String Trio in B-flat major, D. 471
Franz Peter Schubert (1797–1828)

The only one of the great composers to be born in Vienna, Schubert was also the only one who failed to win international recognition in his own lifetime, and for that his untimely death is only a partial explanation. The reasons for the world's neglect of his genius are to be sought rather in his own nature, shy of the limelight, and totally indifferent to the arts of self-assertion.

He had neither the talent nor the inclination for the role of virtuoso performer, and he disliked the regular routine imposed by continuous employment. He never traveled to any of the European capitals outside Vienna, and he lacked percipient champions who could both recognize his worth and spread the word of his talents abroad.

Moreover, the democratization of taste, and the development of commercial publishing, the illiberal political climate of his day: all these factors made life difficult for a freelance composer, a species of which Schubert was perhaps the first thoroughgoing example. He was dependent throughout his life on the fees he could earn from patrons and dedicatees, from the publication of his songs and keyboard compositions (which did not begin until he was 24), and occasional teaching or performing. He never achieved financial security except for a year or two; on the other hand, the idea that he lived in feckless bohemian poverty is certainly a popular myth.

Schubert was the fourth surviving son of a school assistant from Moravia and a domestic servant from Silesia who met and married in the suburb of Lichtental. Franz learnt to play the piano and the violin from his father and brothers, and later the viola. He had a few lessons in counterpoint from the local church organist, Michael Holzer. But his serious musical education began at the age of 11, when he won a choral scholarship to the Imperial College (the Konvikt, or religious seminary). There, under the supervision of the court organist Wenzel Ruzicka and the Kapellmeister Antonio Salieri, his gifts soon revealed themselves.

From Salieri he inherited conservative notational habits and a reverence for the music of Gluck, as well as a coolness towards that of Mozart and Beethoven that he was later to outgrow. The most impressive achievement of these years is the series of string quartets he wrote in 1812. Even earlier, in 1811, came his first attempt at opera, but the setting of Kotzebue's *Der Spiegelritter* ("The Looking-Glass Knight") was abandoned after the first act. Even earlier still were the first songs, ambitiously modeled on the cantata-like settings of Schiller by Zumsteeg.

Franz Schubert wrote three string trios, all of them in the key of B-flat major. From the first of these, *D111A,* a trio Schubert wrote in 1814, only a few measures exist yet today. The string trio *D 471* consists of a completed first movement and an incomplete second movement, composed in 1816. The last of these trios, *D 581,* composed in 1817, was completed in four movements, and exists now in two versions.

The spontaneity and clarity of Schubert's music appeal equally to the expert and to the casual listener. He had many styles—it has been fairly said that he had a different style for every poet he set—and his music often sounds like that of other composers.

Still the adjective "Schubertian" is indispensable. His poetic sensibility enabled him to give an entirely new emotional weight to familiar formulas like the major-minor alternation, the enharmonic

shift, and the tonic—German 6th—tonic sequence, introducing new harmonic tensions between the tonic and its more remote relations.

That he was poised for stylistic development at the time of his death is evident from the sketches for a visionary "Tenth" Symphony, which he worked on during his last weeks. But the long-cherished view of Schubert as an intuitively creative child of nature who felt no need for Beethovenian cerebration or innovation had already been challenged by instances in his earlier works by means of intricate contrapuntal device, palindrome, and "mirror writing," though these were not recognized as such until the late 20th century. It was indeed the fusion of a keen intellectual awareness and a poetic purity of expression that gave the mature Schubertian voice its special uniqueness.

Wikipedia and *The Oxford Companion to Music,* John Reed/Brian Newbould
edited by Alison Latham and Jeff Gallagher

Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 45
Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

He was not only the foremost composer Norway has produced but the first Scandinavian composer to win universal acceptance abroad—indeed, he is one of the handful of popular composers through whom many find their way to music.

The family originally came from Scotland, his great-grandfather changing the spelling of his name from Greig to Grieg on assuming Norwegian nationality in 1779. Hagerup was his mother's maiden name and also that of his cousin Nina. Edvard Grieg showed early talent as a pianist, and when in 1858 the violinist-composer Ole Bull, a distant relative of his mother, heard him play he persuaded Grieg's parents to send the 15-year-old to Leipzig.

There he studied with E. F. Wenzel (a keen advocate of Schumann, Moscheles, and Reinecke) and heard Clara Schumann playing her husband's *Piano Concerto in A minor,* on which his own was later to be modeled. But he was not happy there and in 1860 was afflicted by an attack of pleurisy which resulted in a collapsed lung. For the rest of his days he was plagued with respiratory problems and struggled through life on one lung.

Grieg began composing his third and final violin sonata in the autumn of 1886. Whereas the first two sonatas were written in a matter of weeks, this sonata took him several months to complete. The sonata remains the most popular of the three works, and has established itself in the standard repertoire. It happens that the work was also a personal favorite of Grieg's.

The sonata premiered with Grieg himself at the piano and well-known violinist Adolph Brodsky in Leipzig. To a certain extent, Grieg built on Norwegian folk melodies and rhythms in this three-movement sonata. However, he considered the second sonata as the "Norwegian" sonata, while the third sonata was "the one with the broader horizon." This was the last piece Grieg composed using sonata form.

The first movement is characterized by its bold and heroic introduction. The agitated opening theme is contrasted with a lyrical second theme.

