Selections from Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Viola and Piano, Op. 83
Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Composed in 1909.

Max Bruch, widely known and respected in his day as a composer, conductor and teacher, received his earliest music instruction from his mother, a noted singer and pianist. He began composing at eleven, and by fourteen had produced a symphony and a string quartet, the latter garnering a prize that allowed him to study with Reinecke and Hiller in Cologne. Bruch held various posts as a choral and orchestral conductor in Cologne, Coblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Liverpool and Breslau, and in 1883, he visited America to conduct concerts of his own compositions. From 1890 to 1910, he taught composition at the Berlin Academy and received numerous awards for his work, including an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. Though Bruch is known mainly for three famous compositions for string soloist and orchestra (the G minor Concerto and the Scottish Fantasy for violin, and the *Kol Nidrei* for cello), he also composed two other violin concertos, three symphonies, a concerto for two pianos, various chamber pieces, songs, three operas and much choral music.

Bruch composed his Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Viola and Piano, Op. 83 in 1909, in his seventieth year, for his son Max Felix, a talented clarinetist who also inspired a Double Concerto (Op. 88) for his instrument and viola from his father two years later. When the younger Bruch played the works in Cologne and Hamburg, Fritz Steinbach reported favorably on the event to the composer, comparing Max Felix's ability with that of Richard Mühlfeld, the clarinetist who had inspired two sonatas, a quintet and a trio from Johannes Brahms two decades before.

Clarinet and viola are here evenly matched, singing together in duet or conversing in dialogue, while the piano serves as an accompanimental partner. Bruch intended that the Eight Pieces be regarded as a set of independent miniatures of various styles rather than as an integrated cycle, and advised against playing all of them together in concert. The Pieces (they range from three to six minutes in length) are straightforward in structure — binary (A-B) or ternary (A-B-A) for the first six, compact sonata form for the last two — and are, with one exception (No. 7), all in thoughtful minor keys. Though Bruch was fond of incorporating folk music into his concert works, only the Romanian Melody (No. 5, suggested to him, he said, by "the delightful young princess zu Wied" at one of his Sunday open-houses; he dedicated the work to her) shows such an influence; the only other movement with a title is the Nachtgesang (No. 6, "Nocturne").

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Night Time for Violin and Harp
Sebastian Currier (b. 1959)

Composed in 1998.
Premiered in 2000 at the Berlin Philharmonie
by violinist Jean-Claude Velin and harpist Marie-Pierre Langlamet.

Sebastian Currier was born in 1959 into a musical family in Huntington, Pennsylvania and raised in Providence, Rhode Island — his father, Robert, was a professional violinist and violist and a string teacher; his mother, Marilyn Kind Currier, was a composer and professor of music at Providence College; his younger brother, Nathan, is a Juilliard-trained composer deeply involved with climate science in both his music and his life. Sebastian Currier holds degrees from the Manhattan School of Music and the Juilliard School, where his teachers included Milton Babbitt; he also studied at Tanglewood with George Perle. Currier has served on the faculties of Juilliard (1992-1998) and Columbia University (1999-2007), and held residencies at the MacDowell and Yaddo colonies; he was appointed Artist-in-Residence at the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton University beginning in July 2013. In 2007, he won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award of the University of Louisville for Static for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano. His other distinctions include the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award, Berlin Prize, Rome Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Distinguished Alumni Award from the Manhattan School of Music. Currier's commissions include those from the Berlin Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, Fromm Foundation, Koussevitzky Foundation, Barlow Endowment and Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust. Recordings of his music appear on the Deutsche Grammophon, Albany, CRI, Harmonia Mundi, Koch International Classics, Copland House, New World Records and Naxos labels.

