The Shepherd on the Rock
When on the highest cliff I stand, gaze down into the deep valley and sing,
the echo from the ravines
flashes upwards from the dark valley for ages.
The further my voice travels, the clearer it returns to me from below.
So far from me does my love dwell
that I weep for her more ardently over there.
With deep grief I am consumed,
my joy is gone; on end
all hope on earth has left me:
I am so lonely here,
I am so lonely here.
So longingly sounded the song in the wood,
so longingly it sounded through the night,
drawing hearts heavenwards
with wondrous power.
—Translation: Lionel Satter

Ludwig van Beethoven
Serenade in D Major, Op. 25
Despite its later opus number, Beethoven produced this serenade for the somewhat unusual combination of flute, violin and viola in the mid-1790s, around the same time as his Op. 8 serenade for string trio. The composer later allowed publication of an arrangement for flute and piano (as his Op. 41), about which a reviewer for Vienna’s Zeitung for die elegante Welt commented: “Beethoven’s name itself recommends this very beautiful serenade, which...consists of seven major movements of a very agreeable romantic nature.” This afternoon we hear the first three—a charming allegro, an elegant minuet with two trios, and an energetic movement in ABA form that shifts from D minor to D major and back again—as well as the work’s finale: a brief, stately introduction leads without pause to a lively rondo featuring a recurring dotted-rhythm theme (the term dunsylo in the tempo indication means “unconstrained”), culminating in a quicksilver coda.

DMitri Shostakovich
String Quartet in F# Minor, Op. 108
The string quartets of Shostakovich stand with the six by Bartók at the pinnacle of the 20th century chamber music repertoire. Each of Shostakovich’s quartets is in a different key—he planned to compose one in each of the 24 major and minor keys, but only wrote 15 before his death in 1975. The seventh quartet, his first in a minor key, dates from 1960: the Beethoven Quartet premiered it on May 13 of that year in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). Dedicated to Shostakovich’s first wife (Nina, who had died in 1954), the work is the shortest of the 15 quartets. Its three movements are played without pause.

Franz Schubert
Der Hir auf dem Felsen, D. 945
Of the more than 600 songs Schubert composed in his all-too-brief lifetime, Der Hir auf dem Felsen (”The Shepherd on the Rock”) is one of only two to feature an obligato part for wind instrument (the other being Auf dem Strom, which uses French horn). The work came at the behest of soprano Fanny Hensel, Milde-Hauptmann, who had sung Leonore in the first productions of Beethoven’s Fidelio. For years, she had requested her friend to write a recital showcase; he finally acquiesced in October 1826, just a month before his death—it would be his penultimate song. The bulk of the text comes from Wilhelm Müller (whose poetry also graces Schubert’s song Die Forelle), but with additional lines by Helme von Chézy (the playwright of Rosamunde, for which Schubert had composed incidental music). A brief piano introduction leads to a full statement of the opening melody by clarinet before the singer enters: a lonely shepherd, high atop a mountain, listens to echoes below. The mood darkens as the shepherd expresses his loneliness, brightening again when he anticipates the coming of spring.

Theodor Backhaus,
Skyczklovich, String Quartet (1st movement), Op. 25

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA
Sunday, March 14, 2010 • 3:00 PM
Meany Hall • University of Washington
Stravinsky: Four Last Songs
Eleanor Steffke, soprano
Torke: Saxophone Concerto
Erik Bosen-Nowak, saxophone
Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra
The Shepherd on the Rock
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Franz Schubert
Der Hirt auf dem Felsen, D. 945
Of the more than 600 songs Schubert composed in his all-too-brief lifetime, Der Hirt auf dem Felsen ("The Shepherd on the Rock") is one of only two to feature an obbligato part for wind instrument (the other being Auf dem Strom, which uses French horn). The work came at the behest of soprano Fanny Hildebrandt, who sang Leonore in the first productions of Beethoven’s Fidelio. For years, she had requested her friend to write a recital showpiece; he finally acquiesced in October 1828, just a month before his death—it would be his penultimate song. The bulk of the text comes from Wilhelm Müller (whose poetry also graces Schubert’s songs Unfinished, Die Winterreise and Die Liederkranz) with additional lines by Helmlina von Chézy (the playwright of Rosamunde, for which Schubert had composed incidental music). A brief piano introduction leads to a full statement of the opening melody by clarinet before the singer enters: a lonely shepherd, high atop a mountain, listens to echoes below. The mood darkens as the shepherd expresses his loneliness, brightening again when he anticipates the coming of spring.

Johannes Brahms
An die Helmut, Op. 44, No. 1
Although published in 1874 along with two other (unrelated) songs for the same forces—SATB vocal quartet and piano—An die Helmut ("To the Homeland") dates from a decade earlier. The text, a setting of a poem by Otto Innemann (written under the pseudonym “C.O. Sternau”), undoubtedly accurately reflected Brahms’s longing for Hamburg during his first extended stay in Vienna. Composed during the summer of 1864, the first performance occurred on April 7, 1867, with Brahms himself at the piano.

Antonín Dvořák
Serenade in D Minor, Op. 44
Dvořák modeled both of his serenades—the Op. 22 for strings and this Op. 44—after the Classical-era serenades and divertimenti of Mozart and Haydn, works for chamber ensembles or small orchestras consisting of dance movements yet sometimes with aspirations toward a symphonic scale. In particular, the instrumentation of Dvořák’s Op. 44 recalls the homophonic ensemble so prevalent in the previous century: pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns and bassoons, often with an ad libitum part for string bass or contrabassoon—Dvořák uses both, along with some oboe and a single cello. As with his other string serenade, Dvořák worked quickly, sketching and orchestrating the opening movement in a single day (January 4, 1878) and completing the other three within two weeks. The premiere did not take place until November 17, in Prague. During the intermission, Dvořák wrote his Slavonic Dances, whose publication in late November would create a sensation across Europe, turning a rather obscure Czech composer into a household name. Although Dvořák originally planned to write three serenades, he ended up using sketches for a third such composition—first in his Czech Suite (performed by Orchestra Seattle last June).

The work opens with its shortest movement, a march. While Dvořák labels the next movement a minuet [in F major] with a trio [in B♭], the forms in question are actually two triple-meter Bohemian folk dances: the sousedská (in moderate tempo) and furiant (very fast, with syncopated cross-rhythms). The key moves to A major for the slow movement that follows, returning to D minor for the finale. Cast in a modified rondò (note the left-hand chords) the finale charges ahead until relaxing for a meno mosso section that builds forcefully in anticipation of a recapitulation—but it is the movement from the first theme that reappears before the opening theme of the rondo returns, now in D major.

—Jeff Eldridge