PROGRAM NOTES

Schubert's Quintet and Dvořák's *Serenade*, each a landmark work for strings, come from different points in their respective composer's careers and exemplify genres of dissimilar weight and scale. The Quintet is the last—and sometimes described as the greatest—piece of chamber music that Schubert wrote, which he completed in September of 1828, two months before his death at just 31 years of age. The size of the piece (about fifty minutes of music that unfolds over four substantial movements) and its hefty two-cello sonority give it an ambitious, symphonic cast, which is enhanced by the string-orchestra arrangement of this performance. By contrast, the *Serenade*, composed in May of 1875, comes from Dvořák's early maturity, and its title implies a shorter, less ambitious work than a symphony (about thirty minutes of music divided into five movements). Added to the generic differences between the pieces, the distinctive compositional styles and predilections of Schubert and Dvořák create differences of thematic handling and tonal language between these two pieces that, in spite of the shared medium, of string orchestra and Romantic era of composition, sound markedly different from one another.

A composer of over six hundred songs during his brief lifetime, Schubert stands out as an inexhaustibly inventive tunesmith: his melodies, always attractive and often breathtaking, stick in our memory. His textures emphasize his melodic gift by concentrating our interest in the single line, adding a variety of accompanimental details but avoiding contrapuntal development. Another feature of Schubert is his interest in traversing large tonal distances quickly and effortlessly, so as to transport the listener to (musically) faraway places. Both characteristics, melodic and tonal, mark his Quintet's opening sonata-form movement in which the first theme in C major, vigorous and incisive, leads to a second theme in the distant key of E-flat major. Sonata-form second themes are often gentler and more lyrical in comparison to their first themes, and this one of Schubert's is no exception. What stands out is its intense and sustaining lyricism, and its expansiveness, as if a complete song in and of itself.

The rest of the opening movement (particularly the development) further evidences Schubert's lyricism and interest in exploring distant keys, and the slow second movement demonstrates these same qualities, but in a different setting. The three-part form of this movement contrasts transcendently hymn-like outer sections in E major with a middle section in an otherworldly F minor, tonally remote and stormy. Within this menacing interlude, the main melody, high up in the first violins, evokes operatic melodrama. The storm calms and the E-major hymn returns, but now with accompanying cello filigree. And with remarkable facility, Schubert recalls the larger-scale contrast of this movement in its final few measures with a brief move back to F minor before a final cadence in E. By this point, the exploration and even juxtaposition of remote keys has emerged as an abiding interest, and the third movement similarly brings together a C-major Scherzo and D-flat major

Trio. But more than just tonally remote from one another, the two portions of this movement bear completely distinct characters: a forceful, pounding romp of the Scherzo, marked presto, versus the quiet introspection of the Trio, marked andante sostenuto. The final movement presents a swaggering rondo form whose main theme recalls central-European gypsy fiddling, except that Schubert takes that tune through a series of different keys. A second theme (another masterpiece of expansive lyricism) concludes the rondo-form refrain and takes the piece into an extended modulatory episode. The return of the refrain and its main theme gives way to a new episode and then to the now-displaced second theme later on. The movement concludes with a faster version of the main theme and then an even faster, fragmented form of it. In the final gesture of the piece, Schubert recalls his earlier juxtapositions of distant keys with a jolting, triple-forte chord with D-flat as its bass note, cheek by jowl with the C-major chords of the final cadence.

Dvořák's Serenade, an early work for the composer as mentioned, also appears early within the late nineteenth-century vogue of string-orchestral suites. Those by Tchaikovsky, Elgar, and Grieg (the Holberg Suite) are the best known, but a more complete listing—Emmanuel Moór (1881), Gabriel Pierné (1881), Victor Herbert (1889), George Whitefield Chadwick (1890), Arthur Foote (1891), Vasily Kalinnikov (1891), Guy Ropartz (1892), Joseph Suk (1892), Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari (1893), Carl Reinecke (1898), Oscar Straus (1905)—illustrates the important niche occupied the serenade genre and its string-orchestra medium in late-Romantic music. And if the genre designation of serenade implies a lighter and briefer piece than a symphony, Dvořák's music is nonetheless enriched by his melodic inventiveness, similar to Schubert's, and by the possibilities of thematic contrast, variation, and transformation that he employs throughout.

Each movement except for the last is an A-B-A' form. Thus, in the opening movement the pastoral E-major of the A-section gives way to a march-like B-section (G-major) and return of the A-section with variation. The second movement pairs two dances, a flowing Tempo di Valse and a wistful Trio, each one an A-B-A' form. The Scherzo that follows centers on two themes, the first, infectiously cheery and energized, and the second, gently breezy. And although not labeled as such, a trio section follows within this movement before leading back to the opening scherzo themes. The Larghetto that follows, the slow and soulful interlude within the suite, begins with a plaintive but elegant tune that establishes a point of departure for melodic ornament and, upon repetition, detailed embellishment.

As in the previous movements, there is a contrasting middle section with a new tune and in a new key, and then a return of the opening theme. In this return and in those of the earlier movements, the most special quality of Dvořák's composing shines through because, toward the end, we hear the last

utterance of the movement's main idea, but now transformed by some combination of altered harmonies, recast melody, or transformed tempo. In these passages Dvořák seems to summarize the whole of the movement in a moment of poignant reminiscence, and the effect is always powerful.

The fifth and final movement begins with rousing music that evokes the vigorous fiddling of peasant dances. As is previous movements, this one works through two main sections, but the form is extended by the inclusion of themes from the fourth movement and, closer to the end, the first movement. The effect is similar to the moments of reminiscence in the earlier movements, except that the glance backward now encompasses the entire piece.

We should take note of the writing for strings that we hear in these two pieces. Both composers wrote sensitively and knowledgeably for string ensembles, with a keen awareness of playing technique and coloristic effects. Schubert had quintet models close at hand in earlier examples by Beethoven and Mozart, but he departed from those models by adding a second cello instead of the second viola, as they had done. And he knew what he was doing: the open-string lower-range sonority of his Scherzo makes for a unique moment with that second cello, and one that adds to the array of effects that we also hear in his quintet (e.g., tremolos and diverse staccato bowings). Dvořák, whose understanding of strings must have come easily from his performing background as a violinist and violist, experiments frequently and profitably in the Serenade with the sonorous effects of divisi writing. Thus, at one point, he calls for four separate violin parts instead of the usual two, and similarly, for two viola parts or two cello parts in place of one. The effect is to enlarge the assortment not only of harmonic colors, but also of string-ensemble sonorities. String instruments are distinctive because of the abundance of overtones in their sound. No wonder that composers are attracted to string ensembles. The best of them take that richness of tone color as their primary resource and maximize its distinctive effects, as do Schubert and Dvořák.

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