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TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 1998, 8:00 P.M.

BOSTON CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

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PROGRAM

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano in E-Flat Major, K. 498, "Kegelstatt"

Andante • Minuetto • Allegretto

ERNO DOHNÁNYI (1877-1960)

Sextet in C Major, Op. 37 (1935)

Allegro appassionato • Intermezzo: Adagio

Allegro con sentimento • Finale: Allegro vivace, giocoso

... *Intermission* ...

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 25

Allegro • Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo

Andante con moto • Rondo alla Zingarese: Presto

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TRIO IN E-FLAT MAJOR,
K. 498, "KEGELSTATT"

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

A "Kegelstatt" is a court or alley for playing skittles or ninepins. The unconfirmed story is that Mozart composed this trio in August 1786 while playing the game with Anton Stadler, for whom Mozart wrote his Clarinet Quintet, K. 581, and his Clarinet Concerto, K. 622. According to some reports, Stadler was a sponge who stole and sold some of Mozart's pawn tickets. Mozart wrote his wife in 1791 that Stadler was "only a bit of an ass, not much of one, but . . . well, he is an ass indeed!" But he was an excellent clarinet player, and Mozart forgave him much. Mozart wrote the trio to be played by one of his favorite pupils, Franziska von Jacquin, Stadler, and himself on viola. The unusual combination of instruments served as a model for compositions by several later composers, including Robert Schumann and Max Bruch; the clarinet and viola have a similar range but very different timbres, which provide piquant combinations and solos with the piano.

The first movement, an unusual *Andante*, begins with a motif that dominates the movement: a note with a turn followed by four descending notes. The second theme seems to provide contrast, but it is derived from the first motif without the turn, and the turn soon comes back. The clarinet and the piano share most of the melodic material in the first part of the movement, but all three contribute to the brief development section, and the viola takes the second theme in the recapitulation.

A sturdy bass line in the piano under a dignified statement by the clarinet and viola opens the second movement, a minuet; the piano then follows with a quiet passage alone. This pattern of contrasts is extended in the second part of the minuet. The trio contrasts a brief soft passage on the clarinet—and later with the piano—with assertive triplets from the viola. After the opening section is repeated, the viola's triplets return in the coda.

The clarinet states the opening melody of the finale, a beautiful lyric theme derived from the second theme of the first movement; it then yields to the piano accompanied by the viola. Contrasting sections between repeats of the rondo theme include one with brilliant runs in the piano, and one in which the viola comes to the fore with passionate downward slashes and chromatically rising triplets in C minor. After a final statement of the

rondo theme by the clarinet, a dashing coda ends the movement.

This is the first performance of this work on a Friends of Music program.
Program notes by Edward Doughtie.

SEXTET IN C MAJOR,
OP. 37

ERNO DOHNÁNYI

War and tyranny are major themes in the saga of 20th century music. The flight from danger landed an extraordinary number of Europe's greatest musicians onto New World soil, among them Erno Dohnányi who, at the time of his departure from Hungary at age 67, had for decades been the most influential figure in its musical life. An outstanding pianist from childhood, he won all the important national prizes and medals for performance and composition early in his career and the praise and support of Johannes Brahms for his piano quintet in C minor, written at age 18. He was born in 1877 in Bratislava, then an important provincial city in Hungary (now the capital of Slovakia). His father, a professor of physics and mathematics at the gymnasium and an excellent amateur cellist, was his first music teacher. After completing gymnasium in his home town he entered the Budapest Academy of Music at age 18, completing the course in three years. An international concert career began shortly thereafter, leading to a teaching position at the State Conservatory in Berlin where he stayed until the outbreak of World War I. After his return to Budapest he set about revitalizing the music scene in the city. He introduced a new piano curriculum into the Academy, organized and personally performed in an extraordinary number of public concerts, and took on the posts of director of the Budapest Academy of Music, musical director of Hungarian radio, and president and principal conductor of the Philharmonic Society. During his reign an astonishing number of world-famous musicians passed through the Academy—among those more familiar to American audiences are the conductors Solti, Dorati, and Reiner; the pianists Annie Fisher and György Sandor; cellists Janos Starker and Laszlo Varga; and violinist Josef Szigeti. He resigned his Academy post in protest against Nazi policies, was vilified by both the Nazis and the Communists, and fled the country in 1944 as the Russian Army advanced. He ultimately found safe haven in Tallahassee, Florida, at Florida State

University where, aged 71, he resumed his teaching career in composition and piano, as well as giving regular solo and chamber-music performances until his death eleven years later. Antal Dorati, who was for a time related by marriage, recalls him as “remarkable, amiable and handsome.”

