

# COLERIDGE TAYLOR PERKINSON (1932-2004)

*Composed: 1956*

*Approximate duration: 16 minutes*



## **String Quartet No.1 "Calvary"**

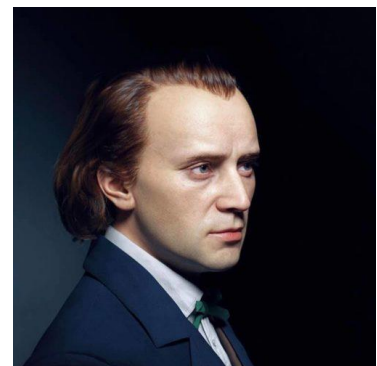
- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro vivace

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson (1932-2004) was named after Coleridge Taylor by his mother who was a piano teacher and arts leader. Perkinson's early development as a composer was inspired by his love of dance and his multifaceted compositional style as a result of collaboration in jazz, blues, and popular styles with his conservatory colleagues. His musical activities would go on to include arranging songs for Harry Belafonte and Marvin Gaye, playing piano, and arranging in Max Roach's quartet, scoring for films starring Sydney Poitier, Cicely Tyson, and Muhammed Ali, and directing the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Jerome Robbins's American Theater Lab, and the Symphony of the New World. His String Quartet No.1 "Calvary" was completed when the composer was only 19 years old during a period where he was contemplating the black experience in the Korean War. Perkinson based the motivic kernels of the work on the spiritual 'Calvary' but cautioned, *"When I sat down to write this string quartet, I was not trying to write something black; I was just writing out of my experience... it is very difficult to say what black music really is. There are kinds of black music, just as there are kinds of other musics. [the only black aspect of my music is] inspiration... Only you can decide if the life you live is significantly black; no one can decide that for you, and I don't think it's right for anyone to pass judgment on the nature of your involvement. In other words, let me compose as I have to compose."* © Catalyst Quartet

# JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

*Composed: 1864-65*

*Approximate duration: 40 minutes*



## **String Sextet in G major, Op.36 "Agathe"**

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Scherzo – Allegro non troppo – Presto giocoso
- III. Adagio
- IV. Poco allegro

The British musicologist Sir Donald Tovey called the String Sextet No. 2 in G Major “the most ethereal of Brahms’ larger works.” Indeed, there is a sense of mystery and haunting celestial beauty underlying this music. Who could have imagined that G major could feel this melancholy and unsettled?

Brahms was 31 years old when he wrote this music in 1864. In contrast to the warm, songlike Sextet No. 1, completed four years earlier, Sextet No. 2 moves into the shadows. Its instrumentation (two violins, two violas, two cellos) opens the door to a tonal richness and depth that is almost symphonic. With the exception of early examples by Luigi Boccherini, few composers before Brahms explored this instrumental combination. Beethoven pushed the symphony and the string quartet to monumental heights. The young Brahms avoided these forms to forge new musical paths.

The first movement (*Allegro non troppo*) begins with a ghostly murmur in the first viola. This shadowy oscillation between G and F-sharp clouds the initial statement of the first theme and draws us into an uncertain world of hushed expectation and harmonic ambiguity. It remains a persistent, haunting presence throughout the movement, weaving into the lines of the other instruments. This murmuring voice emerges prominently at the beginning of the development section (7:41) where, for one heart-stopping moment, all forward motion seems to stop. Throughout the increasingly turbulent development, fragments of the opening theme are tossed between voices. Before the recapitulation, we hear a wrenching falling chromatic line in the first violin, accompanied by shuddering tremolos. The biographer Karl Geiringer has pointed out the motivic imprint of A-G-A-H-E in the movement’s waltzing second theme. The cryptogram was a wistful allusion to Agathe von Seibold, a soprano with whom Brahms had been romantically involved previously.

Reversing the traditional ordering, the second movement is a Scherzo (*Allegro non troppo*) set in G minor. Far from the bright, fast dance we might expect, this is a leisurely, darkly veiled scherzo, punctuated with horn fifths and other bucolic elements. Wandering contrapuntal lines enter into a brief fugato. The movement’s middle section (*Presto giocoso*) erupts into a wild and boisterous peasant dance.

The *Poco Adagio*, set in a lamenting E minor, begins with gloomy descending chromatic lines and musical sighs. The initial theme gives rise to a set of far-reaching variations. The final bars arrive at a transcendent conclusion in sunny, serene E major.

The final movement (*Poco allegro*) is an exhilarating contrapuntal tour de force. Its jubilant sense of motion may remind you of the most ebullient music of Mendelssohn. Following a sparkling fugue, the Sextet concludes with warmth and joy.

Notes by Timothy Judd