Currier composed *Night Time* in 1998 for Marie-Pierre Langlamet, harpist of the Berlin Philharmonic, and Jean-Claude Velin, former violinist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and l'Orchestre de Paris and a specialist in chamber music since 1998; they premiered the work at the Philharmonie in Berlin in 2000. The composer wrote, "The five short movements of *Night Time — Dusk, Sleepless, Vespers, Nightwind* and *Starlight* — share a sense of quietude, introversion, intimacy and subdued restlessness. The instrumental ensemble itself, violin and harp, suggested to me right from the start a series of nocturnal moments, where a sense of isolation, distance and quiet thoughtfulness would prevail throughout otherwise thematically contrasting movements. From the distant murmuring sounds in *Dusk* to the disquiet of the pizzicato ostinato and muted chords in *Sleepless*, from the contemplative lyricism of *Vespers* to the rushing passage work in *Nightwind* and the hypnotic figurations of *Starlight*, there is an affinity with a phrase of a Wallace Stevens poem that I set in another work, *Vocalissimus*: 'in the distances of sleep.'"

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Quartet for Oboe, Violin, Viola and Cello in F major, K. 370 (K. 368b)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Composed in 1781.

For all the reflected glory that the ancient city of Salzburg enjoys from the universal renown of its most famous son, it is perhaps ironic to note that Mozart hated the place. He felt demeaned by the servant's treatment he had to endure as a member of Archbishop Colloredo's musical staff, he chafed under the constantly watchful presence of his father, he sniped at the conservative provincial taste of the town's inhabitants, and he longed to be summoned to some glamorous city with an opera house whose stage he could fill with his music. He tried to escape his "Salzburg captivity," as he rather injudiciously referred to his employment, from at least the age of fifteen, but failed for over a decade to find a better job. It is therefore not difficult to imagine his excitement at receiving a commission from the Elector Karl Theodor to compose a large-scale grand opera for the 1781 Carnival season of the Court Opera in Munich.

Though Mozart's chief effort in Munich was the creation of *Idomeneo*, he was eager to show the music lovers of that cultured and influential city other aspects of his genius as well. The most important satellite works circling *Idomeneo* were the superb Serenade for Ten Winds (K. 361) and the Quartet for Oboe and Strings (K. 370), which were written for the excellent wind players of the court orchestra, many of whom Mozart had met on his tour to Paris four years before, when they were still stationed in Mannheim. The Oboe Quartet was composed for the renowned virtuoso of that recalcitrant instrument Friedrich Ramm, who had fallen so in love with Mozart's Oboe Concerto (K. 314) in Mannheim that he played the work five times within two weeks of discovering it. Mozart tailored this Quartet to the finest elements of Ramm's playing: fiery virtuosity in the finale; grace and agility in the opening *Allegro*; sweet cantilena in the *Adagio*; difficult challenges to technique, range and musicianship throughout. Given the soloistic nature of the wind part and the manner in which the instrument's plangent sound naturally differentiates it from the strings, this Quartet is essentially a miniature concerto for oboe.

The sunny opening *Allegro* follows traditional sonata form, though, uncharacteristically for him, Mozart reused the principal theme, differently scored and in a new key, as the secondary theme rather than devising a new melody. The development section begins with a pedantic, slow-motion canon tenuously related to the earlier material which soon lapses into the playfulness that characterizes the rest of the movement. The brief minor-key *Adagio* is an instrumental aria of almost operatic pathos. The finale is a chuckling Rondeau.

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Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello in F minor, Op. 65
Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Composed in 1883.
Premiered on October 27, 1883 in Mladá Boleslav by violinist Ferdinand Lachner, cellist Alois Neruda and the composer as pianist.

Success for Antonín Dvořák was a two-edged sword. In 1874, when he was struggling to make a living as organist at St. Adalbert's Church in Prague, he submitted some of his compositions to a committee in Vienna granting awards to promising musicians in the Habsburg provinces. Those pieces came to the attention of Johannes Brahms, who encouraged Dvořák in his work and urged the panel to grant the young Bohemian composer the highest possible stipend. Three years later, after Brahms had seen that Dvořák's award was renewed, he instructed his publisher, Fritz Simrock in Berlin, that he was to accept Dvořák as a new client. Dvořák was thrilled with the opportunities his Viennese connections opened for him, and he paid Brahms great homage in word and tone for the rest of his life.

