SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS  
Samueli Theater  
Concert begins at 3 p.m.  

ORLI SHAHAM • PIANO AND HOST  
RAYMOND KOBLER • VIOLIN | BRIDGET DOLKAS • VIOLIN | ROBERT BECKER • VIOLA  
MEREDITH CRAWFORD • VIOLA | TIMOTHY LANDAUER • CELLO | KEVIN PLUNKETT • CELLO

JOHANNES BRAHMS  
(1833-1897)  
Sonata No. 1 in E Minor for Cello and Piano, Op. 38  
Allegro non troppo  
Allegretto quasi menuetto  
Allegro  
Timothy Landauer  
Orli Shaham  

Six Pieces for Piano, Op. 118  
No. 1. Intermezzo in A Minor: Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato  
No. 2. Intermezzo in A Major: Andante teneramente  
No. 3. Ballade in G Minor: Allegro energico  
No. 4. Intermezzo in F Minor: Allegretto un poco agitato  
No. 5. Romanze in F Major: Andante  
No. 6. Intermezzo in E-flat Major: Andante - Largo e mesto  
Orli Shaham

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS  
String Sextet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 36  
Allegro non troppo  
Scherzo - Allegro non troppo - Presto giocoso  
Poco adagio  
Poco allegro  
Raymond Kobler  
Bridget Dolkas  
Robert Becker  
Meredith Crawford  
Timothy Landauer  
Kevin Plunkett
Sonata No. 1 in E Minor for Cello and Piano, Op. 38

Background

All of Brahms’ chamber music is ravishing, but his two great sonatas for cello with piano occupy a special place in his work. He had a special relationship with both instruments: not only was he a superb pianist, but he had studied the cello intensively when he was young, progressing to the point of learning a concerto by the German cellist and composer Berhnard Romberg, whose cello compositions are virtuosic showpieces.

Music historians tell us that Brahms almost certainly wrote a duo for cello and piano when he was 18. If so, it vanished into music history, probably discarded along with many other youthful compositions. He never wrote a cello concerto. Although the cello is featured with the violin in his double concerto — a work that is both deeply expressive and beautifully melodic — cello fanciers will always ruefully wonder about the Brahms cello concerto that might have been. Of course, their imaginations are fired by Brahms’ famous reaction to Dvořák’s landmark cello concerto: “If I had only known that such a cello concerto could be written, I would have tried to compose one myself!”

His cello sonatas satisfy at least some of that painful yearning. They are the most significant cello sonatas composed during the late 19th century, and though formally different from concertos, they are hardly less expressive or musically interesting. Brahms began composing the Sonata No. 1 in E Minor in 1862, before his 30th birthday. He did not complete work on the third movement until 1865, long after the first two were done, but the finished product stands as an eloquently constructed whole.

What to Listen for

If we could have rescued the manuscript of Brahms’ early duo for cello and piano, it would almost certainly have embodied the tempestuous, youthful emotions associated with his earliest compositions. Music historians identify his first cello sonata as a turning point, describing it almost as if it were a college graduate’s new job-interview suit: sufficiently conservative to reflect maturity and professionalism, but with youthful energy and unique style. This was Brahms, a young musician of whom great things were expected, demonstrating that his work had reached a higher level of accomplishment as he approached his third decade of life.

The sonata’s briskly paced first movement is marked Allegro non troppo and opens with the cello’s solo voice heard above chords in the piano. The construction is thorough and formal: The initial melody ebbs and flows with Brahmsian fluidity, with the cello eventually ceding the principal theme to the piano. Once this theme is repeated, the exposition is followed by a development section that takes the movement through an intricately crafted series of tempo and dynamic shifts.

The second movement reflects Brahms’ interest in past musical styles. His extensive studies of music from the Renaissance to Classical periods is evident in the Allegretto quasi menetto marking, which tempers the traditional choice of a central minuet with a slightly quicker allegretto pace. The sound is romantic, but with hints of an elegant, crystalline dance rhythm.

