Notes on the program
By Sandra Hyslop

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Born Salzburg, January 27, 1756; died Vienna, December 5, 1791
Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major, K. 526
Composed in 1787; 24 minutes

At the age of 31, Wolfgang Mozart experienced the gamut of life's pains and pleasures. On the one hand, Leopold Mozart, the composer's indefatigable and pertinacious father, died on May 28, 1787 at age 67. On the other hand, following upon the great success of their opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo da Ponte were engaged by the Prague National Theatre to produce a new work to be premiered in October 1787.

Throughout the year, Mozart worked industriously not only on the composition of *Don Giovanni*, but also on a raft of other significant vocal and instrumental works, including this Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major, K. 526. The Sonata bears no dedication, nor is there evidence of a commission; it is likely that Mozart wrote it specifically for publication. In 1784, Mozart's friend and composer colleague Franz Anton Hoffmeister had established a publishing house, offering Mozart, always in need of money, another small source of income.

The Sonata, K. 526, was Mozart's penultimate example of works for violin and keyboard. Between the ages of six and ten, he had written 16 sonatas for violin and harpsichord—two instruments that he had already mastered. At the age of 22, Mozart returned to the genre, eventually producing another 16 sonatas for violin and piano. Following this sophisticated and brilliant A-major sonata, Mozart composed a final violin-piano composition, an F-major Sonata (K.547) that he described as "für Anfänger"—for beginners.

The A-major Sonata is definitely *nicht* "für Anfänger." Technically and musically challenging, it is among the most admired of Mozart's sonatas. Into it he poured his contrapuntal skills, mastery of melodic materials and structural finesse, creating a perfectly balanced example of the Classical sonata. The violin and piano are equally important throughout.

Written in sonata form, the lively opening, Molto allegro, is strengthened by rhythmic inventiveness and playful interactions between the instruments. The Andante is one of those deceptively simple and breathtaking Mozart creations whose beauty subverts attempts at description. The Presto, a rollicking rondo, closes the sonata with a verve that balances and completes the energy of the first movement. Midori has pointed out that Mozart meant the final movement as a memorial tribute to the composer Karl Friedrich Abel, who had died earlier that year.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
Born St. Petersburg, September 25, 1906; died Moscow, August 9, 1975
Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 134
Composed in 1968; 32 minutes

Having already written two violin concertos for David Oistrakh, Shostakovich honored his friend once again in 1968 by composing the Sonata for Violin and Piano as a tribute to the violinist's 60th birthday. Oistrakh played the work for the first time (with the pianist Moisei Vainberg) on January 8, 1969, at a private reading sponsored by the Union of Soviet Composers. The Sonata's official public premiere took place in Moscow on May 3, 1969; this time the pianist was Sviatoslav Richter. Shostakovich's Sonata was perfectly suited to the imaginations and virtuosity of those two great Russian musicians.

The opening Andante begins with a mysterious journey up and down the piano in quiet octaves. The traversal encompasses the twelve chromatic scale tones within the first three measures. Although Shostakovich never devoted himself to a strict serial technique, he did, in his later works, sometimes use tone rows as one structural or harmonic principle, combining the twelve-tone materials in his own manner: "…if a composer feels that he needs this or that technique, he can take whatever is available and use it as he sees fit.…But if you take only

one technique, whether it is aleatory or dodecaphonic, and use nothing but that technique, then it is wrong. There needs to be a *mélange*."

True to his philosophy, Shostakovich uses the twelve tones of the piano's opening statement within the context of a movement that is tonal, centering on the notes G and D. The violin's entrance describes a second theme, which carries Shostakovich's musical signature: D—eS—C—H (the music notes D—E-flat—C—B). Both themes contribute to an impression of Bach polyphony in the first movement.

The Allegretto is a stomping ternary scherzo in E-flat major. Reminiscent of the angry Allegretto movement of the Piano Trio No. 2, Op. 67, this Scherzo is a relentless and driving dance. Like the Piano Trio, it suggests a Jewish celebration gone amok, with the dancers dropping suddenly at an exhausted finish.