Brahms, however, was indissolubly linked with the spirit and letter of German music, and Dvořák soon came to be torn between the desire on one hand to emulate his Viennese patron and on the other to support the political and social aspirations of his fellow Czechs. This dichotomy resulted in a crisis of philosophy for Dvořák by 1882, when Brahms was urging him to settle in Vienna and opera houses in that city and Dresden were offering lucrative contracts for any work he would write to a German-language libretto, a certain avenue to the international performance of his stage music. Dvořák was still painfully undecided between Vienna and Prague, between his adopted German symphonism and his native Czech heritage, when his mother died on December 14, 1882. The grief over her loss and the emotional distress brought about by uncertainty over his future artistic path threw him into a difficult period of dark moods and troubled thoughts. Even the birth of a son (Antonín) on March 7, 1883 and news that his Stabat Mater had been enthusiastically received at its English premiere in London a few days later did little to relieve his anxiety or ease his decision. After a brief hiatus in his creative work, he poured his feelings into some of his most powerful and deeply felt works during the following months. The first of these compositions was the superb Piano Trio in F minor, begun on February 4, 1883, only six weeks after Anna Dvořák's death, and completed on March 31st. The Scherzo Capriccioso for Orchestra (Op. 66) followed immediately after the Trio, and the Hussite Overture (Op. 67), inspired by the Hussite Rebellion, the 15th-century political, social and religious movement led by Jan Hus that sought sectarian freedom and Bohemian independence, gave testimony that he had resolved his artistic conflict in favor of his Czech nationalism. The great D minor Symphony (No. 7, Op. 70) appeared a year later.

The F minor Trio, the first work of this period of intense emotion and heated creativity, received the brunt of Dvořák's turbulent feelings. It is perhaps indicative of his troubled state of mind at the time that he omitted from the end of the manuscript the phrase Bohu díky ("Thanks to God"), which had invariably graced his earlier pieces. "There is hardly another work in Dvořák's output so sorrowful, somber and poignant," wrote Hans-Hubert Schönzeler. "It must rank among the greatest of his chamber music compositions." Dvořák took special care with this Trio, allowing nearly two months for its composition rather than the customary two or three weeks he usually devoted to a chamber work, and then revising it so thoroughly after its premiere on October 27, 1883 in Mladá Boleslav (thirty miles northeast of Prague) that he had to write out a complete new score.

Though the opening movement is contained within traditional sonata form, its wrought-up, willful mood threatens, observed Paul Stefan, "to burst the bounds and transcend the content of chamber music, passionately striving to merge into the symphonic." The dotted-rhythm main theme begins quietly in the strings, though this is a quiet not of calm but of suppression. The entry of the piano unleashes the inherent dynamism of the principal theme, but emotional control is again restored with the transition, which leads to the cello's presentation of the second theme, a lovely melody whose nominal major mode is continually troubled by plaintive chromatic alterations. The development section, which ranges in mood from sullen to defiant, is impelled by an almost Beethovenian sense of drama. The recapitulation serves not only to recall the exposition's themes but also to thrust their emotional intensity to a higher plane by means of richer figurations, tighter interplay among the instrumental lines and expansion through motivic development.

The second movement is a scherzo in the form of a Bohemian folk dance. The strings begin the dance with a bouncing motive, suggestive of a bagpipe-drone, upon which the piano presents the short-breathed, rather melancholy tune whose varied permutations occupy the first section of the movement. A full stop marks the gateway to the central trio, whose initial bright mood is clouded by the music's unsettled rhythms and apprehensive flattened scale degrees. The opening section is repeated exactly to round out the movement's structure. The Adagio is one of Dvořák's most deeply felt creations, beautiful of line, rich of sonority and sincere in expression. Though the movement is in a key that could offer some sunny solace for the troubled music that surrounds it, the tiny flickers of chromaticism — the lowering of a tone by a half-step to blunt its happiness, like a cloud passing across the sun or the thought of a departed loved one at a moment of joy — further concentrate rather than dispel the Trio's abiding disquiet. The finale is modeled on the furiant, a traditional Czech dance whose fiery character is indicated by its name. The movement, built as a large sonata-rondo form anchored around the recurrences of its principal theme, draws strength from the struggles of the preceding music to achieve a life-affirming close with the turn to the heroic major tonality in its final pages.

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