great string quartets of the past, Schumann completed three of his own. He followed these with the great Piano Quintet, Op. 44, taking just five days for the sketches and two weeks for the score. A month later, also after five days of sketches, he completed the Piano Quartet, Op. 47. Before the year's end, he turned to the piano trio and the work that would later become the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 88.

Both the Quintet and the Quartet are in the key of E-flat. While the Piano Quintet had no precedent, the Piano Quartet followed the two by Mozart and one by Beethoven (a transcription of the Quintet for piano and winds, Op. 16). Schumann had first explored these works in 1828 while ostensibly pursuing law studies at the University of Leipzig. There, he formed his own piano quartet to read through several piano quartets and trios, often with an audience of musicians present to share the discovery. He even drafted a C minor piano quartet of his own, now catalogued as WoO 32 and published in 1979.

Schumann wrote the E-flat Piano Quartet some 14 years later. It is more closely related to his own Piano Quintet than to the earlier work or to the classical quartets he had studied. Both the Piano Quartet and Quintet put the piano front and center in the texture, as in a miniature piano concerto. Because of its reduced forces, the Quartet has a more intimate scale than the Quintet. The first movement opens with a foreshadowing of the terse main theme that is to propel the movement energetically forward. The rising second theme gives an opportunity for Schumann to employ his new-found interest in counterpoint. Development and recapitulation are skillfully woven together in this classically constructed movement. Although the dashing passagework of the Scherzo has something of a Mendelssohn-like lightness and buoyancy, a gathering cloud seems to hang over its minor-key activity.

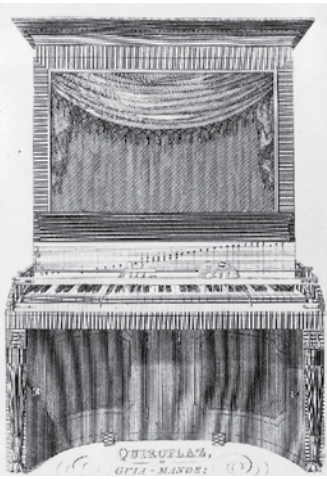
The slow movement is the emotional high point of the quartet. It opens with a gloriously soaring cello theme, by way of tribute to the cello-playing Count Matvei (or Mathieu) Wielhorsky, who commissioned the music – and owned both an Amati and a Stradivari cello. Although an amateur, Wielhorsky gave the first performance of the quartet along with Ferdinand David (violin), Niels Gade (viola) and Clara Schumann (piano), for whom the piece was designed. Brahms paid tribute to the eloquence of Schumann's writing by modelling the slow movements of his C minor Piano Quartet and B-flat Piano Concerto on this opening theme. Extra resonance is provided in this movement when the cellist tunes down the lowest string to B-flat, the home key of the movement. (The time taken to do so also allows the viola to take over the restatement of the heart-warming melody). The finale bursts onto the conclusion of the slow movement, exuberantly unleashing melody upon melody, contrapuntally working them through with a glee that few who have tackled the art of counterpoint have brought to their hard-won results.



Robert Schumann in 1839, by Austrian lithographer Josef Kriehuber

Schumann had high hopes of building a career as a pianist-composer around the time he was turning 20. A letter from piano pedagogue Friedrich Wieck (his future father-in-law) promised that, with disciplined training and study with Wieck, he could, within three years, become a greater artist than either Hummel or Moscheles, two of the most celebrated pianists of the day. Schumann's plan was to follow studies with Wieck with a year in Vienna, under the guidance of Moscheles. By 21, his daily regime started at 7:00 AM with three hours practice of Chopin, followed at 11:00am with an hour of Czerny's trill studies and Hummel's finger exercises – and then an afternoon practicing other music.

His diaries from the time, however, speak of 'an ever-worsening weakness' or 'laming' of the middle finger of his right hand. The cause can only have been aggravated using a finger-strengthening device patented by German pianist and pedagogue Johann Bernhard Logier (1777-1846), known as a chiroplast, which Schumann experimented with in Heidelberg while beginning law studies, as did his piano duo partner at the time. Schumann referred to Logier's 'hand-director' mechanism, as a 'cigar-mechanism.' By October 1831, the numbness in his middle finger had become the source of 'inner struggles.'



In desperation, the young pianist tried some form of 'electrical' therapy and homeopathy, even, on the recommendation of a Professor Kühl, animal baths, involving the insertion of the hand into the still warm innards of a freshly killed animal carcass. A year later, he wrote about his now permanently damaged finger to his mother: "for my part, I'm completely resigned and deem it incurable." His dreams of a career as a piano soloist were dashed, even if his hopes as a composer were now confirmed – "I can compose without it."

The finger-strengthening chiroplast. Pianist's hands are inserted into the two, domed, claw-like devices which move on a runner the full length of the keyboard.

PIANO QUINTET IN A MAJOR, OP. 114, D. 667 (TROUT)
Franz Schubert (b. Vienna, Austria, January 31, 1797; d. Vienna, November 19, 1828)
Composed c.1819; 40 minutes

The period around the year 1819, when Franz Schubert wrote his *Trout* Quintet, one of the most endearing works in the repertoire, was a rich one for lovers of chamber music. Beethoven, then in his 50s, was writing his profound late string quartets. Mendelssohn, not yet in his teens, was shortly to write his Octet. Schubert, in his early 20s had ahead of him such masterpieces as the *Death and the Maiden* Quartet, the Octet and the Great C major Quintet. Chamber music was alive and well, and living, above all, in the city of Vienna. It was here that a tradition of *hausmusik* thrived among the music-loving middle-classes and bourgeoisie. And it was for this tradition of amateur music-making in the home that Schubert wrote his *Trout* Quintet.



Steyr: View from the Tabor, painted by Jakob Alt in 1844 (Albertina Museum, Vienna)

He was on vacation in the Alpine countryside, in the town of Steyr, Upper Austria, when the commission came. Steyr was the hometown of his friend, the well-known singer Johann Vogl, for whom Schubert wrote many of his 600 songs. Schubert was Vogl's guest, and together they visited another Steyr resident, Sylvester Paumgartner, who was a wealthy mining director and keen amateur cellist. Paumgartner asked Schubert to write a chamber work for his *hausmusik* group. The idea of including a movement based on Schubert's song *Die Forelle* (The Trout) also seems to have come from Paumgartner. The instruments specified – piano, violin, viola, cello and double bass – remain an unusual grouping. But they were the instruments used in a published Viennese arrangement of Hummel's popular Septet of 1816 which Schubert would have known.

The number of movements in the *Trout* Quintet is also unusual. Four was the convention. But here, a fifth movement, a series of variations on *The Trout*, was inserted between the Scherzo and finale. The movement starts with a simplified version of the opening of the song. As the music progresses, the theme only gradually reveals its full subtleties, culminating in the final variation, the focal point of the quintet. The work's great clarity of texture comes about largely through the way Schubert contrasts the rich, resonant (and potentially bottom-heavy) scoring for the four string instruments with a brighter, more transparent piano line – created by having the pianist frequently play in octaves high in the upper range of the keyboard, much as in Schubert's piano duos. Another hallmark of the work is that the piano is usually heard in dialogue with the strings, rather than in a mutual single texture that develops the work's themes. Schubert wrote to his brother Ferdinand about the "inconceivably beautiful" countryside around Steyr and it's not hard to picture the picturesque, sunlit freshness of the Alpine air in the five movements of the quintet.

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