Salzburg and Vienna at Six: A Faculty Recital for Violin and Piano

Andrea Dawson, violin and Eunbyol Ko, piano
Friday, October 16, 6:00 p.m. — MTSU Hinton Music Hall

Program notes

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644 - 1704)
Passacaglia in G Minor (ca. 1676)

Biber was a pre-eminent Bohemian-Austrian composer and violin virtuoso. Born in Wartenberg (now in the Czech Republic), Biber's first major position was as court musician and violinist for the Prince-Bishop in Kroměříž. In 1670, he illegally abandoned his post in Moravia to enter the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg. Although not as well-known today as composers such as Bach and Vivaldi, Biber helped to expand string technique through his masterful use of high positions, dense chordal polyphony, and other virtuosic effects. In his *Sonata Representativa (1669),* he imitated the animal sounds of birds, frogs, and cats with trills, scratching bow sounds, and glissandi; this was about 50 years before Vivaldi wrote bird songs and barking dogs into his programmatic violin concertos, *The Four Seasons*. His technical innovations are also on display in his sixteen famous *Mystery Sonatas,* a collection culminating in the Passacaglia you are about to hear. While fourteen of the preceding Mystery sonatas rely on *scordatura* (altered tuning of the violin strings), the Passacaglia uses standard violin tuning. Biber's virtuosity eventually caught the attention of the imperial capital during a high-profile 1677 performance in Vienna for Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I. Thoroughly impressed, Leopold ennobled the composer in 1690, conferring upon him the prestigious title *Biber von Bibern*.

Though different in origin, the passacaglia and chaconne both explore the beauty of variation over a repeating foundation. Tonight's work predates J.S. Bach's iconic D-minor Chaconne by 45 years, yet it achieves a similar sense of scale. It is constructed entirely upon a strict, four-note descending ground bass (G–F–E ♭ –D), which repeats 65 times.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)
Rondo in C major, K. 373 (1781)

Biber broke ties with his employer in Moravia in favor of service with the Archbishop Max Gandolf of Salzburg. Just over 100 years later, Mozart found his servitude to Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg stifling and limiting. Following a heated argument with the Archbishop during a 1781 trip to Vienna, Mozart was dismissed from court service. He chose to remain in the imperial capital, launching a new career as a freelance musician. Vienna was his city of residence for the last ten years of his life.

The Rondo in C major, K. 373 was written during the 1781 Vienna trip with the Archbishop. It was performed by Antonio Brunetti, leader of the Salzburg court orchestra, in a private concert for the Viennese aristocracy. Mozart was not fond of Brunetti, describing him as a "thoroughly ill-bred fellow." Despite his aggravation with both the Archbishop and Brunetti, Mozart produced a sparkling miniature full of charm and flair.

Continue to the next page…

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)
Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100 (1886)
I Allegro amabile
II Andante tranquillo - Vivace
III Allegretto grazioso, quasi Andante

Brahms composed this lovely sonata while on summer holiday at Lake Thun in Switzerland; he described the idyllic scenery there as "so full of melodies that one has to be careful not to step on any." Instead of the usual second and third movements of a four-movement sonata, he combines the slow/lyrical and playful/scherzo concepts into a single movement, alternating slow and fast sections. The third movement is loosely in rondo form (with a returning refrain), with a mood that is restrained and flowing rather than the typical fast and virtuosic rondo finale. The sonata was premiered in 1886 at a chamber music concert series in what is now known as the *Brahmssaal,* a small chamber music venue in the *Musikverein* in Vienna; Joseph Hellmesberger was the violinist and Brahms was at the piano.

Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany, but for the last twenty-five years of his life, he lived in a modest three-room apartment in Vienna at Karlsgasse 4. During that time, he was a prominent figure in the musical life of the city, serving for three years as artistic director of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna and enjoying a successful career as a pianist and freelance composer.

