

# Three Centuries of Sonatas

## 5 - The Romantic Sonata Part 2

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# Schumann: Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Minor, Op. 105

Gidon Kremer, violin / Martha Argerich, piano

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**Schumann did not begin writing chamber music until later in his career—in fact, 1842 was the first year that he became devoted to writing string quartets, piano trios, and the like.**

In 1851 he relocated with his wife Clara and their family to Düsseldorf, where he had landed an excellent position as conductor of the orchestra.

It started well enough, but Schumann's inexperience at leading an orchestra, combined with his unstable personality, led to increasing unhappiness on all sides.

During these years he wrote two violin sonatas, no doubt inspired by the superb musicianship of his concertmaster. The first violin sonata in A Minor is a particularly fine work that demonstrates just how skilled Schumann had become at handling large-scale forms.

The first movement is written in classical sonata form, with extraordinary economy of means. One idea generates all of the themes in the movement—primary, transitional, secondary, and closing—but such is Schumann's inventiveness and skill that nothing ever sounds predictable or repetitive.

**Primary**

**Transition**

**Secondary**

**Closing**

**Exposition**

Primary

New

Closing

Retrans

Development

Primary

Transition

Secondary

Closing

**Recapitulation**

Primary

Closing

Ending

Coda

**Primary**

Transition

Secondary

Closing

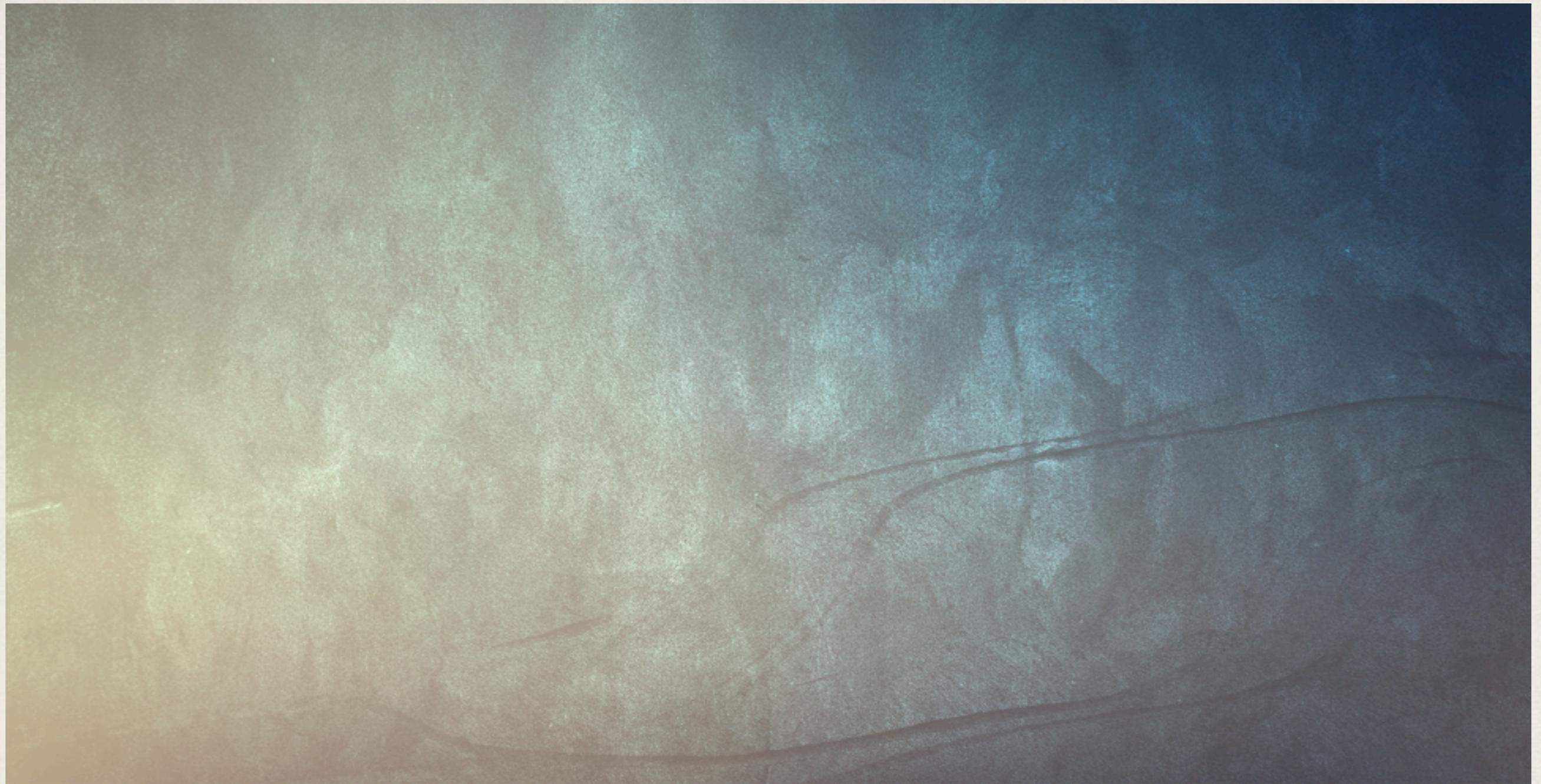
## **Exposition: Primary Theme**

**Violin in A Minor**

Piano in D Minor

Violin in F Major

Both in F Major, then to close in A Minor



# Brahms: Violin Sonata No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 108

Nikolaj Znaider, violin / Yefim Bronfman, piano

