**PROGRAM NOTES:**

Mozart's Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, K. 478, was the first major piece composed for piano quartet in the chamber music repertoire.

Richard Rodda writes"

"As Mozart reached his full maturity in the years after arriving in Vienna in 1781, his most expressive manner of writing, whose chief evidences are the use of minor modes, chromaticism, rich counterpoint and thorough thematic development, appeared in his compositions with increasing frequency. Among the most important harbingers of the shift in Mozart's musical language was the G minor Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola, and Cello (K. 478), which he completed on October 16, 1785 in response to a commission for three (some sources say six) such works from the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister. Hoffmeister had only entered the business a year earlier, and Mozart's extraordinary and disturbing score, for which the publisher saw little market, threw a fright into him. "Write more popularly, or else I can neither print nor pay for anything of yours!" he admonished. Mozart cast some quaint expletives upon the publisher's head, and said it was fine with him if the contract were canceled. It was. (Composer and publisher remained friends and associates, however. The following year, Hoffmeister brought out the Quartet in D major, K. 499, which still bears his name as sobriquet.) Artaria & Co., proving more bold than Hoffmeister, acquired the piece, and published it a year later; there are hints in contemporary documents that it enjoyed a number of performances in Vienna.

"Alfred Einstein, in his classic 1945 study of Mozart, called the G minor tonality in which the K. 478 Quartet is cast the composer's "key of fate . . . The wild command that opens the first movement, *unisono*, and stamps the whole movement with its character, remaining threateningly in the background, and bringing the movement to its inexorable close, might be called the ‘fate' motive with exactly as much justice as the four-note motive of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." Contrast to the movement's pervasive agitation is provided by a lyrical melody initiated by the strings without piano. The *Andante*, in sonatina form (sonata without a development section), is probing, emotionally unsettled music, written in Mozart's most expressive, adventurous harmonic style. Of the thematically rich closing rondo, English musicologist Eric Blom noted, "[It] confronts the listener with the fascinatingly insoluble problem of telling which of its melodies . . . is the most delicious." So profligate is Mozart's melodic invention in this movement that he borrowed one of its themes, which he did not even bother to repeat here, for the principal subject of a piano rondo (K. 485) he composed three months later."

**SCHUMANN:**

In September of 1840, Robert Schumann married the love of his life, Clara Wieck. Clara was a gifted pianist and composer in her own right and Schumann obviously found her inspirational. The 12 months after their marriage saw him complete his famous song cycles, his first 2 symphonies, several other orchestral works and the first movement of his great piano concerto. Despite her obvious positive influence, their relationship could be quite tempestuous. When she embarked on a concert tour of Denmark in 1841, Schumann felt slighted and his creativity seemed to stall. He launched himself into studying the string quartet scores of Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn, drowning his melancholy in "beer and Champagne." When Clara returned, he once again took up his pen. It was during this period of renewed productivity that Schumann completed, not only this piano quartet, but his three string quartets Op 41, and his piano quintet.

At the time, the heart of the romantic era, chamber music was making the transition from the forum of private entertainment to that of the concert performance. Perhaps this explains the experimentation by Schumann and his contemporaries Mendelssohn and Brahms with the more complex, larger forms like the piano quartet and piano quintet, perhaps in an effort combine the intimacy provided by the string dialogue with the bravura and virtuosity of the new and popular generation of pianists at the time.

The influence of Mozart, Beethoven and Haydn is obvious in the way Schumann pays special attention to the form and unity of this work. The slow sostenuto material introduced at the beginning demarcates the different sections of the opening movement. It also serves as the basis for the allegro which follows.

The scherzo clearly shows the influence of Mendelssohn, in its light sparkling, undulating imitation, shaped by the bass line of the piano. The slower trios are more quintessentially Schumannesque, melding seamlessly with the quicker material. The curt ending of the movement, in the style of the "Midsummer Night's Dream," is another "hats off" to his good friend.

The Andante is a poignant, tender melody exchanged between the different instruments. This material is varied only slightly. The delicate coda brings this warm, noble movement to a close. The final three chords anticipate the opening of the finale and provide material for the Vivace, in which this simple pattern is subject to a vigorous "working out" in fugato style. This material is contrasted with a smoother second theme. This movement, perhaps more than any of others demonstrates the unrestrained emotional drive that we associate with the composer.

