

**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**  
**Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34**  
**Allegro non troppo**  
**Andante, un poco adagio**  
**Scherzo: Allegro**  
**Finale: Poco sostenuto**

In the Piano Quintet we see Brahms at his most Romantic, lyrical, and accessible. Yet the work is governed by his mastery of form, veiled though it may be by sheer beauty and Romantic spirit. To this we add Arnold Schoenberg's viewpoint in his famous essay "Brahms the Progressive," for it was exactly such works as the F Minor Piano Quintet that Schoenberg saw as essential to the development of his own twelve-tone system.

In his last article, "New Roads," published in 1853, Robert Schumann said of Brahms: "He is a performer of genius who can make of the piano an orchestra of lamenting and loudly jubilant voices." Schumann might well have been predicting the F Minor Piano Quintet with its massive declarations for the piano, its sweeping melodies, great sonority, and rhythmic complexity. Yet before its publication in 1865, the work had undergone many changes of instrumentation before it found its way to a quintet for piano and strings. Brahms first cast it as a string quintet (1862) that came under fire from Joseph Joachim, then as a sonata for two pianos (1864) to which Clara Schumann had objections. The self-critical Brahms burned the string quintet version but the two piano version survives as Op. 34b, published in 1865. However circuitous the route to its final version, the F Minor Quintet bears all the imprints of Brahms at his best and constitutes a crowning achievement in Romantic chamber music. Scholar Laurence Wallace refers to its success "through the balance it strikes between intense individualism of ideas and breadth of organizational plan, which connects the smallest motivic detail to the largest dimensions of formal design."

Complexity, diversity, and unity characterize the entire work from the massive first movement with its noble opening statement, rich harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic developments, and brilliant climax. Simplicity and tenderness with an underlying tension mark the second movement. Then we are hit with the rhythmic and even melodic eccentricities of the wonderful *Scherzo* with its sudden silence before the return of a lovely *cantabile* melody from the trio section and a repeat of the *Scherzo* section. Brahms pulls out all the stops in the grand final movement, which moves from a forbidding opening to happier times and a whirlwind conclusion.

With all its complexity and diversity, the work has a satisfying unity not easily defined but still palpable to the listener. Here again is the Janus face of Brahms the Classicist and Brahms the Romantic. Add to this, of course, a suggestion of Brahms the Progressive.

Its first performance was given in Paris on March 24, 1868 with Louise Langhans-Japha at the piano.

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