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Whereas Mendelssohn was the ranking chamber composer of the early 19th century, Brahms was the master of the genre in the later Romantic.

Brahms wrote chamber works from nearly the beginning of his career, extending nonstop throughout his life until his last works. His first chamber work is Opus 8; his last is Opus 115.

Only works for solo piano (Opp. 116–119), clarinet (Op. 120), voice (Op. 121) and—oddly enough—organ (Op. 122) followed.

The rich Romanticism of Brahms' personal style might mask the magnificent craftsmanship that went into every work he wrote. He was a relentless self-critic who unhesitatingly destroyed compositions that did not meet up to his personal standards.

He tended to favor certain procedures and techniques throughout his life.

The slow movement *Adagio* of the D Minor Violin Sonata provides illustrations of several of the most important such techniques.

## *Developing Variation*

This technique, found in many Austro-Germanic composers, is a “waste not, want not” approach to composition.

In developing variation, almost every element of the composition is re-used for maximum effect, even seemingly inconsequential accompaniment patterns. That re-using is known as *thematische arbeit*, or in English as “motivic working-out” of the material.

In this violin sonata's slow movement, the piano accompaniment figure becomes the theme of the middle section, or *excursion*. I'll be calling that *motive x* in the listening chart.

The piano accompaniment at the beginning (motive x):

The Excursion theme in the violin (motive x):

## *Hemiola*

Almost a Brahms signature, *hemiola* occurs when off-placed accents in a melodic line produce the effect of a different meter superimposed on the normal meter.

