



Colonel Jason K. Fetting, Director

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES
Sunday, May 19, 2019 at 2:00 P.M.
John Philip Sousa Band Hall
Marine Barracks Annex
Washington, DC

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A, Opus 26

Allegro non troppo
Poco adagio
Scherzo: Poco allegro
Finale: Allegro

SSgt Karen Johnson, violin
GySgt Tam Tran, viola
SSgt Charlaire Prescott, cello
SSgt Christopher Schmitt, piano

INTERMISSION

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

Piano Quintet No. 2 in A, Opus 81

Allegro, ma non tanto
Dumka: Andante con moto
Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace
Finale: Allegro

GySgt Sheng-Tsung Wang and SSgt Karen Johnson, violin
GySgt Tam Tran, viola
SSgt Charlaire Prescott, cello
SSgt Christopher Schmitt, piano

The United States Marine Band will perform Sunday, May 26 at 8:00 P.M. at the Filene Center at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts. The program will include works by Stephenson, Tchaikovsky, and Sousa and will be followed by a fireworks display.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Johannes Brahms and Antonín Dvořák come from very different musical aesthetics: the former steeped in the solemn Germanic musical tradition of Ludwig van Beethoven and Johann Sebastian Bach, the latter associated with Bohemian and Eastern European folk music. The somber weight and deep profundity of each sonority in the Piano Quartet No. 2 by Brahms stands in contrast to the innocent and capricious freedom the light melodies of Dvořák's Piano Quintet No. 2. Although both composers are quintessentially Romantic, emphasizing personal, subjective expression and feeling over the symmetry, structure, and proportion of their Classical era forbears, the content and flavor of this subjective expression is unique to each composer, embodying the intense variety that many listeners love most about music from the Romantic era.

Johannes Brahms was a well-known composer relatively early in life. In 1853, at age twenty, he made the acquaintance of Robert Schumann, one of the most influential composers of the Romantic era. Schumann, who was also a music critic, championed Brahms' works, leading to his ultimate success and recognition as one of the pioneers of classical music. This mentoring dynamic between great composers is a familiar theme, and other prime examples include the relationships between Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler, and Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein. In 1874, when Dvořák was still relatively unknown at the age of thirty-three, Brahms sat on a jury of the Austrian State Stipendium, a kind of competition to provide financial support for budding composers, and was very impressed with Dvořák's skill and talent. Brahms went on to recommend Dvořák in all of his circles, Brahms published Dvořák's music with his publisher Simrock, and even served as copy editor and proofreader for Dvořák's scores. Dvořák said he was appreciative that Brahms would "take on the very tedious job of proofreading. I don't believe there is another musician of his stature in the whole world who would do such a thing." The two composers became good friends, the elder offering advice and encouragement in their regular correspondence, and even offering his protégé his estate in Vienna, an offer Dvořák respectfully declined, as it was contingent on his moving to Vienna. Dvořák went on to become a household name of the era, composing such illustrious works as the New World Symphony and the American String Quartet. Brahms allegedly observed, "Any composer would be honored to have the ideas that Dvořák discarded."

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A, Opus 26

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Johannes Brahms' Piano Quartet No. 2 embodies a compositional concept dubbed organicism: the concept that the work itself germinates from a very simple seed of motivic material and flowers into a creation of varied parts and structures with the same deeply rooted identity. Beethoven's own compositions were dominated by this process. In the first movement of Brahms' second piano quartet, the components of the melody found in the opening three seconds comprise the majority of motivic material for the rest of the work. One does not need to analyze phrase structures and motifs to appreciate this concept; the piece exudes a sense of unity and cohesion that can be intuitively understood and fundamentally contributes to its depth and sense of weight and drama. The second movement is a paradoxical combination of tragedy and sublime expression, while the final movements incorporate the flavor of Brahms' own gypsy fascinations, culminating in a sonorous vigor.

Piano Quintet No. 2 in A, Opus 81

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

Dvořák's Piano Quintet No. 2 was written in less than eight weeks in 1887 at his country cottage at Vysoká in the Czech Republic. The piece is in four movements, and spans the full range between overjoyed exuberance and introspective sorrow, offering contrasts and emotional extremes in a variety of mediums. Dvořák was a violist at heart, and offered many moments for the mellow warmth of the viola to shine, especially in the mournful second movement. The third movement is a vivacious scherzo, and yet is paired with a middle section the likes of which had never been heard before: innocent, simple, flowing, and yet breathtakingly transcendent with an otherworldly beauty. The piece culminates in a Finale full of extroverted charm, the last moments of the movement taking a brief pause to say farewell in a slower soloistic section before finishing in a torrent of joyous sound.