



Mozart's A Little Night Music

January 24, 2026 7:30pm

Program

Saturday, January 24, 2026 at 7:30pm
Mary W. Sommervold Hall, Washington Pavilion

South Dakota Symphony Orchestra
Delta David Gier, *conductor*

Wolfgang Amadeus
Mozart *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*
(1756 - 1791)

Richard Strauss *Metamorphosen for 23 solo strings*
(1864 - 1949)

INTERMISSION

Migizii Stone *Heartache*
(Music Composition Academy student piece)

Leigh Schultz *Midnattssolens Land*
(Music Composition Academy student piece)

Jessica Meyer *Through Which We Flow*
(b. 1974) ???

Benjamin Britten *Simple Symphony*
(1913 - 1976)


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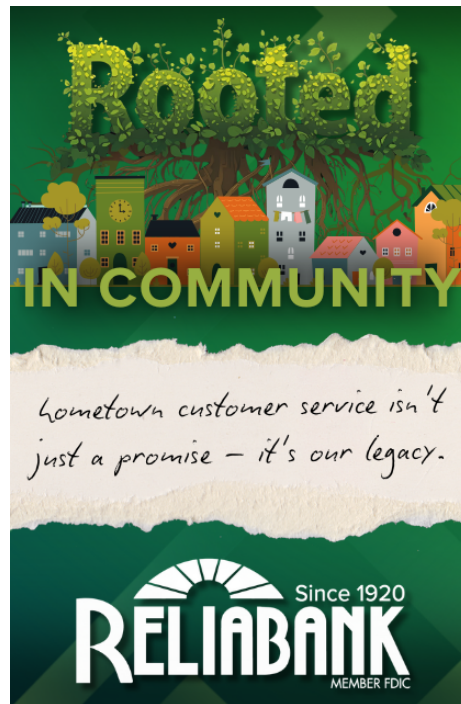
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Program Notes

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Written by Anna Vorhes

Born

January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria

Died

December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria

Instrumentation

Strings only

Duration

16 minutes

Composed

August 1787 (while working on Don Giovanni)

World Premiere

Unknown. We don't know if it was ever performed during the composer's lifetime.

Something interesting to listen for

This serenade includes a plethora of melodies. Mozart was at the top of his compositional career and melodies flowed with ease. In this four movement work, the composer uses melody



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to outline form. He begins with a sonata form first movement, with the clear contrast between first and second themes. The first theme has wide leaps that strings do so well. The contrasting second theme has an intricate downward trend. Once the melodies have been presented in the exposition, the development plays with these melodies. Listen for the recapitulation where you get the sense of starting at the beginning again. The slower second movement has three melodies that intertwine as a rondo. Melody A comes back again and again between melodies B and C: ABACA. The third movement is a dance movement, minuet with its partner trio. The minuet has two main melodies, followed by the trio with two more melodies. Then the two minuet melodies return one more time. Finally, the last movement erupts with even more melodies. To be sure you really hear all the melodies, Mozart asks the orchestra to repeat each section of the last movement. Enjoy listening for melodies to appear and reappear through *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

Program Notes

This popular *serenata notturno* (to use the common term of the day) is a bit of a mystery. Many of the things we know about this composition are from Mozart's catalog of his own works. He indicates he wrote a serenata notturno (night serenade, or in English "a little night music", or in Mozart's German "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik") as an entry into his catalog on August 10, 1787. He shows the work having five movements, with a second movement that was another minuet and trio in addition to the third movement minuet. Did the composer remove the first minuet and trio? Did it get lost before his wife turned the bundle of music, that included this, over to the publisher years after the composer's death? We don't know. We also don't know why he wrote this light and popular piece for strings. We don't know if it was performed during his lifetime.

During the summer of 1787, Mozart was working on the second movement of *Don Giovanni*, the middle of the three operas he composed with Da Ponte as librettist. With its dark plot, the opera premiered in October 1787, in Prague. Where did this cheerful short serenade fit? One clue might be that Mozart himself talked about creating his most serious works when he was happy, and his happiest works during his most depressed times. Could that be a clue? Was he overwhelmed by the complexity of *Don Giovanni* and needed to toss off something cheerful to counteract writing the demise of the Don? Whatever the reason for his interruption of his opera composition, we are left with a memorable composition that many of us whistle or hum for days after hearing.

This work was not published during Mozart's lifetime. It seems to have been part of a bundle of scores his widow Constanza



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sold to publishing house Breitkopf and Hartel. The first publication was in 1827. The original second movement was lost by the time it was published. Serenades were generally pieces for parties, usually performed outdoors by brass or wind instruments. Mozart rarely wrote this type of music without a commission, yet we can find no evidence that this music was for a particular event or to fulfill a commission.

