

CMS

THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Notes on the Program

Selected *Hungarian Dances* for Piano, Four Hands

Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna

Composed in 1889 and 1880.

According to an old Hungarian saying, “Give a Magyar peasant a glass of water and a Gypsy fiddler, and he will become completely drunk.” So it is not surprising that when Kossuth and his Hungarian forces rose up in 1848 against the domination of their homeland by Austria, their ardor was reinforced by the sound of fiery Gypsy music played by Ede Reményi, a young violinist whose politics were as radical as his performances were inspired. Reményi was exiled for his participation in that unsuccessful coup, and he packed his fiddle and his chauvinism off to America for a time.

Returning to Europe in 1852, Reményi met a young pianist in Hamburg named Johannes Brahms, and the two lit out on foot to dazzle the world with their music. The hit of their programs was the traditional Magyar music that Reményi played “with a fire and abandon that excited his hearers to a wild enthusiasm,” according to one contemporary report. Brahms took part by improvising the accompaniments. They traveled mostly through villages and byways, where they added to their repertory by watching the peasants sing and dance. Despite a certain success as a team, however, the differences between the quiet, conservative Brahms and the flamboyant, revolutionary Reményi drove the two apart less than three months after they started their tour.

The seed planted by Reményi’s playing and the enthusiastic music-making of the country villagers, however, stayed firmly rooted in Brahms’ mind, and it later blossomed in such Gypsy-inspired compositions as the finale of the Violin Concerto, the closing movement of the G minor Piano Quartet (Op. 25), the *Zigeunerlieder* (“Gypsy Songs”), and, especially, the *Hungarian Dances*. The themes of most of the *Dances* were not original with Brahms. He collected them, thinking — as did almost everyone else — that the melodies were folk tunes, and he was specific in stating that they were arrangements of traditional melodies. He offered the set of ten *Dances* arranged in 1869 to the Budapest publisher Roszavolgyi for a very modest fee, but was refused because of Roszavolgyi’s belief that the music would be a bad investment. Brahms then sent the manuscript to his regular publisher, Fritz Simrock in Berlin, who gave him a small one-time payment, and then proceeded to make a fortune from the *Hungarian Dances* when their popularity spread like wildfire across Europe. In 1880, Brahms composed a second set of *Dances* comprising eleven original numbers composed “in the Hungarian manner.”

Brahms, one of the most honest and forthright of all the great composers, was accused of plagiarism by his old friend Reményi, who claimed that Brahms had stolen the tunes from him. When that tale was easily exploded, Reményi issued a list of the composers of the melodies in an interview printed in 1879 by the New York *Herald*, forcing Simrock to distribute a pamphlet defending Brahms on the basis of the *Dances* being arrangements that Brahms had never intended to pass off as his own original work — Brahms did not even give them an opus number. (When Brahms first sent the score to Simrock, he wrote, “I offer them as genuine Gypsy children which I did not beget, but merely brought up with bread and milk.”) Despite

this *petite scandale*, the *Hungarian Dances* proved to be the most popular of all Brahms' works during his lifetime.

Brahms retained a special affection for the Gypsy fiddlers and their music throughout his life, and he made frequent visits to the Prater, Vienna's amusement park, to hear them play there. He caught the fire and brilliance of their performances with such fidelity in his *Hungarian Dances* that Elizabeth von Herzogenberg, his close friend and constant correspondent, wrote to him about them, "This medley of twirls and grace notes, this jingling, whistling, gurgling clatter ... carries one right away into the midst of the fiddlers."

Dance No. 6 (D-flat major) was modeled on A. Nittinger's *Rózsa Bokor*. Dance No. 5 (F-sharp minor) is a setting of the melody *Bartfai-Emlek* ("Remembrance of Bartfa") attributed to the German-Hungarian bandmaster and composer of light music Kéler-Béla. Dance No. 10 (E major) has been traced to the *Tolnai Lakadalmas* ("Wedding Dance") by J. Rizner.

String Quartet No. 3

Béla Bartók

Born March 25, 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary

Died September 26, 1945 in New York City

Composed in 1927.

Premiered on February 19, 1929 in London by the Waldbauer Quartet.