The second movement opens with a serene piano solo in E major with a lyrical melodic line. In

the middle section, Grieg uses a playful dance tune. The second movement exists also in a version for cello and piano that Grieg composed during the same time as the violin version. The cello version was given to his brother as a birthday gift in May 1887, but didn't appear in print until 2005 (by Henle).

The finale is written generally in sonata form with coda but lacks a development section.

In the 1880s Grieg briefly directed the Bergen Harmonien (now known as the Bergen Philharmonic), but in the latter part of that decade and throughout the next he vigorously pursued the life of the traveling concert virtuoso, playing and conducting his own music. He visited England in 1888, and it was there that he gave his last concert in 1906. More than any other artist before him (with the exception of Mussorgsky) he evokes the character of a nation's music.

Yet in his songs he hardly ever quotes folk music directly, though his music breathes its spirit. Only "Solveig's Song" uses a borrowed tune. Throughout his life, both in the songs and in the piano music there is a growing response to the musical language of Norway, and his awareness of its harmonic originality deepened continually. The harmonic astringency of the *Slåtter* ("Norwegian Dances" op. 72, 1902) even suggests Bartók at times. Here and in the ten books of *Lyric Pieces* there is an undying freshness and directness of utterance.

Wikipedia and *The Oxford Companion to Music,* Robert Layton
edited by Alison Latham and Jeff Gallagher

Piano Quintet in E-flat, Op. 44
Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

One of the leading figures of the early Romantic period, Schumann was born in a provincial city into a cultured middle-class family—his father was a bookseller and publisher. In this environment he developed keen literary interests and a good knowledge both of German and foreign literature. Throughout his childhood and youth the claims of music and letters ran side by side, with poems and dramatic works produced in tandem with small-scale compositional efforts, mainly piano pieces and songs. His talents as a performer were equally evident: he had begun piano lessons with a local church organist at the age of seven, and quickly showed an interest in improvisation. It is worth noting that his marriage to Clara Wieck occurred on September 12, 1840.

Marriage gave him the emotional and domestic stability on which his subsequent achievements were founded. The relationship was not without its tensions—as a pianist of international reputation Clara remained the better-known figure, while nevertheless regularly sacrificing the interests of her own career to the twin claims of motherhood and Robert's compositions; but it was fundamentally happy, and Clara's encouragement of his ambitions enabled him repeatedly to extend himself as a composer.

During 1840, the year of their marriage, Schumann turned decisively to song, producing more than half his output in the genre, including a series of cycles, notably *Myrthen* ("Myrtles"), *Frauenliebe und leben* ("Woman's Life and Love"), *Dichterliebe* ("Poet's Love"), and others to poems by Eichendorff and Heine. In 1841 he moved on to orchestral music. His first completed symphony (*No. 1 in B-flat,* the "Spring") was conducted by Mendelssohn at a concert given by Clara in March, with the Overture, Scherzo, and Finale following in May. The *Phantasie* for piano and orchestra (which later became the

first movement of the *Piano Concerto*) was written and a new symphony (eventually published as *No. 4 in D minor*) begun. The couple's home life was also enriched by the birth of a daughter in September, the first of seven children to survive.

Chamber music was the next area to be tackled, in 1842. After studying works by Haydn and Mozart, Schumann produced three string quartets, closely followed by a piano quintet, a piano quartet, and a set of *Phantasiestücke* for piano trio. The following year opened with a setback: a severe and debilitating mental crisis whose effects lasted several months. He had suffered similar attacks at intervals over a long period, which may have been congenital: his father had also had a "nervous disorder", and his younger sister Emilie had committed suicide in 1826. During his attacks Schumann too feared that he would take his own life or suffer a complete mental collapse. There has been much speculation as to the origin of these bouts and their relation (if any) to the illness that eventually killed him: he was confined in an asylum in his last years.

Commentators on Schumann's output have all agreed on the outstanding qualities of the piano music and songs. Less universally admired—at least until relatively recently—have been his achievements in other genres. A second caveat has tended to exist in respect of his later works: they have been broadly viewed as inferior to his earlier production (up to, say, the mid-1840s), the progress of his illness being seen as responsible for the apparent decline in their quality. The last decade or two, however, has seen a softening of these views, caused partly by increased performance and recording of the later works, and partly—in the case of his orchestral pieces—by the beneficial effects of period performance practice as it has come to be applied to mid-19th-century music.

Schumann's piano music has needed no such defense. As a highly trained pianist he understood the instrument's character and potential as well as anyone of his generation, and his personal rapport with it from childhood made it a natural means of expression to the adult composer; this perhaps partly explains the highly distinctive nature of his piano writing, in which expertise combines with a certain idiosyncrasy. Though it was found *recherché* by his contemporaries, its expressive power came to be acknowledged, and its lyrical melody and richly varied textures to be given their due. Even its more individual elements—such as its many references to real or imaginary figures within his personal mythology—came to attract as much as to puzzle.

Schumann composed the *Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44* in just a few weeks in September and October 1842, and it received its first public performance the following year. Noted for its "extroverted, exuberant" character, the piano quintet is considered one of his finest compositions and a magnificent work of 19th-century chamber music.

The work revolutionized the instrumentation and musical character of the piano quintet and, as you will hear today, established it as a quintessentially Romantic genre.

Wikipedia and *The Oxford Companion to Music,* George Hall
edited by Alison Latham and Jeff Gallagher