

Find out more about the Programme:

Johannes Brahms' String Sextet No. 2 in G major, Op. 36, written in Baden-Baden in 1864-65, is a masterpiece of chamber music characterized by its lyrical warmth, contrapuntal complexity, and romantic longing, often linked to his failed engagement to Agathe von Siebold. Written for two violins, two violas, and two cellos, it is a four-movement work noted for its bittersweet tone, melodic richness, and lush string textures.

In the **first movement**, Brahms encodes the name of his former fiancée, Agathe von Siebold, using the notes A-G-A-H-E (using German notation where H is B natural) in the first violin part in the second theme.

The **Scherzo** that follows is a rustic, nostalgic movement that contrasts a light, dancing Scherzo with a vigorous, faster Trio.

Then comes the **Poco adagio**: A deeply emotional, melancholic movement consisting of a theme and variations in E minor, noted for its "sighing" motifs and expressive depth.

The work concludes with a vibrant and contrapuntally dense **finale** that, despite its energetic nature, reflects the emotional tension of the first movement.

It is often described as both symphonic in scale and profoundly intimate, a deeply personal, lyrical, and structurally innovative work composed during a tumultuous time, reflecting a "farewell" to his romance with Agathe.

Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*, Op. 70 (1890), composed in June-July 1890 at Frolovskoye, Russian, is a passionate, four-movement string sextet (2 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos) dedicated to the St. Petersburg Chamber Music Society. While sketched in Florence, it blends Italianate lyrical melodies with intense Russian melodic sensibility and dense, orchestral-like counterpoint, making it a pinnacle of his chamber repertoire.

This work, sometimes nicknamed "Recollection of Florence," is characterised by its warmth, energy, and rich texture. It is widely celebrated, including a renowned performance of the second movement that brought Leo Tolstoy to tears.

The **1st movement** features a "swaggering" Russian first theme and a lyrical, Italian-style second theme.

The **2nd movement** has a singing, romantic melody played by the violin over plucked (pizzicato) accompaniment, evoking a mandolin-like love serenade.

The **3rd movement** is a "sweet-sad" interlude/scherzo, often described as having a Russian folk character.

The **4th movement** is a lively finale containing a fast fugato and a return to the work's passionate, intense style.