He was devoted to chamber music and became the first internationally renowned pianist to make its performance a major part of his career. He wrote a good deal of it as well, including the piece we hear tonight, which has the distinction of being his last in this *genre*. Written in 1935 for the rather unusual combination of piano, horn, clarinet, violin, viola, and cello, the circumstances of its creation are available to anyone who reads Hungarian—alas! As with most of his other chamber works, it is written in the romantic tradition which links Dohnányi with the music of Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms. But he speaks with his own voice, and no one would mistake this music for that of either his predecessors or contemporaries.

In this Sextet, as in his famous Piano Quintet in C Minor, Opus 1, Dohnányi plants unified thematic material into the four movements; echoes of the opening theme of the first movement will be heard at strategic points in the remaining movements either as direct quotes or somewhat transformed. The first movement, longest of the four, is marked *Allegro*. Its lovely flowing melodic lines are shared by all the instruments; and whereas its flawless counterpoint, rich romanticism, and adherence to sonata form bind it to music of the past, it distinguishes itself by a freer use of harmonic relationships. The *Intermezzo (Adagio)* which follows is based on the harmonic outline of the first movement’s opening three notes woven into mood music of the highest quality. The third movement is a set of variations marked *Allegro con sentimento—presto, quasi l’stesso tempo—meno mosso* (*Allegro* with feeling—*Presto*, almost the same tempo—less quickly). The movement ends with a statement of the opening theme of the Sextet, leading without pause into the final *Allegro vivace giocoso*, a witty and affectionate send-up of 1930’s European nightclub music. This movement is a rondo whose dance themes gyrate through a dizzying array of shimmering key changes sparkling with color like a diamond in the sun. Towards the end, a restatement of the first movement’s grand opening theme is again briefly heard buried in the lower voices, after which the movement winds up strong, grandiose, smug—and smack in the wrong key, an outrageous

half tone off base—which the composer hurriedly corrects with two slapping chords. You won’t be alone if you find yourself chuckling!

Dohnányi was a highly gifted and skilled composer whose music was overshadowed by the forces of the new music around him—that of his countrymen Bartók and Kodály, of the French Impressionists Debussy and Ravel, of Stravinsky, and of the New Viennese School of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. Many reference works on 20th century chamber music do not even mention his name! Yet his chamber music is beautifully crafted and gratifying for both listener and performer. He was a victim of fashion, not of incompetence. It is to be hoped that his music will experience the renaissance it deserves.

This is the first performance of this work on a Friends of Music program.

Program notes © Nora Avins Klein.

PIANO QUARTET NO. 1 IN G MINOR, OP. 25 JOHANNES BRAHMS

At a party in the summer villa of waltz-king Johann Strauss, Brahms once inscribed the autograph-fan of Strauss’s stepdaughter with the first few measures of the Blue Danube Waltz, then wrote under it “Unfortunately not by Johannes Brahms.” Fifty years later, sitting in his study in southern California, Arnold Schoenberg doodled on a scrap of paper, practicing Brahms’s signature. Then he noted down the first few measures of the Piano Quartet in G Minor and wrote, “Unfortunately by Johs. Brahms, only orchestrated by Arnold Schoenberg.” Nothing better illustrates the radical composer’s love of Brahms’s quartet than his unusual homage, for Schoenberg did indeed orchestrate the entire quartet, producing a version of the piece that is still played today. But Brahms’s best friends were not quite as admiring as Schoenberg. In 1861, before the quartet was published, they puzzled over the unusual nature of the opening movement. And soon after its first performance in Vienna (autumn 1862), the famous critic and Brahms friend, Eduard Hanslick, complained that the opening theme was “not important enough.”

Posterity has left those critics far behind: the G Minor Quartet is by far the most popular of the three Brahms wrote for that combination. The “unimportant” first theme, a mysterious unfolding of a rhythmless four-note module, repeated three times

in various permutations and stated by the piano in bare octaves, is just the right material to start Brahms's fertile imagination off on a rich journey. And in any case, the austerity of the four-note module is countered by five other full-blown, singable tunes in the exposition—an exposition that is almost twice as long as any other section of the movement (one of the anomalies that bothered Brahms's friends); and because of its self-effacing austerity, Brahms is able to use the module as bass line and as texture throughout the movement, in fragment or in whole, giving this sprawling work a remarkable unity.