After the fiendish winds of the First World War had finally blown themselves out in 1918, there came into music a new invigoration and an eagerness by composers to stretch the forms and language of the ancient art. Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Copland, and other of the most important modern masters challenged listeners and colleagues throughout the 1920s with their daring visions and their brilliant iconoclasms. It was the most exciting decade in the entire history of music. Béla Bartók, whose folksong researches were severely limited geographically by the loss of Hungarian territories through the treaties following the war, was not immune to the spirit of experimentation, and he shifted his professional concentration at that time from ethnomusicology to composition and his career as a pianist. He was particularly interested in the music of Stravinsky, notably the mosaic structures and advanced harmonies of the Diaghilev ballets, and in the recent Viennese developments in atonality and motivic generation posited by Arnold Schoenberg and his friend/disciple Alban Berg. A decided modernism entered Bartók's music with his searing 1919 ballet, *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and his works of the years immediately following — the two Violin Sonatas, the piano suite *Out of Doors*, the First Piano Concerto, and the String Quartet No. 3 — are the most daring that he ever wrote. He was reluctant to program them for any but the most sophisticated audiences.

Bartók wrote the Third Quartet quickly in Budapest at the end of the summer of 1927, immediately following a concert tour of Germany during which he performed his new Piano Concerto No. 1 with Wilhelm Furtwängler in Frankfurt and his Piano Sonata in Baden-Baden. The composition of the Quartet was well advanced by September 10th, and the score was completed before the end of the month. In December 1927, Bartók began his first visit to the United States, concertizing from coast-to-coast for three months after making his American debut with the New York Philharmonic and Willem Mengelberg in Carnegie Hall on December 22nd in his own Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra. (It was one of the ironies of Bartók's life that both his last home and the hospital in which he died in 1945 were literally across the street from the famed auditorium which hosted his introduction to this country.) Before returning to Hungary in February 1928, Bartók learned of a lucrative competition for new chamber works sponsored by the Musical Fund of Philadelphia, and submitted his Third Quartet for consideration after he arrived home. He heard nothing for some time, however, and

so sent a copy of the Quartet to Universal Edition in Vienna, inquiring if that firm would be willing to publish the score and help promote its first performance. Then on October 2nd, news arrived that Bartók's piece and a string quartet by the Italian composer Alfredo Casella had been chosen by a panel (which included Mengelberg, Fritz Reiner, and Frederick Stock) from over 600 entries to share the considerable first prize of \$6,000. In view of the international recognition accorded the work, Universal agreed to issue the score immediately; the piece was premiered at London's Wigmore Hall by the Waldbauer Quartet on February 19, 1929.

Bartók's Third Quartet is among the great masterworks of 20th-century music — brilliant, challenging, cathartic, one of the most difficult yet rewarding pieces in the entire chamber literature. Though the music is Bartók's furthest adventure into modernity, it is founded solidly on the confluence of two traditional but seemingly opposed musical streams — the folk music of Eastern Europe, a subject on which Bartók was a scholar of the highest accomplishment, and the elaborate contrapuntal constructions of Sebastian Bach and other Baroque composers. By 1927, the time of the Third Quartet, Bartók had so thoroughly absorbed the quirky intervals, tightly circling motivic phrases, snapping rhythms, and ornate decorations of indigenous Hungarian music into his original work that his themes constitute of a virtual apotheosis of native folksong. "The melodic world of my string quartets does not essentially differ from that of folksong," he said, "only the framework is stricter." For the working-out of his folk-derived thematic materials (Bartók never quoted existing melodies unless specifically noting that they were arrangements), he turned to the highly organized models of canon and fugue postulated by Bach and his 18th-century contemporaries. The Third Quartet therefore represents a marvelous synthesis of West and East — the structural integrity and emotional range of Bach wedded to the melodic and rhythmic exoticisms of Slavic folksong.

