

DUST AND IONS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2025 | 3:00 PM

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

Daniel Hege

Music Director & Conductor

PROGRAM NOTES

ALEX WAKIM

Born November 9, 1996 in Wichita, Kansas

Dust and Ions: Orchestral Suite (World Premiere)

1. Introduction
2. Sophia 537
3. To the Lost Cedars Interlude
4. The Fireflies in Kansas (Are as Big as the Stars)
5. To the Lost Cedars Interlude
6. Waltz of Corruption
7. Dust and Ions

This is the world premiere performance of Dust and Ions: Orchestral Suite.

Dedicated to the children all around the world who look up and dream for simplicity and peace.

We look up, and thanks to Hubble and James Webb, we see galaxies that are 14-billion years old (an unfathomable amount of time.) We see comets on 6,000-year trajectories, and some on much longer ones that we'll never know existed, and we realize we are part of something much bigger than ourselves - more beautiful than the corruption and pain that often rules. *Dust and Ions* began as a meditation on connection during COVID, the fascination in the idea that we are visited by huge balls of ice from the Oort cloud (the cloud of comets outside of our solar system). I recorded for the initial album on August 4th, 2020. As I geared up for the session, I saw the news of the port explosion in Beirut – the largest non-nuclear blast ever recorded – devastating an already crippled population. I quickly wrote a final chapter of this album to record later in the day: a chapter about corruption.

This rendition of *Dust and Ions* is a 15-minute orchestral suite – two tableaux, *Sophia 537*, and *The Fireflies in Kansas*, are based on pieces from the original album, arranged for orchestra. The rest of the music features completely new writing and arrangements. We begin our journey with the purity of creation, followed by the sultry waltz of corruption, and its inevitable destruction and immolation, like that in *Götterdämmerung*. The twilight of the gods is often preceded with hubris and destruction, which has taken far too many innocent lives these past couple years. We pray that by looking to the stars and inspiring breath and thoughtfulness, we might be a small step closer to purity of heart and joy.

A little bit about each movement:

Introduction – Creation, birth, spectacular, messy. The Dust and Ions theme is introduced here and used throughout.

Sophia 537 – Rendition of somebody running to a service at the newly opened Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a moment of magic and beauty through creation.

To the Lost Cedars Interlude – Presentation of the Cedars theme.

The Fireflies in Kansas (Are as Big as the Stars) – A meditation on this very thought, the Dust and Ions theme is stretched and kneaded.

To the Lost Cedars Interlude – Second iteration of the Cedars theme.

Dust and Ions: Orchestral Suite (World Premiere)

continued

Waltz of Corruption – Opening as a sultry waltz (corruption often sneaks in an alluring fashion.) The waltz is a variation on the Dust and Ions theme, which ends up fighting with The Cedars theme in a grand climax.

Dust and Ions – Post-explosion, an attempt at purity and peace. We return to the Dust and Ions theme, and wonder if it'll all start over again, or be different this time.

I'm deeply thankful to be premiering this suite with the Wichita Symphony Orchestra – I grew up being continually inspired by their programming, and I'm thankful to my parents, Mimi and Tony, for enriching and supporting me, and to my fiancée, Mollina, for coming along to see the comet that started this whole journey and sticking around for the next one.

Follow me on [Instagram](#) at @musicwakim for updates, and on [Spotify](#) for new music. AlexWakim.com for more info.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn Germany

Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna, Austria

Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72B

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on March 12 and 13, 2011 with Daniel Hege conducting.

The compositional struggles, revisions and re-writes that Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) endured are well known to us. Undoubtedly, the most extreme example was his single opera, *Fidelio* (originally titled *Leonore*), which underwent numerous and severe revisions between 1805 and 1814, resulting in three different versions before the master was satisfied. An important part of the *Leonore/Fidelio* evolution was Beethoven's composition of no fewer than four different overtures for the opera. The composer apparently considered *Leonore No. 1* unsatisfactory; for he took a different tack with *Leonore No. 2*, making it closely follow the rescue plot of the opera. However, *Leonore No. 2* had many technical problems for the orchestra, so Beethoven began revising the movement. Radically altered and extended, that overture became *Leonore No. 3*. In the 1814 revision, now retitled *Fidelio*, the first act opens in a different key from previous versions, so Beethoven wrote a fourth and altogether new overture: *Fidelio*.