Piano and violin introduce the finale with a Largo in a forceful and dramatic statement. The violin then picks out a lengthy (eleven-bar) theme in pizzicato that leaves the listener unsure of direction or tonality. With the piano's quiet entrance, it soon becomes clear that Shostakovich is describing an extended passacaglia—yet another reminder of Shostakovich's ties to Bach. Both instruments play mighty solo cadenzas before the passions subside into echoes of the first two movements then, finally, an eerie silence.

ROBERT SCHUMANN
Born Zwickau, June 8, 1810; died Endenich, near Bonn, July 29, 1856
Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in A minor, Op. 105
Composed in 1851; 17 minutes

Schumann was nearing the end of his life as a composer before he attempted to write works for solo violin. As he had done so often, once he started working in a new genre, he produced multiple examples. In this case, two sonatas for violin and piano (Opp. 105 and 121) appeared in 1851. In 1853, he wrote the Fantasie for Violin and Orchestra, Op, 131, and the Violin Concerto in D minor. (A third sonata, which Schumann cobbled together from various sources, was published much later, in 1956.) In 1854, Schumann was admitted to a mental asylum at Endenich, where he would remain, dying there in summer 1856.

Schumann composed the A-minor Sonata quickly, starting and finishing it within five days in September 1851. His wife, the illustrious concert pianist Clara Wieck Schumann, and his friend and colleague Ferdinand David gave the premiere performance of the work in Düsseldorf the following March. It is an intimate work, with restless energy and searching phrases traded between the two instruments. Although technically demanding, its extensive passages of rapidly moving figures seem more agitated than virtuosic.

Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck [with passionate expression] lives up to its title. The violin's opening statement in A minor is interrupted and taken up by the piano in a new key, and the two instruments continue, restlessly, to trade the theme, modulating to other keys, throughout the movement.

The Allegretto is an F-major interlude in the style of so many of Schumann's short piano pieces and smaller chamber works. Tender folk-like melodies alternate with saucy figures in a freely distributed tempo rubato. Two light pizzicato chords finish this gentle rondo.

The impassioned mood of the first movement returns for the finale, also in A minor. Both instruments propel the music on rushing swirls of 16th notes in a traditional sonata form. The main theme of the first movement reappears briefly, but the piano and violin reassert the finale's energetic principle motif, and they bring the sonata to a vigorous conclusion.

FRANZ SCHUBERT
Born Himmelpfortgrund, suburb of Vienna, January 31, 1797; died Vienna, November 19, 1828
Fantasy for Violin and Piano in C major, D. 934
Composed in 1827; 25 minutes

Schubert had less than one year to live when he composed the Fantasy for Violin and Piano in C major, dedicating it to the masterful Bohemian violinist Josef Slavík. Slavík and the pianist Karl Maria von Bocklet first performed the work at a public concert in Vienna in January 1828, a month after its composition.

A work in four movements, the C-major Fantasy is further subdivided into an ingeniously worked out seven-part structure. Above a rustling tremolo in the piano, the violin opens the Fantasy with a plaintively sweet melody. It is a song without words, reminiscent of the many Lieder that Schubert wrote on themes of nature, in which the piano sets a brook-like background for the singer's meditation. The jaunty dance that follows, Allegretto, is often playful, but with a melancholy undercurrent.

Schubert turned pointedly to one of his own Lieder for the Fantasy's Andantino section, which is a set of variations on the main melody from his 1822 song "Sei mir gegrüsst." Schubert composed the song on a melancholy text of farewell to a lost love by the poet Friedrich Rückert. In the original Lied, Schubert created a recurring musical refrain from the words: "Sei mir gegrüsst, sei mir geküsst." [I greet you, I kiss you.] In this Fantasy for Violin and Piano, Schubert turned the theme of that musical refrain into a subject for a lengthy (more than ten minutes) set of variations.

The "Sei mir gegrüsst" theme and other echoes of earlier movements recur briefly in the finale, which is based on a quick march tune. Replete with many changes of mood and tempo, the fourth section ends with a blazing Presto coda.