The third movement, an allegro, is often referred to as a fugue. But despite its dense counterpoint, the movement is actually developed in a very different form (traditional sonata allegro) with fugal elements based on Bach’s The Art of the Fugue. From this antiquesounding beginning, the movement opens onto a development section signaled by descending octaves that quote the original, fugue-like theme. Throughout the development, Brahms’ deft, Bach-inspired counterpoint continues to predominate, leading to a rapid, spirited coda.

Six Pieces for Piano, Op. 118

Background

Justly popular in our own day among both pianists and audiences, Brahms’ Six Pieces for Solo Piano (or Sechs Klavierstücke) were all but ignored in his own lifetime and through the mid-20th century — a period of great piano artistry on the world’s concert stages. What could have accounted for this unjust neglect by the informed public? One reason might be what your annotator has called “tap-dancers’ syndrome.” Professional tap-dancers have often noted that when their audiences break into spontaneous applause, they are often responding to a relatively easy but spectacular-looking display. A much more difficult but less showy sequence of steps will be watched in silence.

Brahms lived during a period when virtuosic display by instrumentalists, especially pianists and violinists, was wildly popular throughout Europe. His piano music poses formidable technical challenges, and performers consider his two great piano concertos to be “monsters” of the repertoire — among the most difficult to play. But with Brahms, it is all about the beauty and expressiveness of the music, and never about virtuoso display. His pianist is like a tap-dancer with only the most difficult, least spectacular steps to perform. Walter Niemann, a composer and critic who wrote Masters of the Piano: Past and Present as well as a popular biography of Brahms, put it aptly: “The poet speaks — the virtuoso with Brahms has to be silent.”
This kind of expressiveness challenges the creativity of both performer and listener; the interpretive possibilities for both are without limit. And happily, both performers and listeners have risen to the challenge in recent years. One formative influence on Brahms in this regard was Schumann, who also composed suites of short, related, deceptively simple-sounding piano sketches. Schumann’s *Davidsbündlertänze* was similarly neglected for decades, and has now gained an enormous following among classical music listeners.

Brahms was 60 when he completed the Six Pieces for Piano in 1893. He dedicated the suite to Schumann’s widow, Clara, considered by many to be the great romantic love of Brahms’ life, though her correspondence with him and others makes clear that her feelings for him never reached beyond a deeply appreciative friendship. As points of comparison, Schumann’s *Davidsbündlertänze* and the ever-popular *Kinderszenen* (“Scenes from Childhood”) date from 1837 and 1838 respectively. The Six Pieces were Brahms’ penultimate published work.

**What to Listen for**

Four of the Six Pieces are intermezzi: numbers one, two, four and six. But that word should not mislead us. Though Brahms was usually quite exacting in his musical descriptors and instructions, in this case he seems to have followed the convention of ignoring the technical meaning of the term intermezzo — a brief musical interlude connecting two longer passages — and instead uses it as a catch-all. For Brahms and his contemporaries, calling something an intermezzo seems to have been a license to express intimate feelings, as if writing in a musical diary.

We hear this intimacy in the Intermezzo No. 1. It departs from the formal A-B-A structure that prevails in the five other pieces, and instead seems to begin in the middle of an episode of tender feeling, catching the action like a candid photograph. It opens with a passage constructed of symmetrical four-bar phrases that convey alternating moods of sorrow and love in the manner of a sung duet. A developmental section, emotionally sensitive yet somehow unstable, leads to what has been described as the most explicit love music that Brahms ever composed — an expression of ardor and devotion that is gentle yet powerful in its sincerity. Is this testimony of Brahms’ feelings for Clara Wieck Schumann?

In the second piece, also an intermezzo, the tempo is a bit slower (an andante) and the feeling is tender (marked teneramente). Two voices emerge: first a soprano line declaring a theme, and then a tenor echoing it. A chorale that arises between them acts as a foil for their melody, and the combined result somehow merges passion, serenity and a nearly religious solemnity. In fact, the chorale line quotes a melody from Brahms’ monumental German Requiem, used in setting the words “I shall comfort you like a mother.”