Fritz Kreisler (1875 - 1962)
Recitativo and Scherzo for solo violin, op. 6 (1911) *(dedicated to Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe)*

Three Old Viennese Dances (ca. 1905)
Schön Rosmarin ("Beautiful Rosemary")
Liebesleid ("Love's Sorrow")
Liebesfreud ("Love's Joy")

In the early 1880's, Brahms met an impressive Vienna-born violin prodigy named Fritz Kreisler, and played duets informally with the boy at the local musician's club. Kreisler's mother was Catholic, but his father was Jewish. Due to the dangers of life in Nazi Germany and Austria for someone of Jewish heritage, Kreisler first fled to Paris, and then in 1939 he took up permanent residence in New York City. Often regarded as one of the greatest violinists of the twentieth century, he was admired and well-loved not just by audiences, but also by his fellow virtuoso violin contemporaries, Heifetz and Menuhin.

We all owe our modern expressive life to him. He took the coldness out of the strings.
— Jascha Heifetz on Kreisler

He had the unique gift of dignity without pretension. He could perform a monumental concerto and then follow it with 'Schön Rosmarin,' and the audience would leave feeling as though they had been treated to a profound spiritual truth.
— Yehudi Menuhin on Kreisler

I wanted to recreate the atmosphere of the old Vienna of my youth—a world of elegance, of relaxed conversation over coffee, and of music that didn't seek to overwhelm you, but to warmly embrace you. […] People tell me that the world has changed and that music must change with it to reflect modern anxiety. But I believe the purpose of music is to heal, not to distress. If my little Viennese dances bring back a glimmer of a gentler, warmer time when people actually stopped to listen to one another, then they have done their job.
— Kreisler on his Three Old Viennese Dances

Map of Vienna with landmarks:

1. Hofburg - former principal palace of the Habsburg dynasty. Biber was honored by Emperor Leopold I in 1690 and is thought to have studied here with violinist, composer, and Vienna court musician Johann Heinrich Schmelzer. Three of Mozart's operas were premiered in the adjacent Burgtheater. Brahms's cantata Rinaldo had its premiere in the Großer Redoutensaal in 1860.