Leonore No. 3 begins with a compact *Adagio* introduction, soon reaching highpoint, as the woodwinds quote Florestan's touching aria from the opening of Act II. The main theme of the *Allegro* is entirely new material, but the second theme is an ingenious transformation of the Florestan quotation. The turbulent development reflects the struggle of Leonore (alias "Fidelio") to free her husband, Florestan, from his unlawful and oppressive political imprisonment. Then comes the famous offstage trumpet call, signaling the arrival of the King's minister who will set matters right. A false recapitulation in the flute follows - a quiet moment between husband and heroic wife. Then the true and triumphant recapitulation thunders into the full orchestra. The exultant *Presto* coda proclaims to the world that a heroic blow for personal freedom and political liberty has been struck.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany

Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austria

Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25

1. Allegro (15')
2. Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo (9')
3. Andante con moto (12')
4. Rondo alla zingarese: Presto (9'30")

The Brahms Piano Quartet in G Minor, orchestrated by Arnold Schoenberg, was previously performed by the Wichita Symphony on February 22 and 23, 2004 with Andrew Sewell conducting.

Orchestrated by

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

Born September 13, 1874 in Vienna, Austria

Died July 13, 1951 in Los Angeles, California

At first glance, the pairing of Johannes Brahms with Arnold Schoenberg might seem like classical music's version of the "odd couple." On the one hand, we have Brahms, one of the preeminent 19th-century Romantics and a beloved composer of symphonies, lieder, piano, and chamber works. On the other hand, there is Schoenberg, one of the high priests of modernism during the first half of the 20th century, founder of the 12-tone system and composer of atonal music. In Brahms we have one of the most popular of all classical composers. In Schoenberg, we easily have one of the least popular. How did this pairing come about?

Although both men lived in Vienna, there is no record that they ever met. Schoenberg's early D Major String Quartet had been brought to Brahms's attention in 1896 by Alexander von Zemlinsky, one of Brahms's students, who had, in turn, become the teacher of Arnold Schoenberg. Brahms expressed admiration for the Quartet, which was written in a late-19th-century style. Brahms even offered financial assistance to the 22-year-old Schoenberg, but the upstart and proud young composer declined the generous offer.

Although he was revolutionary, Schoenberg always thought of himself as an apostle of tradition. He respected his artistic lineage, showed interest in music of the Renaissance, edited Viennese music of the 18th century, and, like everyone else in Vienna, adored Johann Strauss. He and his students often arranged Strauss waltzes for small ensembles. Schoenberg once said that he held the greatest esteem for Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mahler.

Like others in the 20th century, his interest in the music of the past led him to orchestrate the music of his predecessors. In 1922, he orchestrated two chorale preludes by Bach. In 1933, he composed a cello concerto loosely following the music of Monn, a Viennese contemporary of Haydn. Although famous for his modern atonal style, he could write tonal music and once said, "There is still a lot of good music to be written in the key of C."

Having fled the Nazis in 1933 and settled in Los Angeles, Schoenberg turned to the music of Brahms in 1937 and paid tribute with this colorful orchestration of the Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25. When asked why he chose this work, Schoenberg replied, "Chamber music groups never play it right, and I wanted to show them how it ought to sound."

The music of Brahms finds its successor in the music of Schoenberg. That may come as a surprise to many. Schoenberg wrote an essay entitled "Brahms the Progressive." In it, he explained his admiration for Brahms's music, citing the older composer's mastery of "three-dimensional space" consisting of melody, harmony, and

Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25

continued

form. He recognized the implications of Brahms's craft in developing entire works from a few motives in a constantly evolving fashion, which Schoenberg called "developing variation." If one were to look at the score of the second piece in Schoenberg's Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11, one would be struck by how much the texture looks like a late-Brahms piano work. We note the principal difference mainly in the chromaticism and notes marked with sharps and flats. Of course, Schoenberg also learned as much from the music of Wagner.

In choosing the Brahms Piano Quartet in G minor, Schoenberg was drawn to the youthful work of a composer who himself was working through the legacy of a prior master, in Brahms's case, Beethoven, and developing a structural style uniquely his own. Many of Brahms's early chamber works were lengthy, almost symphonic structures. Some writers suggest that Brahms developed his craft through chamber music forms rather than tackling the symphonic form in the shadow of Beethoven.

Brahms began his Quartet as early as 1856 or 1857 and completed it in 1861. The G minor's first run-through occurred privately with Clara Schumann at the piano. On November 16, 1862, for his debut in Vienna, Brahms performed the official premiere of the Quartet with the Hellmesberger Quartet. The work made such an impact that Joseph Hellmesberger, the quartet's leader, exclaimed, "This is Beethoven's heir!"