Brahms challenges listeners — especially piano enthusiasts — with vocabulary as well as music in pieces three and four. Piece three, a G minor ballade, inevitably brings Chopin’s spectacular Ballade in G minor to mind. Brahms’ choice of the word was clearly intentional and possibly provocative; he had originally intended to call this piece a rhapsodie, a term he usually reserved for more grandiose works. Chopin was the first composer to use the term “ballade” to identify piano works composed for concert performance, but Brahms’ use hews closer to its original designation of a European song form of the 17th and 18th centuries with formal elements that Chopin ignored. More significantly, Brahms uses more economical means to achieve his ballade’s sense of drama. The works’ similarity lies in the sense of drama and ongoing incident they convey. In piece four, labeled an intermezzo, Brahms’ nomenclature is provocative as well; in his day, as in ours, the term “intermezzo” was associated with lyrical compositions and relaxed tempos. His use of it to identify a piece marked Allegretto un poco agitato (agitated) was called “defiant” by one critic.

Originally titled as Romanze, piece five bears striking parallels with the Romanze in Schumann’s Symphony No. 4 in D Minor. Brahms may well have composed this piece as a tribute to his esteemed early mentor; both works are constructed around central sections in D major, and both have a loping quality suggestive of the German love of hiking — a sense of wanderlust. And, like a classic Spaziergang (walk), both works end with a sense of relaxed return to the point of origin.

The sixth and last of the Opus 118 pieces is thrillingly intense and episodic, marked Andante, largo e mesto — stately in pace and tinged with sadness. The piece is self-contained and follows an A-B-A structure, with a feeling of grandeur and completion that brings the Six Pieces to an emphatic close. But critics have noted a link between this intermezzo, keyed in E flat minor, and the opening of Brahms’ next set of four piano pieces, Opus 119 — also an intermezzo, in the closely related key of B minor. It’s almost as if he wrote the script with a sequel in mind.

**String Sextet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 36**

**Background**

Did Brahms write his String Sextet No. 2 because of an unhappy love affair? Possibly.

Is it any of our business? Perhaps not. But for a man whose habits were chaste and productive, Brahms has proven to be an irresistible target for speculation about his personal life and its effect on his music. He was an extremely handsome young man with refined features, but later in life he somehow cultivated a gruff, Ursine appearance that suited his curmudgeonly, solitary ways. He maintained a lifelong passion for Robert Schumann’s widow, Clara Wieck, but though she cared for him deeply, his love for her was probably never consummated. And he almost certainly never formed an intimate relationship with anyone else.

That would seem to include — but just barely — Agathe von Siebold, the young soprano Brahms met in Göttingen during the summer of 1858. He was 25 and had gone there at the invitation of the composer Julius Otto Grimm. Grimm’s attempt at matchmaking between Siebold and Brahms showed every early appearance of working; according to the cellist Kenneth Slowik, they spent time together for two months and exchanged ardent love letters after that.

But the incipient affair did not end well. In her memoirs, Siebold quotes a letter from Brahms: “... I love you! I must see you again! But I cannot wear fetters. Write to me whether I am to come back, take you in my arms, to kiss you and tell you that I love you.” Like music, his words are subject to interpretation; they can be read as a bold declaration of love, or as a non-proposal of marriage depicting their relationship as a “fetter.” Siebold’s interpretation was the latter, and she sent him a letter of refusal.
Still, their time together left its mark. Siebold married, but not until 10 years later, and Brahms was still thinking of her when he began work on his G Major Sextet, six years after his time with her in Göttingen. In composing the sextet, he told the voice professor and amateur cellist Josef Gänbsacher, “I have freed myself from my last love.” That love’s identity is clear in the sextet’s first movement, which builds to a climax that invokes Siebold’s given name — Agathe — three times in a traditional German musical cipher. (Schumann had taught Brahms the technique.) The cipher employs the notes A, G, A, D as a substitute for T, B natural (H in German musical notation), and E.