What Mozart composed is almost a miniature symphony without winds or brass. This is written for strings only. The four existing movements follow the format that Mozart and his peers made the standard for a symphony. But he indicates that this had a fifth movement, which various conductors and composers have tried to reconstruct. The melodic material and the cheerful viewpoint make this one of Mozart's most famous and most performed works, even with the sense of mystery surrounding it.

Metamorphosen for 23 solo strings

Richard Strauss

Written by Anna Vorhes

Born

June 11, 1864, Munich, Germany

Died

September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

Instrumentation

ten violins, five violas, five celli, three bass

Composed

September 1944 - April 1945

World Premiere

January 25, 1946, by Collegium Musicum Zürich, Paul Sacher conducting

Duration

25 minutes

Something to listen for

This work is very unusual because it does not use the strings as groups. Each individual player has a part unique from the others. Each part has at least one moment to shine in the composition. The lush texture that results is part of the depth of emotion expressed in this work. Listening to a recording, one is tempted to believe one or another of the players are leading all the way through, but experiencing live musicians playing allows



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listeners to identify how the melodies and accompaniments and the polyphony travel through the ensemble. You may hear a brief quote from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. There is building up and drawing back. Finally, toward the end there comes a familiar melody from Beethoven's Third Symphony. In the score, Strauss indicates "in memorium" as the strains of Beethoven's funeral march are heard. Strauss was reacting to the end of World War II, quoting Beethoven's reaction to Napoleon's crowning himself emperor. Beethoven's response to hearing the news was to destroy his dedication of the Eroica. Strauss's reaction was to create a more complex work, reacting to the destruction of so many places and so much of the society he valued.

Program Notes

Richard Strauss was a composer blessed with good health and a long life. Some of his most beloved works were created at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. His tone poems ranged from the picture of a mischievous young boy in *Til Eulenspiegel*, to an examination of Nietzsche's speculations on man and superman in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, to examination of human existence in *Death and Transfiguration*. After the turn of the century, he turned his focus to opera, with *Salome*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* and the beloved *Der Rosenkavalier* among others. Then as he was on the cusp of his seventies, the world around him changed.

When Hitler began his rule of Germany, Strauss made the decision to accept appointments in the Third Reich. Many artists left Germany in search of everything, from safety to a place that suited their philosophies better. Strauss decided to stay. It's complex to say why he did so. One part was undoubtedly his desire to use his public position to protect members of his extended family, including his Jewish daughter-in-law and her family. Another part was the thought that he had built a life and following in Germany, and it would be hard to relocate in his seventies. He held no illusions about the German government by the time he wrote this piece, however. He no longer had the patronage of the government, he had not been able to save all those he had hoped to protect, and life was difficult by the final days of WW II.

Watching and hearing of the destruction of many of the beloved concert halls Strauss had built his career in was extremely upsetting to the composer. Hearing the Munich Opera House had been destroyed by bombs led him to write, "I can write no more music today. I am beside myself." He turned to the writings of German philosophers, especially those of Goethe. Among other works, Strauss read *The Metamorphoses of the Plants* and *The Metamorphoses of the Animals*.



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Strauss began work on this attempt to make sense of the world he found himself inhabiting in September, 1944. He started out thinking of a smaller ensemble but ended up with this wonderfully complex work by the time of its premiere in Switzerland. Friends had arranged for a commission from a Swiss ensemble which performed the premier in January of 1946, eighty years ago this month.

While Strauss was composing, Germany fell. Around the composer, people were being asked to commit suicide to avoid the takeover by the Allies. It's hard to imagine living in a time where in the last concert of the Berlin Philharmonic, just days before the end of the war, Hitler Youth passed cyanide capsules to the audience should they wish to use them before the Allied invasion. That month alone, it is estimated that over 7,000 Germans committed suicide in Berlin.

Fortunately, the American division that took over the area where the Strauss family lived included several musicians who admired the composer. They insured that Strauss and his family were left with as much peace as possible at the end of the war. Strauss would live a few more years, finally succumbing to complications from a stroke in 1949.

The complexity of *Metamorphosen* seems analogous to the disturbing complexity of the world during the Second World War. Strauss was long disillusioned by the government, having used them as much as he could early on but finally being rejected by them and rejecting the government, albeit quietly, in return. This composition feels like an expression of complex and difficult thought patterns as the world changed during the Third Reich and its fall.

Through Which We Flow

Jessica Meyer

Born
1974

Instrumentation
Four violin, two viola, two cello, two bass

Duration
10 minutes

World Premiere
May 18, 2017 at St. Paul's Chapel of Trinity Wall Street, Novus NY.