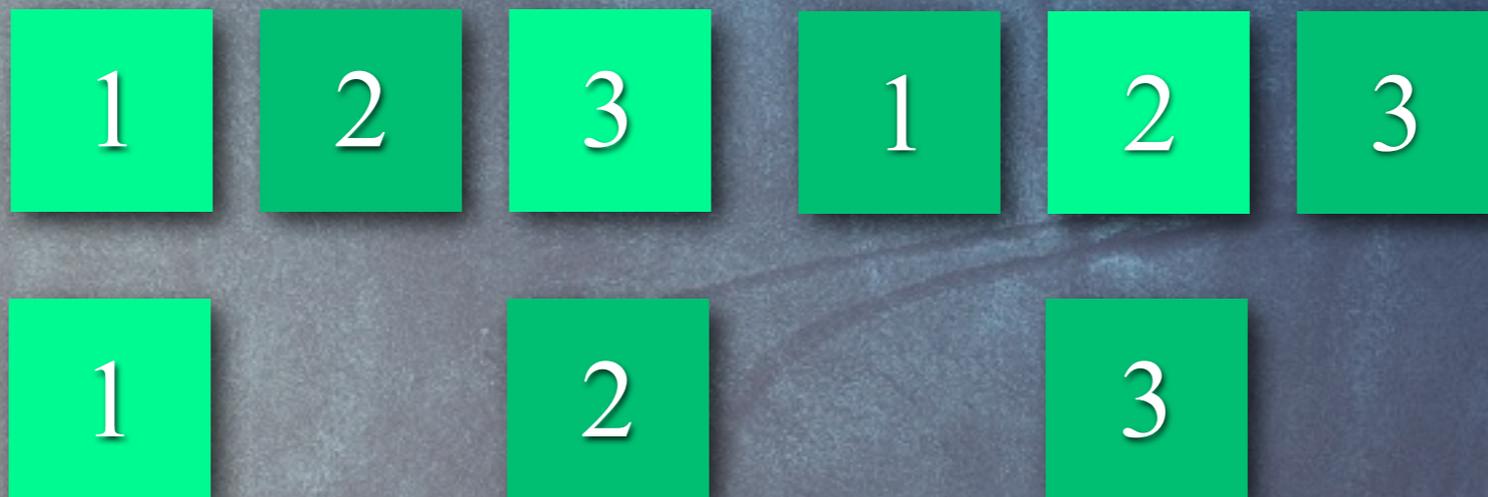
## *Hemiola*

Typically it's encountered in triple meter. First the plain triple meter:



## *Hemiola*

Now the triple meter with the accents changed; lower notes help to highlight those accents:



*Hemiola*

Now just the hemiola alone:

1

2

3

## *Hemiola*

In the movement, the hemiola is most audible in transitions:

## *Double Stops*

When playing double stops, a violinist draws the bow across two strings simultaneously instead of the usual single string.

It isn't the bowing that makes this so tricky, but the left-hand technique on the fingerboard—two different pitches that can go out of tune very, very easily.

In this sonata movement, the double stops mark the *cadences*—i.e., passages that mark the end of sections. Here's an example:

## *The Adagio Movement of the D Minor Sonata*

The movement is in classical First Rondo, also sometimes called “Slow Movement Ternary.” It was the favored slow movement form for Viennese Classical composers, including Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert.

It consists of two statements of a Reprise, flanking a central Excursion. A short transition moves Excursion to Reprise, and from Reprise to the inevitable Coda.

# Reprise

a a<sup>1</sup> b c

# Excursion

d d<sup>1</sup>

T

# Reprise

a<sup>1</sup> b c

T

# Coda

a

Reprise

a a<sup>1</sup> b c

Excursion

d d<sup>1</sup>

T

Reprise

a<sup>1</sup> b c

T

Coda

a

Reprise

Violin takes the melody; piano plays motive *x*

Repeated with a long extension

Transitional quality; piano initiates dialog

Violin in double stops (two strings)



# Brahms: Sonata for Two Pianos in F Minor, Op. 34b

Alfons and Aloys Kontarsky, pianos

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*String Quintet — 2-Piano Sonata — Piano Quintet*