What to Listen for

Writer Steven Ledbetter makes the startling observation that Brahms’ String Sextet No. 2 is “one of the most lovable works of a composer to whom that adjective is rarely applied.” Listening to the sextet in the context of Brahms’ larger oeuvre, we can hear what Ledbetter means. This was a cerebral composer who did not write operas, wrote few songs, was not attracted to the emotionalism of programmatic compositions. But this sextet has a lyrical, singing quality that seems suffused with romance. Perhaps it is not just that artfully wrought cipher in movement one that reflects the afterglow of Brahms’ feelings for Agathe von Siebold.

The sextet opens with the romantic sound of a softly singing line in the first viola with flowing accompaniment in the upper strings. The second movement is a scherzo in a double rhythm, untraditional for a chamber scherzo. (Sir Donald Tovey described the sound as “elfin.”) When the lively dance theme ebbs, Brahms brings the movement back to its original tempo and ends it with a lively coda.

The third movement, a slowly paced set of variations in E minor, is built on a subtle theme and its variations, ending with a coda of gleaming ethereality. But its spell is broken by a highly energized finale: Marked poco allegro, it combines rondo and sonata forms with a feeling of happy vitality, confirming Ledbetter’s “lovable” characterization.

Michael Clive is editor-in-chief of the Santa Fe Opera and blogs as The Operahound for Classical TV.com.
consummate musician recognized for her grace, subtlety and vitality, Orli Shaham has established an impressive international reputation as one of today's most gifted pianists. Hailed by critics on four continents, Shaham is in demand for her prodigious skills and admired for her interpretations of both standard and modern repertoire. The Chicago Tribune recently referred to her as “a first-rate Mozartean,” and London's Guardian said Shaham's playing was “perfection” during her recent Proms debut with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Shaham has given recitals in North America, Europe and Asia at such renowned concert halls as Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, Frankfurt’s Alte Oper, and the Herkulessaal in Munich, and has worked with many eminent conductors including Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Roger Norrington, Christopher Hogwood, David Robertson, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Leonard Slatkin, Robert Spano and Gerard Schwarz, among others.

Shaham’s highly acclaimed (Wall Street Journal, New York Magazine, NPR.org) classical concert series for young children, “Baby Got Bach,” is in its third season. The popular series continues in New York City where it is now presented by the 92nd Street Y, and has expanded to venues in St. Louis and Aspen. Designed for preschoolers, “Baby Got Bach” provides hands-on activities with musical instruments, and concepts and concert performances that promote good listening skills.

Shaham was recognized early for her prodigious talents. She received her first scholarship for musical study from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation at age 5 to study with Luisa Yoffe at the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem. By age 7, she traveled to New York with her family to begin study with Nancy Stessin, and became a scholarship student of Herbert Stessin at The Juilliard School a year later. She has also won the Gilmore Young Artist Award and the Avery Fisher Career Grant, two prestigious prizes given to further the development of outstanding talent. In addition to her musical education, Shaham holds a degree in history from Columbia University.

Violinist Raymond Kobler was appointed concertmaster of Pacific Symphony in 1999, and currently occupies the Eleanor and Michael Gordon Chair. During his illustrious career he has appeared as soloist on numerous occasions with the Cleveland Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony, Zurich Chamber Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony. In this capacity, he has collaborated with such conductors as André Previn, Lorin Maazel, Sir Neville Marriner, Leonard Slatkin, Christoph Eschenbach, Neemi Jarvi and Herbert Blomstedt. At the festivities surrounding the opening of Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco in 1980, he performed the Bach Double Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin.

From 1974 to 1980, Kobler served as associate concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra, and from 1980 to 1998, he served as concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony. In 1995, Kobler was appointed by Sir Georg Solti to be concertmaster of the World Orchestra for Peace, an ensemble comprised of concertmasters and principal musicians from major orchestras around the globe. In 2002, Kobler was nominated for a Grammy Award as a member of the chamber group AN DIE MUSIK. The Outstanding Individual Artist Award of 2002 was presented to Kobler by Arts Orange County.

