



## THE GRAND FINALE

**Strum** ..... **Jessie Montgomery**  
(b. 1981)

Ani Kavafian, *violin*      Kirsten Docter, *viola*  
Geoffrey Herd, *violin*      Hannah Collins, *cello*

**Dumka** ..... **Rebecca Clarke**  
(1886-1979)

Geoffrey Herd, *violin*  
Kirsten Docter, *viola*  
Esther Park, *piano*

**Sonata in E minor, K.304** ..... **W. A. Mozart**  
(1756-1791)

Allegro  
Tempo di minuetto

Ani Kavafian, *violin*  
Esther Park, *piano*

– intermission –

**Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34** ..... **Johannes Brahms**  
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo  
Andante, un poco adagio  
Scherzo. Allegro - Trio  
Finale: Poco sostenuto – Allegro non troppo

Ani Kavafian, *violin*      Kirsten Docter, *viola*  
Geoffrey Herd, *violin*      Hannah Collins, *cello*  
Esther Park, *piano*

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**Saturday, June 12, 2021**  
Smith Opera House  
7:30 pm

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For violinist, educator, and composer **Jessie Montgomery**, “music is a meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories.” It is clear that *Strum* is a product of that attitude, not only in its influence (American folk idioms) but also in action; performers interact dynamically with one another, trading fiddle-like melodic fragments and creating shimmering layers of texture, rhythm, and harmony. Montgomery takes full advantage of the range of the string quartet, creating an expansive sound with widely spaced voicing. At times, she seizes upon homogeneity of the ensemble to create a single composite sound, in which the quartet fuses into a single entity. In other moments, though, the instruments break apart, forming warring factions. Violins are pitted against lower voices, for instance, or cross-ensemble pairs form. *Strum* also explores the full continuum of available timbres; as the title suggests, the technique of pizzicato (when players pluck, rather than bow the strings of their instruments) plays an integral role throughout. It begins simply and nostalgically, perhaps evoking the lyre accompanying an epic poem, but the intensity of the strumming grows, driving the music forward in an ecstatic dance.

The term *Dumka* was adopted from Czech, Polish, and Ukrainian cognates meaning, “to ponder,” or “to meditate,” and used to describe a genre of instrumental music with a contemplative, melancholy character. Slavic composers such as Dvořák (who wrote eleven so-called *dumky*) popularized the style in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Its influence clearly spread, inspiring British composer **Rebecca Clarke** to pen her own version around 1940. The piece, subtitled “Duo Concertante for Violin, Viola and Piano,” was written while Clarke was living in America at the onset of World War II; this explains the somewhat unusual instrumentation, as it was likely intended to be performed by her artistically-inclined family, with whom she was staying at the time.

Clarke’s *Dumka* pays homage to her predecessors in the genre, implementing folk-inspired rhythms and melodic gestures. Informed by her study of Bohuslav Martinů (she was concurrently editing a book on the Czech composer) as well as her exposure to folkloric composers like Bartók, Clarke was well prepared to imbue her trio with the veneer of Slavonicism. A pensive opening Poco Andante section—an unmistakable allusion to the origins of the title—eventually gives way to a sprightlier, angular dance. Throughout, she plays with the relationship of duple to triple meters and subdivisions, recalling Dvořák’s rhythmic treatment in his trio of the same name. Unusual modal inflections hint at the work’s Eastern European influence and harmonically transport the listener.

Over the course of his life, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** wrote around thirty Sonatas for keyboard and violin. The earliest set (K. 6-9) was composed during his childhood, beginning when he was just six years old and notated by his father. The last (Sonata No. 36 in F major, K. 547) was composed only three years prior to

his death in 1791. These works are a window into Mozart’s compositional development; already the **Sonata in E minor, K. 304**, composed at the age of twenty-two, reveals new maturity. No longer satisfied to simply compose charming dialogue between the instruments, Mozart instead crafts a work filled with drama and pathos. Based on chronology and sentiment (it is, after all, his only minor-mode work in this genre), it is often suggested that this sonata was written in response to the death of his mother, a reflection of his profound personal loss. Though the context for the work is purely speculative, the emotional depth of this sonata is undeniable.

Like all but one of the Palatine sonatas (a group of six named for their dedicatee, Maria Elisabeth, wife of the Elector of Palatine), the E minor Sonata is comprised of two movements. The opening Allegro immediately sets the tone with a quietly somber theme presented in unison. Grief, though, gives way almost immediately to anger; a loudly resolute outburst interrupts the original melody. A dance-like second theme in C major provides respite from the gloom. Even that is temporary, however, as Mozart modulates the otherwise-sunny melody to the minor mode. These quicksilver emotional shifts continue throughout the movement, their volatility foreshadowing Beethoven’s own contributions in the genre. The title of the second movement (Tempo di Minuetto) belies its wistful character; the plaintive main theme returns, refrain-like, between exploratory, blissful episodes, as if to remind the listener of the work’s true nature.

Now recognized as a jewel of the chamber music repertoire, the **Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34** by **Johannes Brahms** gestated for nearly two years before emerging in its final, spectacular state. Though originally conceived as a string quintet (à la Schubert’s C major example), violinist Joseph Joachim expressed concern about the instrumentation. While he praised the work’s creativity and unalloyed spirit, he found the sound alternately too weak (where it failed to convey the energy of the rhythms) or too thick (where it obscured significant melodies). Unwilling to give up, Brahms revised the work; it was premiered as a sonata for two pianos in Vienna in 1864 (and remains published and performed today, as his Op. 34b). Yet again, though, another party interceded with reservations about the ensemble. Upon playing the sonata, Clara Schumann suggested that the work merited a richer sonic palette, prompting Brahms to revise it once more. The piano quintet (a genre popularized by Clara’s husband, Robert) proved the perfect compromise, with the percussive and harmonic heft of the piano married to the coloristic opulence of a string quartet.

The first movement (Allegro non troppo) utilizes a sonata-form structure of epic proportions, introducing five themes (rather than the requisite two). Perhaps aware of the sheer amount of melodic information with which he was inundating listeners, Brahms restrains himself in the development section; the recapitulation,

though, creatively reinterprets the material introduced previously. The serenity of the following slow movement stands in stark contrast; the Andante, quasi adagio, features Brahms at his most gentle and tender, prefiguring his famous lullaby of 1867. The Scherzo seethes with quiet intensity, the stubborn cello steadily marking the beat while an anxious, syncopated melody pulls the music forward. The second melodic motif—an upright, terse march-like figure—changes the mood, if not the dynamic. Only with the introduction of the third, celebratory theme does the ensemble fully blossom. The simmering excitement is interrupted only by a more lyrical trio; though the character is calmer, the melody remains thematically tethered to the earlier motives. A somber introduction begins the Finale, recalling the devastating slow openings of some of Beethoven's quartets. Its tortured chromaticism dissolves into a jovial, Hungarian-inflected tune, which proves to anchor the remainder of the rondo-form movement.

– Anya Wilkening