Welcome to Musica Nova. We are here for the joy of making music, and we especially want to celebrate the memory of our dear colleague Dr. Enric Madriguera, who died suddenly a few weeks ago. He was one of the most distinguished members of our music faculty: an internationally known concert guitarist, the founder of our guitar program and a former student performer in Musica Nova. We are dedicating this concert to Ric, and, tonight, we are honored to see so many of his dear friends and students. Also, there will be a separate remembrance on May 18 in our Jonsson Performance Hall.

Now, for our music: They say that there are two kinds of classical musicians: on one hand, there are those who say that the two greatest composers who ever lived are Bach and Mozart; on the other hand, there are those who say that the two greatest composers who ever lived were Mozart and Bach. We don’t have to choose one or the other, because, in our first half, we have both.

We begin with Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto #2. Bach wrote six Brandenburg concerts, and, over the years, we have played five of them. We haven’t played this one because it has a trumpet part that is so stratospherically high and difficult that only a few trumpet players on the planet can play it. This semester, we don’t even have a trumpet player, but those little details don’t stop us. We checked with Bach up in Composer Heaven, and he made a special arrangement for us with a French horn in place of a trumpet, and we have a daring, death-defying horn player to play it.

There are four soloists: horn, flute, oboe and violin plus strings and keyboard. Right from the beginning, you’ll hear the four of them duking it out, each one saying, “I’m the most important,” and the others saying, “No, you’re not, I am.” In the second movement, which is slow and sweet, Bach gives the horn and the orchestra a rest, and the other three soloists play with just cello and piano. In the third movement, Bach brings back the horn and the orchestra, and it all ends in a blaze of glory. Back when they first started sending capsules into space, Voyager II included a recording of this concerto as a sample of the very best that our civilization has produced.

They say that the angels in heaven play Bach for God, but, when they get together on their own, just for fun, they play Mozart. Mozart is something of a guilty pleasure. Bach had a sense of humor, and it’s wholesome and hearty and full of “Ho, ho, ho.” But
Mozart had a wicked sense of humor. In this concerto, right from the beginning, every theme is a set-up for a punch line, so he’s constantly one-upping himself. It’s a little comic opera, and you can hear plots and counter plots, with the characters sneaking up on each other. There are musical puns and lots of seductive Casanova love scenes, full of the delights of the senses.

The slow movement is suddenly a tragedy. There are ravishing moments of sunlight, maybe to savor happy memories, but mostly, there are demons right in your face, as if we are confronting the terrors and the mystery and the majestic inevitability of death.

Then, in the third movement, he turns on a dime and says, “But life goes on, so let’s party!” But it’s a strange party. It’s really one of the strangest movements Mozart ever wrote. The form is: party, sex interlude, party, and we have a picture of the interlude. Take a look at the fold-out of the back and the cover of your program. There’s a Watteau painting called “The Journey to Cythera.” Cythera was the birthplace of Venus, the goddess of love and the delights of sex, so a “journey to Cythera” was a polite way of referring to a “romantic encounter.”

In the picture, time moves in a circle. On the left, we see couples getting off of the ship from the party back in the real world. They land on Cythera, and then, out of nowhere, there’s a soft, lascivious minuet in the piano that says, “Come in…we’ve been expecting you…” Then, you can hear them making their way to the shrine of Venus over on the right. There, in front of Venus, you can see them, two-by-two, ecstatically cavorting in the grass, surrounded by cupids. Later, in the middle of the picture and in the middle of the music, you can see the couples reluctantly getting up, dusting themselves off, looking back longingly at the shrine of Venus, saying, “Ah, that was great. Can’t we stay a little longer?” But finally, they realize that they have to get back on the ship, and they sail off out of the picture. At the end, Mozart takes us back to the real world, and, after the party, we’re all thinking, “Great party, but let’s go back to Cythera!”

Mozart probably never saw this painting, but, now that you have, I think you’ll have a lot more fun when you listen to the music. We’re performing it with new wind parts that Mozart wrote just for us.

Welcome back. Between Mozart and Brahms, there’s an elephant in the room, and that elephant is Beethoven. Beethoven revered Mozart. He wanted to study with Mozart, but Mozart died too soon, so Beethoven studied Mozart’s music and modelled many of his works after Mozart. Similarly, Brahms revered Beethoven, and, in this next work, we can hear Brahms channeling Beethoven. Brahms originally wrote it for string quartet and piano, but he made a new version for us for string orchestra and piano.
We’ll ask our pianist Misha to show us four little Beethoven fragments followed by a bit of what Brahms did with each fragment:

First, Beethoven (from the “Appassionata” Sonata)…then the opening of the Brahms…

Then more Beethoven (from the “Pathétique” Sonata) …and the second movement of the Brahms…

Now, more Beethoven (from the Fifth Piano Concerto)…and the third movement of the Brahms…

Finally, more Beethoven (back to the “Appassionata”)…and the fourth movement of the Brahms…

So, with this quintet, in came Beethoven, and out came pure, wonderful Brahms.