

LIVE
FROM LINCOLN CENTER



February 13, 2011 at 5:00 on PBS
Beethoven and Brahms with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Unlike such other constituent members of Lincoln Center as the New York Philharmonic or the Metropolitan Opera, with histories that go back many years before Lincoln Center came into being, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center was specifically created by the Center itself for the regular presentation of the great chamber music literature of the past and present. Our next Live From Lincoln Center, on Sunday afternoon, February 13, will present two pillars of that repertory: the first of the two String Sextets by Brahms and the "Archduke" Trio by Beethoven. Incidentally, that will be our first origination from the re-designed Alice Tully Hall that has added a dynamic new exterior to the building and by common consent has materially improved the Hall's acoustics.

The combination of 2 violins, 1 viola and 1 cello--music for string quartet as codified by Haydn in the middle of the 18th century--has yielded some of the most profound music produced by the human mind. Composers' need to enrich the musical palette by adding another viola and cello, creating a string sextet, might seem to be a logical expansion of the quartet format. Yet Brahms was one of the few composers who availed himself of the richer texture offered by double violins, violas and cellos; among the others are Boccherini, Spohr, Raff, Rimsky-Korsakoff and Tchaikovsky (his "Souvenir de Florence").

When he composed the first of his two string sextets, Brahms was in his mid-twenties; the work was premiered in Hanover in October, 1860. Brahms was 27 at the time and by then he had already produced some significant music including his First Piano Concerto and the two Serenades for Orchestra. This First Sextet, Opus 18, is a rather lengthy work in four movements lasting about 40 minutes. It is marked by melodic geniality and rhythmic flow, with a particularly gracious slow movement in the form of theme and variations. Interestingly, in those years before music was available in the home by way of recordings, ipods and whatnot, Brahms made arrangements of both his Sextets for piano, four hands, and the theme and variations movement from this First Sextet he arranged for piano solo. A side note: the second of the two Brahms Sextets was given its world premiere not in one of Europe's great music capitals but in Boston, Massachusetts in 1866, just as Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto was to receive its world premiere in Boston 9 years later.

Between the years of 1803 and 1806 Beethoven gave music lessons to a chubby, unattractive young man named Rudolph---who happened to be the younger brother of the Emperor of Austria. (Whether or not he was red-nosed history does not tell us.) The pupil obviously adored the teacher and in 1809 Archduke Rudolph made it possible for Beethoven to receive an annual annuity, thus providing a measure of financial security. The affection seems to have been mutual, for Beethoven would sometimes refer to Rudolph as "my little Archduke". In a more tangible way Beethoven acknowledged his gratitude by dedicating a number of his works to Rudolph, including the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, the final Piano Sonata, the Great Fugue for strings and the colossal Missa Solemnis; also, the work which indeed carries the identity "Archduke"---Beethoven's final trio for piano, violin and cello, Opus 97. As in the Seventh Symphony the "Archduke" Trio displays a joyful and buoyant vitality. It is in four movements: a broad and lyrical opening Allegro moderato; an impish Scherzo marked Allegro; a theme and variations third movement marked Andante cantabile; and a concluding Rondo which grows without pause out of

the third movement. The writing for piano in this last movement is even more brilliant than earlier in the work.

The string players in the Brahms Sextet will be violinists Erin Keefe and Amy Lee, violists Paul Neubauer and Mark Holloway and cellists Jakob Koranyi and Gary Hoffman. The pianist in the "Archduke" Trio will be Wu Han (co-director with her cellist-husband, David Finkel, of the Chamber Music Society), along with violinist Arnaud Sussman and cellist Gary Hoffman.

So there we are, two works in B Flat Major on our next Live From Lincoln Center on Sunday afternoon, February 13 at 5 PM. Please check your local PBS station's schedule for the exact date and time of the telecast in your area.

Enjoy!

MARTIN BOOKSPAN