The Quartet, one of Bartók's most tightly constructed works, is disposed as a large single span divided into four sections. Part I opens with a mysterious harmonic curtain which serves as an introduction to the work's germinal theme — a tiny fragment comprising a rising fourth and a falling minor third initiated by the violin in measure six, at the point where the lower strings remove their mutes. The first section is largely based on the extensive permutations of this pregnant thematic kernel through imitation, inversion, augmentation, diminution, and other processes that Bartók learned from Bach. Part II, which follows without pause, is a free, continuously unfolding variation of an arch-shaped folk-dance melody presented in pizzicato multiple stops by the cello. A passage of dizzying slides and almost brutal dissonance bridges to Part III, which is a thoroughly reworked version of Part I (Bartók marked this section "Ricapitulazione della prima parte," but also noted, "I do not like to repeat a musical idea without change"), a distillation of the essence of the Quartet's earlier material. The concluding Coda starts as a vague, bow-tip buzzing, but soon develops into a furious altered restatement of the folk dance of Part II. The Quartet culminates in a powerful, viscerally compelling cadence. Wrote Mosco Carner of Bartók's incomparable series of quartets, "For profundity of thought, imaginative power, logic of structure, diversity of formal details, and enlargement of the technical scope, they stand unrivaled in the field of modern chamber music."

Quintet No. 2 for Piano, Two Violins, Viola, and Cello in E-flat minor, Op. 26

Ernst von Dohnányi

Born July 27, 1877 in Pozsony (now Bratislava), Hungary.

Died February 9, 1960 in New York City.

Composed in 1914.

Premiered on November 12, 1914 in Berlin by the Klinger Quartet and the composer.

Ernst von Dohnányi was among the 20th-century's foremost composers, pianists, teachers, and music administrators. Born on July 27, 1877 in Pozsony, Hungary (now Bratislava, capital

of Slovakia), he inherited his musical interests from his father, a talented amateur cellist, who gave him his first lessons in piano and theory. At seventeen, he entered the newly established Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, the first Hungarian of significant talent to do so; his example inspired Bartók to enroll at the school. In 1895, Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 1 came to the attention of Brahms, who arranged a performance of the work in Vienna with the pronouncement that "I couldn't have written it better myself." The young composer was honored with the Hungarian Millennium Prize for his Symphony No. 1 in 1895, and two years later he received the Bösendorfer Prize for his First Piano Concerto. He graduated from the Academy in 1897, and spent several weeks preparing for his professional debut in Berlin in October with the celebrated pianist Eugene d'Albert, a student of Liszt. Dohnányi triumphed at his Berlin appearance, and he toured extensively for the next several years, appearing throughout Europe, Russia, the United States, and South America. During that time, he not only introduced into the repertory many previously neglected works of Mozart (all of whose 27 piano concertos he performed in 1941), Beethoven (a complete concerto cycle in 1920) and Schubert, but he was also among the first world-renowned pianists to appear regularly in chamber music.

From 1905 to 1915, Dohnányi taught at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik, a position he assumed at the invitation of his friend, the eminent violinist Joseph Joachim. He returned to Budapest in 1915, becoming director of the Franz Liszt Academy in 1919 and musical director of the Hungarian Radio in 1931. He served as conductor of the Budapest Philharmonic for the 25 years after 1919 while continuing to concertize at home and abroad, and remaining active as a composer. In addition to his work as a performer and composer, Dohnányi's contributions to the musical life of his homeland included inspiring and performing the works of younger composers (notably Bartók and Kodály), reforming the Liszt Academy's music curriculum, guiding the development of such gifted pupils as Georg Solti, Géza Anda, and Annie Fischer, expanding the repertory of the nation's performing groups, and serving as a model in musical matters through the strength of his personality and the quality of his musicianship.

In 1944, Dohnányi left Hungary, a victim of the raging political and militaristic tides that swept the country during World War II. He moved first to Austria, then to Argentina, and finally settled in Tallahassee in 1949 as pianist and composer-in-residence at Florida State University, where his students included the prominent American composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and his grandson, conductor Christoph von Dohnányi, former Music Director of the Cleveland Orchestra. Though in his seventies, Dohnányi's abilities remained unimpaired, and he continued to appear regularly on campus and in guest engagements; his last public performance was as conductor of the FSU Symphony just three weeks before his death. He died in New York on February 9, 1960 during a recording session.

Dohnányi's works include three operas, two piano and two violin concertos, two symphonies, the *Variations on a Nursery Tune* [*Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*] for piano and orchestra, several independent orchestral compositions, a dozen important chamber scores, and many solo piano works. His music, though influenced by Brahms and Schumann, displays an individual voice in which the richly expressive gestures of the late Romantic era are coupled with a Classical clarity of form.