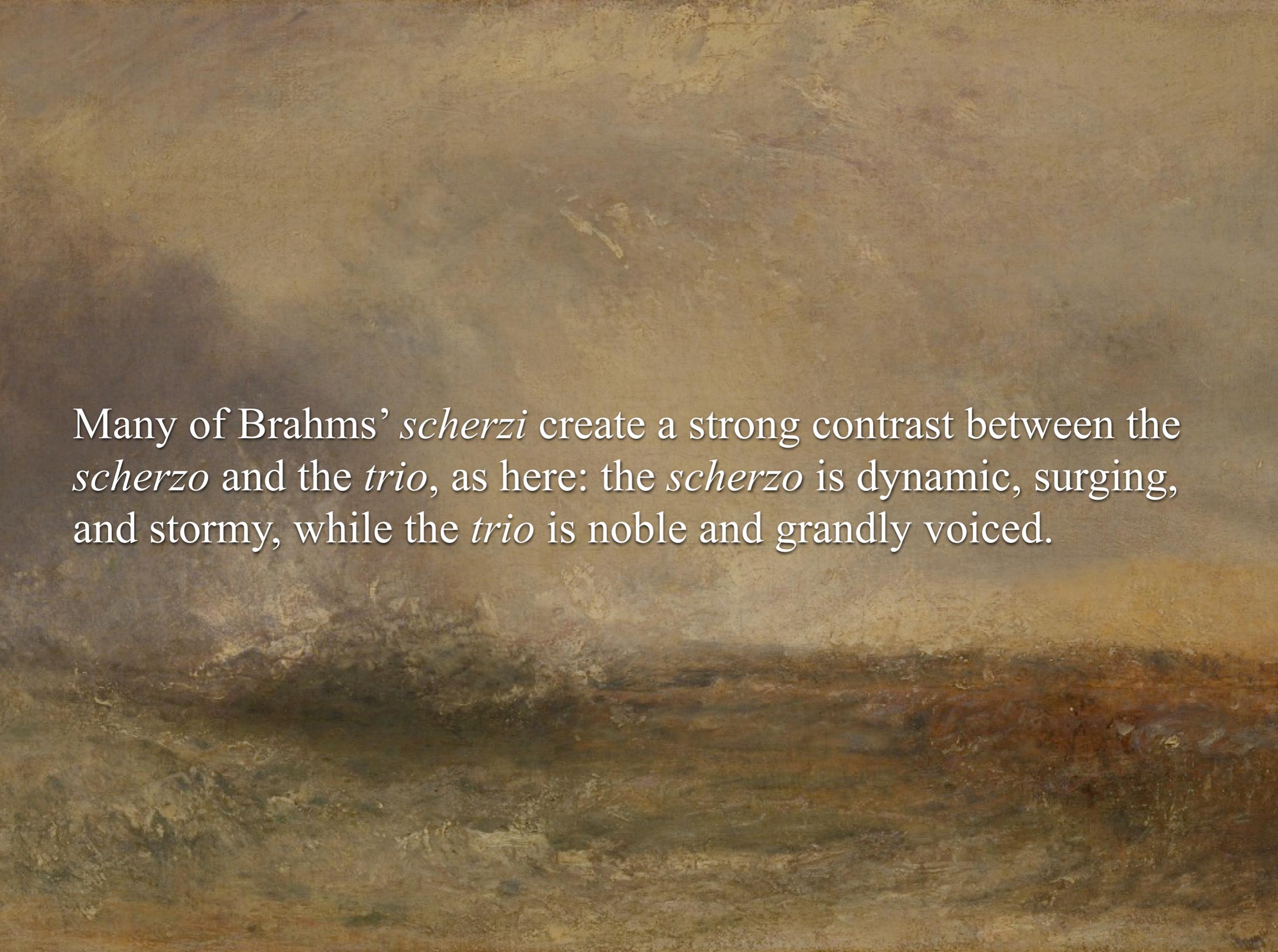
The F Minor Sonata for Two Pianos began its life as a string quintet, then became the Sonata for 2 Pianos in F Minor when Brahms was looking for a recital work to play with the great Liszt pupil Carl Tausig.

However, the work wasn't quite fully evolved, and finally reached its ultimate setting as the great Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34, one of the world's most beloved chamber works.

