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Cello Suite No. 2 in D Minor, Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach was perhaps the most prominent composer of the 18th century, the time period which is otherwise known as the "Baroque period". Serving as the church's organist and main composer, Bach would often compose from the organ as he composed new works for mass every week. His music would ultimately inspire countless composers after him, including Johannes Brahms, as well as influencing many of the pieces that we are familiar with today.

Bach composed a total of six suites for solo cello during his engagement as the music director at Cöthen with Prince Leopold, an avid supporter of music, as his patron. The cello was a rather new instrument at the time as the suites were composed in the 1720s, roughly 20 years after its conception. Following the gallant Suite No. 1 set in G Major, Suite No. 2 in D Minor serves as a startlingly contrast to its precedent. The Prelude introduces a three-note motive comprised of a d minor triad, which effectively sets the prevailing dark atmosphere for the (duration of the) movement. A dramatic improvisatory flourish appears in the Allemande, while an energetic and briskly-paced Courante leads into the intimate, dark sonorities of the Sarabande. After recalling moments reminiscent of the Prelude, the elegantly contrasting Menuets take their stride and lead into an uplifting Gigue which concludes the suite with a climbing d minor arpeggio.

Intermezzo per viola e pianoforte, Nino Rota

In his hometown of Milan, Rota was surrounded by music from his birth in 1911. His grandfather, Giovanni Rinaldi, was a composer and his mother, Ernesta Rinaldi, was a pianist. He began composing when he was eight years old, attracting the attention of the Italian public as a compositional prodigy, at the young age of twelve, with his first oratorio, "L'infanzia di S Giovanni Battista". Rota studied at the Milan Conservatory that very same year and embarked to the United States in 1931, with scholarship, to study at the Curtis Institute of Music. In addition to his friendship with Igor Stravinsky, which begun in Milan, Rota also befriended composer Aaron Copland during his studies and exposed to American popular song, Gerwin's music and

most importantly, film scores. In the 1940s he established his career in film scoring, also composing for the opera house and concert halls, and produced well over 150 scores, including the noteworthy Oscar-winning score for "The Godfather".

Rota's musical style has been described by fellow Italian composer and musician, Gianandrea Gavazzenni, as an "Italian Ravel: archaic, intimate, the voice of one who has invented a style that did not exist before". His works demonstrate his mastery of incorporating a multitude of influences ranging from the middle-Eastern, Slavonic symphonic tradition, as seen in his symphonies, to flowing lyricisms. In his "Intermezzo per viola e pianoforte", he juxtaposes two themes against each other as the viola and piano remain in constant dialogue. The first theme is sentimental and becomes increasingly sentimental as it recurs throughout the piece, serving as a stark contrast to the playful second theme as it gambols forward.

Sonata No. 1, Op. 121, Johannes Brahms

First son of Johann Jakob Brahms and Johanna Henrika Christiane Nissen, Johannes Brahms is commonly placed among the ranks of Bach and Beethoven and referred to as one of the "three B's" of classical composers. He began his musical studies with private lessons on the piano, horn and cello, taking after his father who could play the flute, horn, violin and double bass. One of Hamburg's leading teachers, Eduard Marxsen, who was a pianist and composer, took Brahms under his wing early on to instruct him on piano and music theory, free of charge. From him, Brahms was instilled with a love for Bach and Viennese classical composers.

Brahms was originally inspired to compose Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 121 for the clarinet upon hearing Richard Mülhfeld, principal clarinetist of the Meiningen Orchestra, perform Weber's clarinet concerto. The transcriptions for viola, however, were made by Brahms soon after as he also enjoyed the rich sounds of the instrument. His two clarinet sonatas are in fact, his last ever published chamber works, as they were published only two short years before his death. Of the two sonatas, Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 121, is the most declamatory; it begins with an Allegro Appassionato as the four opening bars in the piano serve as thematic material for the duration of the movement. The gentle lulling of the second movement brings to mind an aria as the theme introduced by the viola returns six times, once by the piano. Following the dance-like third movement, an Allegro Grazioso, is the final Vivace as the three introductory notes chime throughout, seemingly losing sight of its way through key changes until it returns to its original key of F Major and reaches its enthusiastic ending.