Dohnányi composed his Piano Quintet No. 2 in the summer and early autumn of 1914, during his tenure on the faculty of the Berlin Hochschule für Musik; he gave the work's premiere in Berlin on November 12th with the distinguished Klinger Quartet. That was an anxious time for Germany. Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo on June 28th, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria declared war on Serbia. War fever intensified in Berlin (H.W. Nevinson, war correspondent of London's *Daily News*, reported that "up and down the wide road of Unter den Linden crowds paced incessantly by day and night, singing German war songs"), and on August 4th, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Franz Joseph's ally, opened the hostilities against Russia, France, and Britain that began World War I. Some of the anxiety of the summer of 1914 seems to have filtered into Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 2, which he cast in the somber key of E-flat minor, though the work ends optimistically and frequently posits brighter emotions to counter its darker passages.

The Quintet opens with a hushed main theme begun with an upward leap that is intoned in octaves by violin and cello above a foreboding rumbling in the piano. The other strings repeat the theme before the piano adds a hymn-like idea in block chords and all the participants join in a rising, muscular strain with dotted rhythms. The tension subsides and the piano again plays the opening theme as a bridge to the movement's formal second subject, a sweet, lyrical melody begun in duet by first violin and viola. The exposition closes with a luminous stream of chords in the piano. The brief development section treats, in turn, the rumbling figures of the opening, the hymn-like idea, the muscular strain and the main theme. The arrival at the recapitulation is marked by a sudden break in the music's momentum, after which the viola recalls the main theme in long notes against a rippling keyboard background. The lyrical second subject and the piano's luminous chord streams return before the movement closes quietly with an echo of the opening measures.

The *Intermezzo* begins in a lighthearted Viennese mood, a 1914 analogue to Brahms' *Liebeslieder Waltzes*, but it seems unable to commit fully to such frothy music-making and moves on to an anxious, scherzo-like passage. This feverish music provides some energy for a while but it soon disintegrates as well. The waltz is tried again, more assertively this time, but with little more conviction than before. The ensemble then remembers the lyrical second theme from the preceding movement but cannot sustain it, and the waltz and the scherzo are recalled again, but with waning enthusiasm. The *Intermezzo* comes to an unsettled (and unsettling) end, a mirror, perhaps, of Berlin's apprehensive mood at the time of its creation and a prescient chamber counterpart to Maurice Ravel's disturbing musical commentary on the fall of the ancient Habsburg empire, *La Valse* of 1920.

The finale is music of transformation. The movement starts with a stern canon, with each of the strings in turn imitating the winding melody first entrusted to the cello; the piano offers a solemn, prayer-like chorale in response. The canon begins again and grows more aggressive until the piano resolutely adds the main theme of the first movement as antagonist. These two ideas contend, and the canon melody is ultimately subdued to a final, quiet, isolated line in the cello. In a magnificent postlude, the doubt of the first movement's main theme is transfigured into a serene, confident benediction.

***Magyar Madness* for Clarinet and String Quartet**

David Del Tredici

Born March 16, 1937 in Cloverdale, California

Composed in 2006.

Premiered on October 9, 2007 in Iowa City, Iowa, by clarinetist David Krakauer and the Orion String Quartet (Daniel Phillips, violin; Todd Phillips, violin; Steven Tenenbom, viola; Timothy Eddy, cello).

David Del Tredici made *Alice in Wonderland* the hinge upon which a musical revolution swung. In 1968, when Del Tredici first took up Lewis Carroll's books as creative catalysts, tunes and tonality in concert music were little in fashion. Though trained in modernist techniques at Berkeley and Princeton, Del Tredici said, "I couldn't imagine setting a Carroll text to dissonant music," and he used traditional styles of melody and harmony for what would prove to be a career-defining series of works based on *Alice*, showing how the language of Straussian Late Romanticism could be renewed and enriched after the post-World War II period of dedicated modernism. Del Tredici has since drawn upon other sources of inspiration for his work, but the lyricism, tonality-based harmonies, and glowing sonorities that he rediscovered for *Alice in Wonderland* have not only remained essential elements of his style, but have also become important forces in much of the new American music of the last forty years.