2. Domgasse 5 - Mozart lived here 1784-1787 and worked at the nearby St. Stephen's Cathedral.

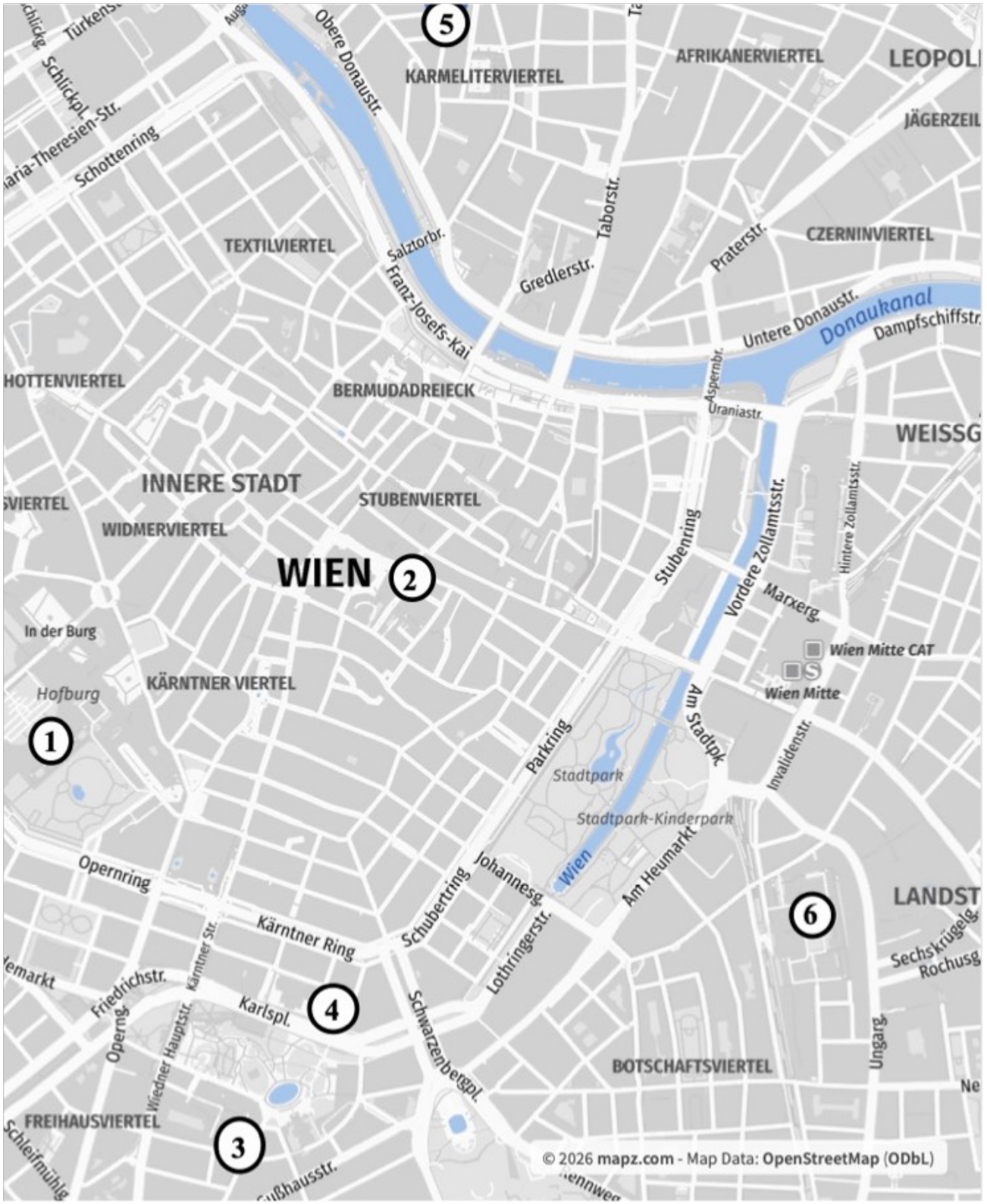
3. Karlsgasse 4 - Brahms lived here 1872 - 1897.

4. Musikvereinplatz 1 - Musikverein concert hall was constructed in 1863 with the support of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien (Society of Friends of Music in Vienna). Brahms was appointed music director of the Gesellschaft in 1872. Kreisler performed in the Großer Saal in 1934.

5. Schiffgasse 21 - Kreisler's birthplace and childhood home (Leopoldstadt - Vienna's 2nd district)

6. Anton-von-Webern-Platz 1 - Vienna Conservatory (now University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) - Kreisler studied here as a child (1882-1887) with Jakob Dont for violin and Anton Bruckner for composition.

(A bit further south in Vienna and not on the map: Schönbrunn Palace, where Mozart performed for the imperial family along with his sister Nannerl in 1762. Wolfgang was 6.)

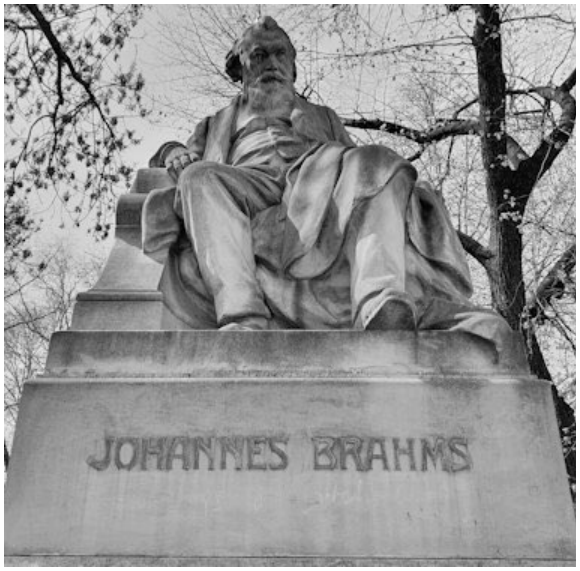




Map of Austria



Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber



Johannes Brahms monument, Vienna



Mozart monument, Vienna



Fritz Kreisler, ca. 1915