

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

PETER SERKIN, *piano*
Friday, January 18 – 7:30 PM
Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM

Adagio in B Minor, K. 540

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1788

Duration: 10 minutes

According to his own catalog, Mozart completed the Adagio, K. 540, on March 19, 1788. Two weeks earlier, he had completed the last of his arias for sister-in-law Aloysia Weber, *Ah se in ciel*, K. 538, and the previous month, the Piano Concerto in D Major, K. 537, *Coronation*, but he was chiefly occupied by thoughts of the impending Vienna premiere of his opera *Don Giovanni* on May 7 of that year. No specific event appears to have prompted the composition of this exquisite, solitary slow movement for piano. Distinguished musicologist Arthur Hutchings deemed the Adagio Mozart's finest single piano work and eminent Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein considered it "one of the most perfect, most deeply felt, and most despairing of all his works."

Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 570

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Composed: 1789

Duration: 20 minutes

The Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 570, comes from late in Mozart's life: he composed it in Vienna just before departing for Berlin with the hope to play for King Wilhelm Friedrich II. A certain amount of mystery surrounds this gentle music: some scholars feel that Mozart intended it as a work for his students to perform, and it also exists in a version with a violin part added to

the piano line. It remains one of Mozart's less-frequently performed sonatas. Mozart's biographer Alfred Einstein speaks of this music with almost extravagant praise, calling it "the most completely rounded of them all, the ideal of his piano sonata."

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born: March 31, 1685, in Eisenach, Germany

Died: July 28, 1750, Leipzig, Germany

Composed: 1741

Duration: 65 minutes

In November 1741, Bach made the hundred-mile trip east from Leipzig to Dresden to visit an old friend, Count Hermann Keyserlingk, the Russian ambassador to the Saxon court. Keyserlingk's court harpsichordist was the 14-year-old Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, who at age 10 had been a student of Bach. There are several stories as to what happened next, all impossible to confirm. One is that Keyserlingk commissioned a work for his young harpsichordist and gave Bach a goblet full of gold coins in payment. Another is that Keyserlingk was an insomniac who specified that he wanted a piece that Goldberg could play to him as he went to sleep. What is certain is that the following year Bach published a work he called simply *Aria with Thirty Variations*, composed for two-manual harpsichord. The score bore no dedication, nor any mention at all of Keyserlingk or Goldberg. But Bach did give the count a copy of this music, and the conclusion is that this is the piece that had been requested in Dresden. By a process of (perhaps random) association, one of the greatest works ever written immortalizes a 14-year-old harpsichord player, and we know this music today simply as the *Goldberg Variations*.