**BRAHMS**:

Brahms’ three piano quartets were conceived together (although the third was published, with alterations, much later) during a time that was fraught with turmoil for the composer. He had returned to his native Hamburg after the death of his close friend and mentor Robert Schumann. A failed romance with Agathe von Siebold and the complex nature of his relationship with Clara Wieck, Schumann’s widow, surely caused him emotional distress.

This was also a period of intense study for the young composer. When many of his contemporaries were exploring the possibilities of programatic music (romantic notions, myths and patriotic themes), Brahms dedicated enormous amounts of time to the study the music of his forebears, and he was devoted to the idea of absolute music (music for which no references are stated).

The G minor quartet opens with the statement of a simple melodic idea by the three string players and the piano in unison, answered by some gentle chords. This, along with the second more lyrical and tender theme, are developed and expanded in a myriad of ways. In this, Brahms owes much to the music of Beethoven. They both had the ability to manipulate a simple idea brilliantly to create some very memorable melodies, not to mention the countermelodies and harmony to go with them.

The second movement was originally entitled Scherzo, but later renamed Intermezzo, a title Brahms reserved for some of his most magical music. Muted strings, a rippling piano part and the use of duple and triple time, so characteristic of the composer, are used to great effect in this movement. A more animated trio section follows. The third movement begins with a broad melody that eventually evolves into a curiously martial mid-section, again reminiscent of Beethoven (the Turkish march from the Ninth Symphony comes to mind)! The wild Rondo alla Zingarese, or Gypsy Rondo, with its three bar rhythms, virtuoso parts and a very orchestral ending make for a rousing finale. Brahms’ biographer Ivor Keys wrote of it, “It was obviously designed to bring the house down, and it did.”

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

The **ST. PETERSBURG PIANO QUARTET** was founded in spring of 2014 and make its début in New York City that same season with a pair of extremely successful concerts on the popular Barge Music series. Since then, they have performed nationwide, including at the Da Camera Society in Los Angeles, Music Mountain, Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, Friends of Chamber Music of Troy, NY, Florida State University in Tallahassee, Music at Kohl Mansion, and many other series. They recently gave the NYC premiere of Jeremiah Bornfeld’s “As it Happened” on an extremely successful concert at Rockefeller University.

**Alla Aranovskaya** and **Boris Vayner** are the first violinist and violist of the **St. Petersburg String Quartet**, one of the world’s most esteemed chamber ensembles. The SPSQ’s rise to fame included the 1st Prize at the All-Soviet Union String Quartet Competition, the Silver Medal and a Special Prize at the Tokyo International Chamber Music Competition, 1st Prize and both Special Prizes at the Vittorio Gui International Competition for Chamber Ensembles in Florence, Italy, and First Prize and the "Grand Prix Musica Viva" at the Melbourne, Australia International Chamber Music Competition.’’ They received a Grammy nomination and “Best Record” honors in both Stereo Review and Gramophone, held a five-year residency at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and gave hundreds of concerts on many of North America, Europe and Asia’s most prestigious series and festivals.

Pianist **Tao Lin** has performed as soloist with the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, Winnipeg Symphony, Miami Chamber Orchestra, and Knoxville Civic Orchestra. He has given recitals at the Kennedy Center, National Gallery of Art, 92nd Street Y, Chautauqua Institute, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Minnesota Orchestra Hall, Izumi Hall (Osaka, Japan), and the Edvard Grieg Museum in Norway. He was a founding member of both the Berlin Piano Quartet and the Brahms Piano Quartet.

Tao won prizes at the National Society of Arts and Letters, Music Teachers’ National Association, Palm Beach International Invitational, 1st International Piano e-Competition, William Kapell International Piano Competition and Osaka International Chamber Music Competition. He is an artist faculty member at the Bowdoin International Music Festival and visiting professor at Shanghai Normal University Music College, where he received the "Outstanding International Pedagogue” award. A prolific recording artist, he can be heard on the Naxos, Artek, Centaur, Romeo, Poinciana, and Piano Lovers labels. He is a Steinway artist.

Cuban-American cellist **Thomas Mesa** won the $50,000 First Prize in the 2016 Sphinx Competition. He performed as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, and was soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra.

Thomas has toured with Itzhak Perlman both nationally and internationally. He has been soloist with the GRAMMY-nominated The Crossing Choir, most notably at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He has performed in Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the Arsht Center in Miami, Boston's Jordan Hall, and on PBS’s syndicated show "From the Top."

Thomas won first place in the Thaviu Competition for String Performance in Chicago and the Alhambra Orchestra Concerto Competition. He received the Ray Millette Young Artists Award and the New World Symphony’s Outstanding Musicianship Award.