

It was not unusual for Mozart to rework an already completed composition, as he did in the case of the *Viola Quintet in C Minor, K. 406*. It appeared originally as his *Serenade for Winds, K. 388*. The musicologist and Mozart biographer, Alfred Einstein, maintains that Mozart planned to submit a set of six viola quintets to Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, in hopes of receiving a further commission or a court appointment. Even though the composer accelerated the process of completing six works by changing an extant work into a viola quintet, there is no evidence that the full project ever came to fruition. In spite of the reduction from eight parts in the *Serenade* to five in the *Quintet*, the work is perfectly suited to the smaller medium and projects great power.

After a stark, ominous opening passage in unison, the first movement of the quintet proceeds with four distinct motives, corresponding to the following characteristics: beseeching, defiant, flirtatious, and stubborn. The second movement moves to the major mode, and its tranquility eases the tensions that were built up by the first movement. The third movement, a minuet, reveals Mozart's potential for astounding contrapuntal writing. Once the melody has been subject to numerous intricate contrapuntal treatments in the minuet, the *Trio in rovescio (Trio in Reverse)* presents the melody both in its original form and its inversion. The final movement begins, as did the first, with a sober theme. The theme is subject to seven variations, in each of which it becomes progressively more obscure. The seventh variation carries the work to a depth of chromatic anguish, but its positive mood is restored by a glistening coda.

Prokofiev had already been actively composing for fifteen years when in 1924 he wrote the music now known as his *Quintet, Opus 39*. However, he had little success up to that time in selling his scores, which were too traditional for the Paris publishers, and too unconventional for those in New York. In need of funds, he accepted a commission to write the music for a ballet about the circus, *Trapeze*, for a small traveling dance company. The company soon folded, and the music would have been completely forgotten had not Prokofiev reworked it into a quintet.

Stylistically related to his *Second Symphony*, which also dates from 1924, the quintet has six movements, the first of which calls to mind the antics of clowns, with the woodwinds tumbling over one another. Each of the successive movements features an unusual acoustical effect, with special emphasis on the possibilities of the double bass in the second, fourth, fifth, and sixth movements.

The artistry of clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907) was a great inspiration for Brahms, who in 1891 wrote two major works with Mühlfeld in mind: the *Trio in A Minor, Opus 114*, and the *Quintet, Opus 115*. In a letter to his friend Eusebius Mandyczewski, the ever self-deprecating Brahms referred to the latter as a "piece of foolishness" that he was trying to "nurse along." The work, to the contrary, is a masterpiece in its genre, displaying the clarinet's most telling effects, from the high wail of its *clarino* register to the dark, romantic shades of its low *chalumeau* range. On the occasion of the quintet's first performance on 12 December 1891 in Berlin, Mühlfeld was the clarinetist, with the Joachim Quartet providing the other four parts.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

For the convenience of concertgoers the Garden Café remains open until 6:30 p.m.

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Sunday Evening, 1 October 2000
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

