

Placitas Artists Series – May 21, 2017 Program
Willy Sucre & Friends
String Sextets

Willy Sucre, viola
Krzysztof Zimowski and Carol Swift-Matton, violin
Justin Pollak, viola
Lisa Donald and David Schepps, cello

Program:

Tchaikovsky : String Sextet in D minor “ Souvenir de Florence “

- 1) Allegro con Spirito
- 2) Adagio Cantabile e con moto
- 3) Allegretto Moderato
- 4) Allegro con brio e Vivace

*****Intermission*****

Brahms : String Sextet No. 2 in G major-Opus 36

- 1) Allegro non troppo
- 2) Scherzo-Allegro non troppo
- 3) Adagio
- 4) Poco allegro

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String Sextet in d minor, Souvenir de Florence, Op. 70 by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Tchaikovsky's string sextet in d minor, Souvenir de Florence, Op. 70 (TH 118 ; ČW 94) was composed and scored in June and July 1890 at Frolovskoye, and revised at Maydanovo between November 1891 and January 1892. In response to his being awarded honorary membership of the Saint Petersburg Chamber Music Society, Tchaikovsky made the following pledge to Eugen Albrecht: "I give you my firm promise to write and dedicate to your Society some sort of chamber music work." Tchaikovsky decided the new work should be a sextet for string instruments in June 1887. "Souvenir de Florence" is the title because the composer sketched one of the work's principal themes while visiting Florence, Italy.

The first movement is in sonata form and, without introduction, presents a rather violent yet melodic first theme in d minor. The second theme, in the dominant major key of A major, is much calmer; it flows from the first theme almost effortlessly and then proceeds into the development and recapitulation, which concludes with a quick coda.

The slow movement, in D major, has a very innocent, romantic theme initially stated by the first violin with pizzicato accompaniment before being taken up by the cello. Following interruption by an interlude for all of the instruments, the theme returns for a repeat of the first section.

The last two movements, with their distinctly Russian and folk-like melodies and rhythms, greatly contrast with the previous ones.

"I...am writing with *difficulty*, not for want of new ideas, but because of the novelty of the form. One requires six independent yet homogeneous voices. This is unimaginably difficult." On the same day, the composer wrote that it was: "terribly difficult working in this new form; it seems that rather than writing for six voices, I am, in essence, composing for the orchestra, and only then arranging it for six string instruments." However, once finished he wrote: "...this is my first attempt to break free from the quartet. What a wonderful thing the sextet is! It felt so natural, with such a wealth of resources!"

String Sextet No. 2 in G major-Opus 36 by Johannes Brahms

First performed in Boston, Massachusetts on October 11, 1866, most of this work was composed in the comfortable country surroundings of Lichtental, near [Baden-Baden](#). According to Brahms' biographer [Karl Geiringer](#), it conceals a reference to the first name of [Agathe von Siebold](#) (with whom he was infatuated at the time) in the first movement, bars 162–168, with the notes *a-g-a-h-e*.

The work is characterized by its exotic sounding opening of the first movement, by innovative chord structures, and its many contrasts both technical and melodic. Brahms' richness of invention animates the score from the outset. A viola murmuring quietly on a semi-trill figure sets the scene for the main theme in the first violin – two ascending fifths, the first in the home key of G followed by one in the unexpected key of e-flat. The viola figure provides a sense of

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unrest as the violin finds its way back to the home key after briefly exploring the foreign one. After the main idea is repeated, with cello interjections of descending fifths, the first cello sings the main theme as violins take up the murmuring figures. The movement proceeds with all manner of appealing and endearing elegance, including a secondary theme, presented by violin I, that is about as waltzily charming as you please. Thus do charm and veiled beauty coexist in a movement that is filled with compositional subtlety and strength of design.

Brahms puts the Scherzo in second position and makes of it a place of minor-key intimacy expressed in the most sophisticated contrapuntal and rhythmic terms. The middle Trio section provides multiple contrast: It is in triple meter whereas the main section is in duple; the key is G major rather than g minor; and the spirit is dashing Hungarian. But the underlying strength of the movement, as of the entire work, is the masterful counterpoint that enriches the musical texture.

If Brahms was gathering his new contrapuntal strength in the Sextet, he was continuing his distinctive command of variation form in the third movement Adagio. Not only is this set of variations a mighty technical feat, but it is also music of affecting expressiveness. Brahms had already written several impressive sets of variations for piano solo, including the Handel Variations and the Paganini Variations. Here the string sonorities add a dimension to the variation process that marks the composer as a spiritual seer far beyond his chronological age.

It was an excellent decision to place the Adagio in the penultimate position, considering the busy athleticism of the finale's main section. The ensemble demands are considerable in the movement's perpetual-motion passages, and the contrasting lyricism radiates with the kind of Brahmsian warmth that is as comforting as anything 19th-century romanticism has to offer.