Program Notes
Written by composer



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This work is based on assertions found in Masaru Emoto's book "The Hidden Messages in Water", which can be interpreted as a more spiritual extension of String Theory/Quantum mechanics.

String Theory is about how objects in our universe are composed of vibrating filaments (strings) and membranes (branes) of energy, and the author asserts that the best vehicle to capture and transport these vibrations is water.

His way of proving this was to take pictures of the crystals formed in frozen water after being exposed to different kinds of music and concentrated thoughts directed towards the water. The results were a visual representation of the manifestation of variations of positive and negative emotions.

Through Which We Flow embodies different sonic manifestations of joy, hate, and prayer - using the resonances specifically created by string instruments and the unique acoustic of the church itself to remind us of the power of our own thoughts and actions.

A Simple Symphony

Benjamin Britten

Written by Anna Vorhes

Born

November 22, 1913, Lowestoft, United Kingdom

Died

December 4, 1976, Suffolk, United Kingdom

Instrumentation

Strings

Duration

16 minutes

Composed

1934 during his last year at the Royal College of Music

World Premiere

March 6, 1934, by the Norwich Symphony Orchestra, Britten conducting

Something interesting to listen for

Like Mozart, Britten created an abundance of melodies. Each movement of this exquisite symphony uses two melodies that Britten created at an earlier point in his life. He also enjoyed experimenting with what timbres can be created by the



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standard string family of violin, viola, violoncello and bass. The strings play in the normal fashion with bows in a technique called arco, and they put their bows down and play pizzicato. If you pay attention, you may also hear some players strumming as if a violin or viola is a guitar.

Program Notes

Most people know that Mozart was an incredible child prodigy. Far fewer people know that Benjamin Britten, born about 150 years later, was as incredible a child prodigy. Britten was born just before the First World War in Great Britain. He started playing the piano and by the age of seven was playing several instruments. One biographer estimates between the age of seven and eighteen, Britten wrote eight hundred compositions.

Educationally, Britten began his formal academic musical training at age seventeen when he was accepted to the Royal College of Music in London. He had been studying composition with Frank Bridges since he was fourteen. At the Royal College, he would continue developing his compositional knowledge. After he finished his studies he created this delightful little piece. It combines his technical ability and demonstrates classical forms with a sense of whimsy. He drew on his own earliest works, choosing melodies written in his childhood to become the themes of the four movements. Then he chose descriptive and alliterative titles.

The first movement is "Boisterous Bourrée". A bourrée is a dance done originally in social settings during the Baroque era, which quickly became a staple of the ballet world. During the Baroque, suites were collections of dances. The first theme is drawn from his 1924 Suite #1 for piano, also called a bourree. You may notice counterpoint which is somewhat unusual in sonata form but is also a style Britten developed well. The second theme is from the earliest composition Britten used in this entire suite, written in 1923. It was originally a song for voice and piano titled "A Country Dance: Now the King is Home Again" on text from Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Foresters*. The two themes intertwine in clear sonata form. (Of course when using the melody in a instrumental work Britten omits the words.) Listen for the recapitulation (restatement of the themes) to begin after you hear what it sound like rather miscellaneous high notes.

The second movement, titles "Playful Pizzicato", is an exercise in playing without the bow. The first theme is from Britten's 1924 Piano Sonata from the scherzo and trio movement of that sonata. The more lyric second theme is a song for voice and piano titled "The Road Song of the Bander-log" originally with text from a Rudyard Kipling poem. It was also written in 1924.



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The instructions from the composer for the "Playful Pizzicato" are "as fast as possible, always pizzicato". The tempo slows a bit as the second theme is introduced, but overall this is very energetic!

The third movement "Sentimental Saraband" is the longest of this short composition. It returns to a Baroque idea, offering a sarabande, a slow and stately dance with a halting rhythm. It's in ABA form overall. The A section uses a melody from Suite #3 for piano written in 1925. Listen for a pedal G in this first theme. (A pedal G means that the low strings will play a long G under many different chords in the other instruments.) The second theme is Waltz for Piano written in 1923. The Two themes are combined in the traditional "slow" movement. Even in this slow movement, Britten uses pizzicato sound, with a different effect than in the previous movement.

"Frolicsome Finale" uses a melody from Britten's Piano Sonata #9 written in 1926 along with a melody that might have been written just for the Simple Symphony. It's identified as "Song - 1924" but the referenced material is unknown. This movement is a long build to the triumphant end.

If you were (or are) a string player, you may recognize this work. The notes and techniques are easy enough for a young or amateur orchestra to play the work to good effect. To hear the very fine musicians of the SDSO play this as it was intended is a real treat.



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