Brahms's Quartet almost seems to beg for orchestration. His manipulation of motives lends itself well to the orchestra and would reach its logical culmination in the four great symphonies completed after 1876.

In Schoenberg's orchestration, the G Minor Piano Quartet takes on an entirely new life. Schoenberg employs a much larger orchestra than Brahms ever used, adding many instrumental colors entirely foreign to Brahms's sound world. In the winds, we hear a piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, an English horn, an e-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, a bass clarinet, two bassoons, and a contrabassoon. Brahms never utilized the English horn, E-flat, and bass clarinets. The brass section is typical of late-19th-century symphonies with four horns, three trumpets (although Brahms was usually content with two), three trombones, and a tuba. Brahms used a tuba in only one of his four symphonies – the Second, the *Tragic* and *Academic Festival Overtures*, and the *German Requiem*. The instrumentation of the percussion section is completely un-Brahmsian. In addition to timpani, one hears glockenspiel, xylophone, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, triangle, and tambourine.

The resulting orchestration filters Brahms's chamber music score through Schoenberg's symphonic sound world, much like Ravel's orchestration of *Pictures at an Exhibition* transforms Mussorgsky's original piano work. Nonetheless, Schoenberg is faithful to the spirit of the original and does not add dissonant tones or alter the harmonies. Brahms's harmony is quite advanced as it is.

Schoenberg often stays faithful to the sounds of Brahms's original, keeping part assignments to violin, viola, and cello intact. More interesting is the reassignment of the original melodic lines to new instruments. Brahms's violin parts sometimes turn up played by the clarinets or oboes in Schoenberg's orchestration. A cello part appears in the horns. One noteworthy example of re-instrumentation occurs at the opening of the second movement. Brahms scored it for a harmonious duet of parallel sixths between violin and viola over a repeating eighth-note pedal tone in the cello. Schoenberg reassigns the same notes to a duet between the oboe and English horn with viola accompaniment. One wonders if string players combat the instinct to jump in and play their parts as Brahms wrote them!

Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25

continued

With the absence of the piano in Schoenberg's orchestration, Brahms's piano texture must be adapted for orchestral idioms, ranges, and techniques. Often Schoenberg highlights an implied motivic element with orchestration and rhythmic definition not explicitly noted in the original. This becomes particularly apparent in handling the piano cadenza of the finale. Brahms's texture is often subjected to enrichment by octave doublings. The score becomes more contrapuntal through orchestration than it would be heard in the chamber version. The texture becomes thicker, and the dynamic contrasts are more extreme.

The darkly romantic scoring of Brahms's Quartet becomes vivid and colorful in Schoenberg's treatment. A striking moment occurs with the march theme in the third movement. It's a magical moment in the original, but in Schoenberg's hands, it seems like a moment out of a Mahler symphony.

The most famous movement of the entire work is the finale. It is a gypsy rondo in which Brahms draws upon his love for Hungarian folk music and the traditions of Haydn and Schubert. Audiences loved the original chamber version; the same holds for the orchestration. The music is brilliant. The un-Brahmsian sounds of the percussion section capture and highlight the music's rough and stomping rhythmic element.

The entire work lasts as long as a symphony – approximately 46 minutes.

A Final Note

The score and orchestral parts for this Wichita Symphony performance came from Belmont Music Publishers, a firm in Los Angeles dedicated exclusively to preserving Arnold Schoenberg's archives and music. It was established in 1965 by the composer's widow, Gertrud, and their son, Larry. The latter maintained the archives steadfastly in a building behind his home on Bienvenida Avenue for sixty years. Shortly after the parts and score for the orchestration of Brahms G Minor Piano Quartet were received by the Wichita Symphony, the entire archives of Belmont were lost on January 7 to the Pacific Palisades fire in Los Angeles. *The Los Angeles Times* reported that over 100,000 items were destroyed, including the entire rental catalog, scores, correspondence, photographs, books, and artwork. The parts for this weekend's performance may be all that's left!

Before attending the Wichita Symphony familiarize yourself with the Brahms/Schoenberg Quartet with this performance by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony conducted by Christoph Eschenbach.

<https://youtu.be/NywzRoKEI10?si=WZepc2YEHom4wsDD>

If you'd like to compare that to the original Quartet by Brahms, try this video with performances by Leif Ove Andsnes, piano, Christian Tetzlaff, violin, Tabea Zimmermann, viola, and Clemens Hagen, cello.

<https://youtu.be/42lro9rDSQQ?si=evSNWo-gNY3VTmna>