Del Tredici was born in the picturesque northern California town of Cloverdale in 1937, studied piano and composition at Berkeley, attended Princeton on a Woodrow Wilson

Fellowship as a student of Roger Sessions and Earl Kim, and was invited by Aaron Copland to participate in the Tanglewood Music Center for several summers. Del Tredici joined the Harvard faculty in 1968, and has since taught at SUNY/Buffalo, Boston University, the Manhattan School of Music, Juilliard, and, since 1984, City College/CUNY. His many distinctions include a Pulitzer Prize (*In Memory of a Summer Day*, 1980), Naumburg Award, Friedheim Award, Grammy nomination, election to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and commissions from leading American and European orchestras, the Koussevitzky, Guggenheim and Fromm foundations, Meet the Composer, and the NEA.

Del Tredici, "*Magyar Madness* (2006) is a 35-minute work for clarinet and string quartet in three movements of wildly varying lengths. The first, *Passionate Knights*, is eleven minutes; the second, *Contentment (Interlude)*, a chaste four; and the finale, *Magyar Madness*, a whopping twenty minutes long. The work, co-commissioned by Music Accord and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center for David Krakauer and the Orion String Quartet, is also dedicated to these remarkable artists.

"I. *Passionate Knights*. The first movement begins with a fiery clarinet cadenza punctuated by strings and leads to an impassioned main theme. Moving through a series of contrasting motives — some perky, some dramatic — the movement divides into two halves, the second of which is a varied reprise of the first (like a sonata form without a development). The lengthy, dramatic coda then acts as a kind of development and leads to a second, more reposeful clarinet cadenza and a calm ending. This was (one could say) a knight well spent.

"II. *Contentment (Interlude)*. The short, quiet movement that follows is for muted strings alone. It is, in essence, a transcription of a song I wrote in 1998 for piano and baritone. The music — sweetly ardent, lyrical, and contented — belies (perhaps) the text I set: a poem by Edward Field entitled *Street Instructions: At the Crotch*.

"III. *Magyar Madness*. The twenty-minute finale is subtitled '*Grand Rondo à la Hongroise*.' The movement's title alludes to David Krakauer's performance group, *Klezmer Madness*. David, a specialist in klezmer (Jewish folk music of Eastern Europe), asked me to write something using that melismatic style. I told him, 'Oy vey! Klezmer I can't do, but Hungarian I'll try.' What I had in the back of my mind was Schubert's piano, four-hand masterpiece, *Divertissement à la Hongroise*, Op. 54. In this piece, not only does Schubert give the harmony an oddly ethnic seasoning, but in the last movement he composed a rondo in which he introduced a quasi-Gypsy device that intrigued me: each repetition of the theme is increasingly ornamented, and the accompaniment grows more and more animated. The illusion is that the tempo is accelerating — a wonderful way to enliven what is, after all, mere repetition. The idea of literally speeding up each appearance of a theme over the course of an entire movement — of creating a goulash of musical frenzy — gripped me.

"The finale begins with the clarinet's return in a virtuosic cadenza. The music then settles into a 'Hungarian' rondo theme in G minor introduced over a steadily oscillating accompaniment. The theme at its next repetition is systematically shortened. The effect is increased agitation. A third statement is faster still — twice the opening speed. And finally, fastest of all, at four times the speed of the opening, there is a frantic version of the theme. Amid the ever-accelerating rondo sections are three contrasting episodes. The first — boisterous and energetic — is capped by a dramatic reprise of the movement's opening clarinet cadenza. The second episode, in complete contrast, is (as the score says) 'music from afar' — mysterious and pianissimo throughout. To that end, I ask the strings to use especially soft 'practice' mutes and the clarinetist to play from off-stage. The third episode, which follows the second immediately, is wild and barbaric with (like dashes of paprika?) hugely virtuosic clarinet flourishes — bringing out, to borrow from Cole Porter, 'the Gypsy in me!' As a coda and calming antidote, the rondo theme reappears quietly — now, for the first time, in G major — while the clarinet trails behind in canon [i.e., exact imitation]. Eventually, though, the music rouses itself to close in a 'proper' Hungarian frenzy."