Bridget Dolkas, principal second violin of Pacific Symphony, is a passionate and vibrant member of the Southern California musical community. As first violinist and founding member of the California Quartet, she co-founded the Connections Chamber Music Series (connectionsmusic.com), of which Tim Mangan of the Orange County Register wrote, “a worthy series.” Since the year 2000, the California Quartet has performed in Europe and the United States to great acclaim.

Dolkas has performed worldwide since the age of 10. In recent years, she has performed as soloist with South Coast Chamber Orchestra and Poway Symphony. She performed for eight years in the San Diego Symphony and the San Diego Opera Orchestra. Dolkas has studied chamber music under such masters as Joseph Silverstein, Kim Kashkashian, Fred Sherry, Toby Appel, as well as the Juilliard, Alexander and Miro quartets.
Robert Becker is currently in his 30th season as principal viola of Pacific Symphony. He was recently appointed to the position of full-time director of string studies at Chapman University’s Conservatory of Music. Internationally known as a pedagogue of the viola and chamber music and founder of the Viola Workout in Crested Butte, Colo., he is dedicated to the training of young violists and string players for a future career in performing, teaching, chamber music and orchestral playing.

Continuing his tenure as principal viola of Pacific Symphony, he served as principal and solo viola for American Ballet Theatre’s West Coast performances at Dorothy Chandler Pavillion and Segerstrom Center for the Arts in 2009-10. Becker occupies the Catherine and James Emmi Chair.

Violist Meredith Crawford, a Maine native, studied under the tutelage of Professor Peter Slowik at Oberlin College and Conservatory. She graduated in 2009 after completing Oberlin’s double-degree program with both a B.M. in viola performance and a B.A. in English literature. She was inducted into the Pi Kappa Lambda honor society, receiving the prestigious prize for musicianship, awarded to students judged to be “the most outstanding of those elected to Pi Kappa Lambda.” Crawford is the first-prize winner of the Ohio Viola Society’s annual competition in 2007, the 2009 Skokie Valley Symphony Annual Young Artist Competition, and the 2009-10 Oberlin Conservatory Competition — the first win for a violist in over a decade.

At the age of 22, before the completion of her senior year at Oberlin Conservatory, she won her first orchestral audition and a seat with Pacific Symphony. In September of 2012, she won her current position with the orchestra as assistant principal viola. Additionally, she has been performing with the Los Angeles Philharmonic since April of 2010, and more recently with the Riverside Philharmonic as principal viola, as well as the Mozart Concert Orchestra.

Pacific Symphony Principal Cellist Timothy Landauer was hailed “a cellist of extraordinary gifts” by The New York Times when he won the coveted Concert Artists Guild International Award in 1983 in New York. Landauer is the winner of numerous prestigious prizes and awards, among them the Young Musicians Foundation’s National Gregor Piatigorsky Memorial Cello Award, the Samuel Applebaum Grand Prize of the National Solo Competition of the American String Teacher’s Association and the 1984 Hammer-Rostropovich Scholarship Award. Landauer’s extensive engagements include his highly acclaimed recitals at Carnegie Recital Hall, the Ambassador Auditorium in Los Angeles, the Orford Arts Center in Montreal, the City Hall Theater in Hong Kong and in Hanover, Germany.

Kevin Plunkett is currently in his 25th season as assistant principal cellist of Pacific Symphony. Born and raised in Los Angeles, he studied at the New England Conservatory under Laurence Lesser, and at Northern Illinois University under Raya Garbousova. He has been a member of the Rochester Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, as well as the Detroit Symphony. He has also held teaching positions at the Universities of Maine and Delaware, where he was also a member of the Delos String Quartet. In his leisure moments Plunkett enjoys tinkering with computers, reading, hiking, and various intellectual pursuits.