

Piano Quartet – April 26, 2026

Piano Quartet in A Minor, Op. 67

Joaquín Turina
1882-1949

Like so many composers from middle class families, Joaquín Turina was railroaded into studying medicine, despite the fact that his father was a painter. But Joaquín soon took up with his muse and began training as a composer and pianist in his native Seville. After completing the opera *La sulamita* (the Queen of Sheba), he tried – unsuccessfully – to make his career in Madrid. Further studies and friendship with Manuel de Falla modified his ambitions and influenced his chamber and orchestral music. In 1905 Turina set out for Paris, where he adopted a more pan-European style. He remained there until the outbreak of World War I.

From 1931 he taught composition at the Royal Conservatory in Madrid. Although described as a kind man who loved simplicity and beauty, his nationalist and royalist sympathies brought persecution on him and his family by the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War.

Turina's earliest published compositions show the influence of his Paris stay. Although advised by Isaac Albéniz to use Spanish folk material in his compositions, he resisted, trying to give his music more international flavor. After returning to Spain, he continued to compose in the Classical forms, but his musical language started incorporating Spanish idioms.

Turina composed the Quartet in 1931. The first of its three movements has been described as the evocation of a night in Sevilla, the composer's home; in the dance-like second movement, the occasional plucked strings recall the sound of the castanets, ubiquitous in Spanish dance. The third movement brings out a number of folk-like themes, returning near the end to themes from the opening movement.

Piano Quartet in C major, Op. 23

Arthur Foote
1853-1937

American composer, organist, pianist and teacher Arthur Foote was a leading member of the Boston Six, a group of New England composers at the end of the nineteenth century, which also included John Knowles Paine, Horatio Parker, George Chadwick, Edward MacDowell and Amy Beach. In 1875 Foote received an MA in music from Harvard, the first such degree given by an American university.

Of the Six, Foote was the only one not trained in Europe, receiving all his musical education in the USA. He was nevertheless a firm late-nineteenth century Romantic in the European tradition. Foote lived well into the twentieth century but never participated in forays away from conventional tonality. He is best remembered for his chamber music, especially his piano quartet and piano quintet, and the orchestral *Four Character Pieces after the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. He also composed over 150 songs and partsongs. In addition to his many compositions, he wrote a widely used book on harmony.

The Piano Quartet, composed in 1890, was quite popular in its time, performed in the States as well as Europe; It essentially disappeared from the repertoire by 1920 with the post-war

search for innovation and new sounds. It is a cheerful work throughout, densely scored, with no “American” sound in it, but rather that of Schumann and Dvořák.

Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25

Johannes Brahms
1833-1897

All three of Brahms’s piano quartets date from the period 1857-1861 when he was just starting on the artistic career path that would eventually see him as the standard bearer for the proponents of musical classicism. He was in his turbulent twenties, overwhelmed by his infatuations with Clara Schumann and, later, Agathe von Siebold. Although Robert Schumann, Brahms’s idol at the time, had hailed him as a “young eagle,” his instrumental works, especially the D minor Piano Concerto, were not always received with enthusiasm by the public.

In 1857, before beginning the G minor Piano Quartet, Brahms had already done significant work on the composition that was eventually to become the C minor Piano Quartet, Op. 60. But the latter, like many of Brahms’s early works, underwent major revisions before it too saw the light of day. In his later years, Brahms was ruthless in his evaluation of his early compositions, and we must count ourselves fortunate that it and the other piano quartets did not end up consigned to flames.

The G minor quartet was premiered in 1861 with Clara Schumann at the piano. Until the rousing final movement in “gypsy style” the piece is emotionally intense almost to the point of melancholy. Part of its intensity comes from the outpouring of myriad musical ideas, unusual key changes, and the tendency to drift back into the minor mode even in the contrasting major themes.

The first movement begins with a short motif for the piano, transformed three more times to comprise a principal opening theme (Brahms later used this device in the opening of the Fourth Symphony). But he introduces several other motives before coming to the formal second theme in B-flat. The development works primarily with the opening motive.

The second movement, originally called a scherzo but later entitled “Intermezzo,” has an almost mysterious air about it but brightens up with the boisterous trio section. This movement is historically important because it represents Brahms’s initial experiment with the transformation of the scherzo form as it is used later in the symphonies.

The flowing romantic theme of the third movement is paired with a crisp march; but Brahms’s harmonic treatment of both themes is tinged with melancholy.

The final rondo represents Brahms’s initial creative response to the gypsy (Roma) music imported by Hungarian expatriates and popular in Hamburg at the time. It is wild and flamboyant, the thumping main theme with its unusual three-bar phrases alternating with frenzied flights of fancy and every gypsy cliché in the book, including a cadenza for the piano.

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