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The *Phantasy for Violin with Piano Accompaniment, Op. 47*, is the last instrumental work by Arnold Schoenberg. It was commissioned by the Canadian violinist and conductor Adolph Koldofsky (1905–1951), whose interest in contemporary music drew him to the work of the master of the twelve-tone system. Schoenberg originally conceived the *Phantasy* for the violin alone, but added a piano accompaniment at Koldofsky's request. In a tight structural format, Schoenberg develops a high degree of unity in the composition through avoidance of repetitions and exploration of new musical forms for greater contrast among the various sections of the work.

Discreetly hidden in this remarkable *Phantasy* are some of the same characteristics that are exhibited in fantasies dating as far back as the seventeenth century: sectionality, capriciousness, and, to a large degree, a feeling of improvisation. However, in-depth study of the work reveals a more profound and composite structure than might appear on first hearing. Underlying the multisectional façade is the outline of a condensed sonata-allegro form. Taken as a whole, the *Phantasy* embodies the epitome of Schoenberg's compositional technique, making it one of the most significant examples of its genre from the twentieth century.

Violinist Vincent Skowronski, a champion of Richard Strauss' only violin sonata, writes: "From the outset, [the] opening movement bursts forth with a glorious Straussian statement of the principal theme. Then, by means of tonal colors, grandiose thematic arching, and some Brahmsian patches of dramatic impact, incorporated with unorthodox yet rich harmonic blends, Strauss twirls and molds the elements of this movement into a cohesive mixture of impassioned splendor." This high voltage of raw energy is replaced in the second movement by a quiet reserve of suppressed emotion that launches Strauss into one of his most lyrical and expressive moods. The third movement segues from a solemn introduction into the joyous and irresistible optimism of the *allegro*, and climaxes in an energetic and muscular *scherzando*.

It has been said that in writing his partitas and sonatas for solo violin, Johann Sebastian Bach was at the summit of his achievement. Although he was an accomplished violinist, the very foundation of his musical style was his skill as an improviser at the keyboard. The resulting highly polyphonic textures present special challenges to players of the violin and other sustaining instruments, on which it is difficult to play the music as Bach put it on the page. The intrinsic musical value of Bach's solo violin works was not recognized or appreciated by subsequent generations of string players. Although violin teachers used them as a pedagogical aid, the partitas were not brought to the concert stage until the end of the nineteenth century, when the great Hungarian-born violinist Joseph Joachim began to play them in his program. The *Partita No. 1 in B Minor, BWV 1002*, with its characteristic four dance movements, *Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Tempo di bourrée*, is an anomaly among Bach's three solo violin partitas because each movement is extended by the addition of a *double*, or variation.

Ravel's *Tzigane (Gypsy)*, an exotic and rhapsodic composition for violin, can trace its musical lineage back to Paganini and Liszt. A bravura adaptation of the Hungarian rhapsody, *Tzigane* presents extraordinary technical challenges for the violinist. It is filled to the brim with rapid harmonics and pizzicati, quadruple stops, and brilliant passages in perpetual motion. The many subtle changes in tempo, the rhythmic figures, the straightforward harmony, and the frequent use of a four-note Gypsy motif (E, F, G#, A) give *Tzigane* an authentic folk flavor, but the clarity of Ravel's workmanship raises the work to a sublime level.

Programs notes by Elmer Booze