



Smithsonian Associates

Musical Miniatures: The Perfect Magic of Shorter Works

Dr. Rachel Franklin

Thursday, September 5, 2024 - 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. ET

The economist E. F. Schumacher famously said: “Small is Beautiful,” and throughout the centuries composers have been constantly drawn to the perfect simplicity of shorter musical forms. Preludes, bagatelles, overtures, romances, impromptus, nocturnes, dances, arias, etudes, songs without words, lieder, fantasias, intermezzos: the range of small-form musical works is astoundingly varied, but creating exquisite miniatures is a demanding art. To quote Burt Bacharach: “You can get away with murder in a forty-five minute piece but not in a three-and-a-half minute song.” With some of the most deeply loved music in the repertoire, we delve into how it’s done using minute marvels by Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Grieg, Bartok, Brahms, Faure, Webern, Debussy and many others.

September 5: Can we categorize a musical miniature?

Like the title itself, a definition of short-form concert music is elusive. If it’s not a sonata or a symphony, what is it? Is this program music? Salon music? How short is short? Is a miniature a character piece? Do art songs count? We enjoy multiple aspects of this limitless conundrum with a perfect Bach prelude, Chabrier’s *Espagna*, John Adams’ *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, *Caprice Viennois* by Fritz Kreisler, and more.

Works explored, media used:

J. S. Bach, 1685-1750

Little Prelude in D major, BWV 925

John Adams, 1947-

Short Ride in a Fast Machine, 1986

- BBC Symphony Orchestra, Marin Alsop

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LoUm_r7It8

John Adams talking about Short Ride

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVMdXngRV7w>

Fritz Kreisler, 1875-1962

Caprice Viennois, Op. 2, 1910

- Fritz Kreisler, Franz Rupp

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I91mFEQPEJU>

Emmanuel Chabrier, 1841–1894

España, Rhapsody for Orchestra, 1883

- Václav Smetáček, Prague Symphony Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HAnewLpaLw>

Darius Milhaud, 1892-1974

Little Chamber Symphony No.1 "Printemps", Op.43, 1917

- Orchestre de Radio Luxembourg, conductor Darius Milhaud

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJKziU8yEt4>

Samuel Barber, 1910-1981

Adagio for Strings, Op. 11, 1938

- Dover Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmnstnZnSDw>

Anton Webern, 1883-1945

Four Pieces for Violin & Piano, Op. 7, 1910

- Diamanda La Berge Dramm, violin, Helena Basilova, piano

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UxV9B_bld4

Paul Dukas, 1865-1935

Fanfare to precede La Péri, 1912

- Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Marie Jacquot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EDekMos1ok>

Claudio Monteverdi, 1567-1643

Cantate Domino, publ. 1620

- Voces8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-ZEDle6lhY>

Franz Schubert, 1797-1828

Gretchen am Spinnrade, Op. 2, D118, 1814

- Elly Ameling, Jorg Demus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3_ZHi8htc

Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770-1827

Bagatelles, Op. 126, 1825

- Wilhelm Kempf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zHJQPmDal0>

Sergei Prokofiev, 1891-1953

March from "The Love for the Three Oranges", Op. 33, 1921

- Michael Tilson Thomas, San Francisco Symphony

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ur8dHVxByE>

Dmitri Shostakovich, 1906-1975

Tahiti Trot, Op. 16 (Tea for Two), 1927

- Evgeny Svetlanov, USSR State Symphony Orchestra

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw2gQIP_sdY