The "second theme" is really a group of four themes, three of them in D major, the "wrong" key for second themes of a piece in G minor—the other trait that worried Brahms's friends. Only musicologists and over-conscientious friends worry about such things, however; as for us, we can enjoy Brahms's generosity in giving us so much gorgeous music before we have even come to the development section. There are surprises in store: the relatively short development section begins by sounding like the repeat of the exposition (there is no repeat written), and the re-exposition starts well into the comparable part of the exposition. Having created the first part of the sonata form on such a large scale, Brahms has the good sense to condense the rest. There are a number of gems to listen for in this movement: one of the second section themes sounds like a sturdy country dance, with vigorous open fifths in the cello part; it returns in the re-exposition transformed now to minor, stripped of its cello rhythms, with undulating violin string crossings, and sounding deeply forlorn. It is a compelling example of thematic transformation. The coda, too, is particularly successful. The four-note module expands its intervals in the bass; heard then as a stretto between the strings and the piano, it brings the movement to a most satisfying close, with the very kind of compositional practice that Schoenberg so admired and used himself.

The second movement is an ABA *Intermezzo*, a tour-de-force portrayal of what cross-rhythms are. If every once in a while, as you automatically sense the beat, you are forced to add an extra beat to make it all come out correctly, you have merely fallen victim to Brahms's penchant for mixing twos and threes, and then obliterating the bar-line by displacing the beat. The Trio, above all, is metrically ambiguous, leaving one feeling especially satisfied that against all odds, everyone has actually ended together.

The third movement, an *Andante con moto* (in ABA form), has such a rich texture that one wonders if it was not this which gave Schoenberg the idea of orchestrating the work. This is music painted with a broad brush—until towards the end of the A section, where dotted rhythms suddenly appear in the piano, gradually spreading to the strings. They herald the B section, a bizarre march performed at a whisper, wraith-like, until another sudden change presents the march in *fortissimo*. The A section returns, completely altered in instrumentation and ornamentation, but still completely recognizable.

The Finale is a smashing *Rondo alla Zingarese*, Gypsy style. Brahms's great friend, the Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim, commented that here Brahms had outdone him at his own game. Joachim had already written his Hungarian Violin Concerto, and presumably knew what he was talking about. And indeed, the music is unusually wild for Brahms, with strongly etched rhythms—some of them actually Hungarian—tremendous energy, and virtuosity galore. Much of the popularity of the quartet rests with this movement. One might expect that given Brahms's friendship with Joachim and the wide renown of Gypsy violinists, Brahms would have written music to show off his friend's violin; instead, the piano has the greatest brilliance, an indication of Brahms's own impressive pianism at this period of his life. Although Clara Schumann gave the first performance of this work (in Hamburg in the autumn of 1861), Brahms placed this piece on his debut recital in Vienna one year later, and gave a concert so successful that it provided the firm foundation for his future career there.

This is the fourth performance of this work on a Friends of Music program; it was last played in March 1987 by the Los Angeles Piano Quartet.

Program notes © by Styra Avins.

BOSTON CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

The Boston Chamber Music Society was founded to provide Boston's concert-going public with quality performances of the great chamber music repertoire from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Now in its second decade, the Society has steadily grown and evolved, enjoying the largest audience in Boston chamber music history. In any given concert,

the players perform combinations of strings, winds, and piano, from duos to octets, which creates enormous variety in each program.

The Boston Chamber Music Society gave its first public performances in Boston in 1981; its range of performances now reaches across the world, including recent concerts at Lincoln Center, and tours to the Far East and Europe, including an appearance at the prestigious Academia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome. In celebration of its tenth anniversary season, the Society released its first two critically acclaimed compact discs on the Northeastern label, featuring four Brahms masterpieces. Their latest release on Northeastern features piano trios of Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky.

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SHOSTAKOVICH:
 Adagio and Polka;
 Quartet No. 7, Op. 108 (1960)

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 Mozart, *Ein musikalischer Spass*
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 P.D.Q. Bach, Schlepptet in E major
- **ROBERT SPANO, PIANO**
 FEBRUARY 3, 1998
 Shostakovich, Trio No. 2 for Violin,
 Cello and Piano in E minor
 Dvořák, String Quintet in G major
- **CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH, PIANO**
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 Von Bose, Paraphrase from the
 opera *The Sorrows of Young Werther*
 Faure, Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor

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