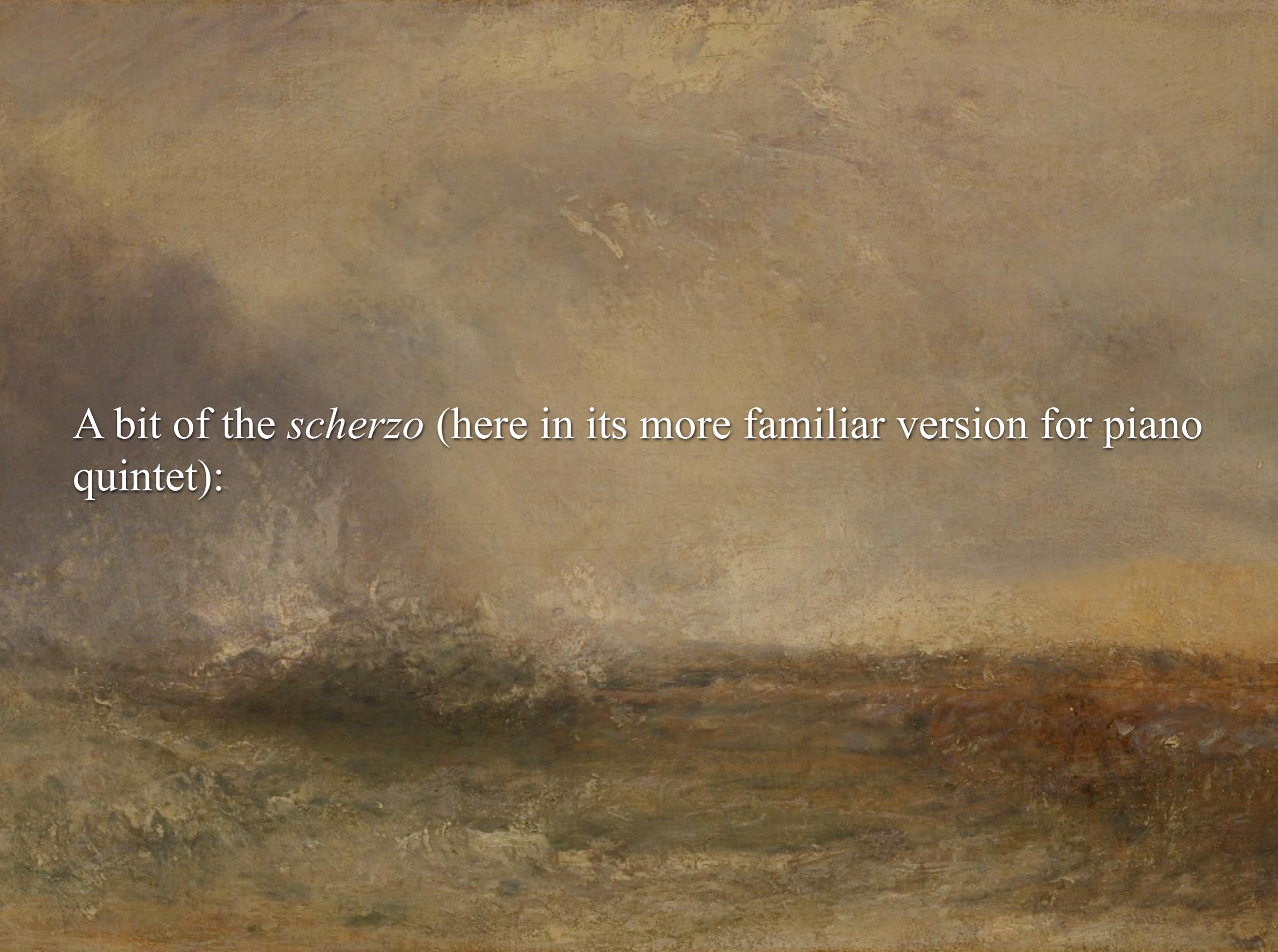
The change of name from “Quintet” to “Sonata” aptly demonstrates that Classical (and Romantic) labels generally followed the instrumentation—Trio, Quartet, Quintet for chamber works, but “Sonata” for solo instruments or, as here, paired instruments.

In other words, a “Piano Trio” is also a sonata for piano, violin, and cello—but the custom is to restrict the term “sonata” to one instrument, or two maximum.

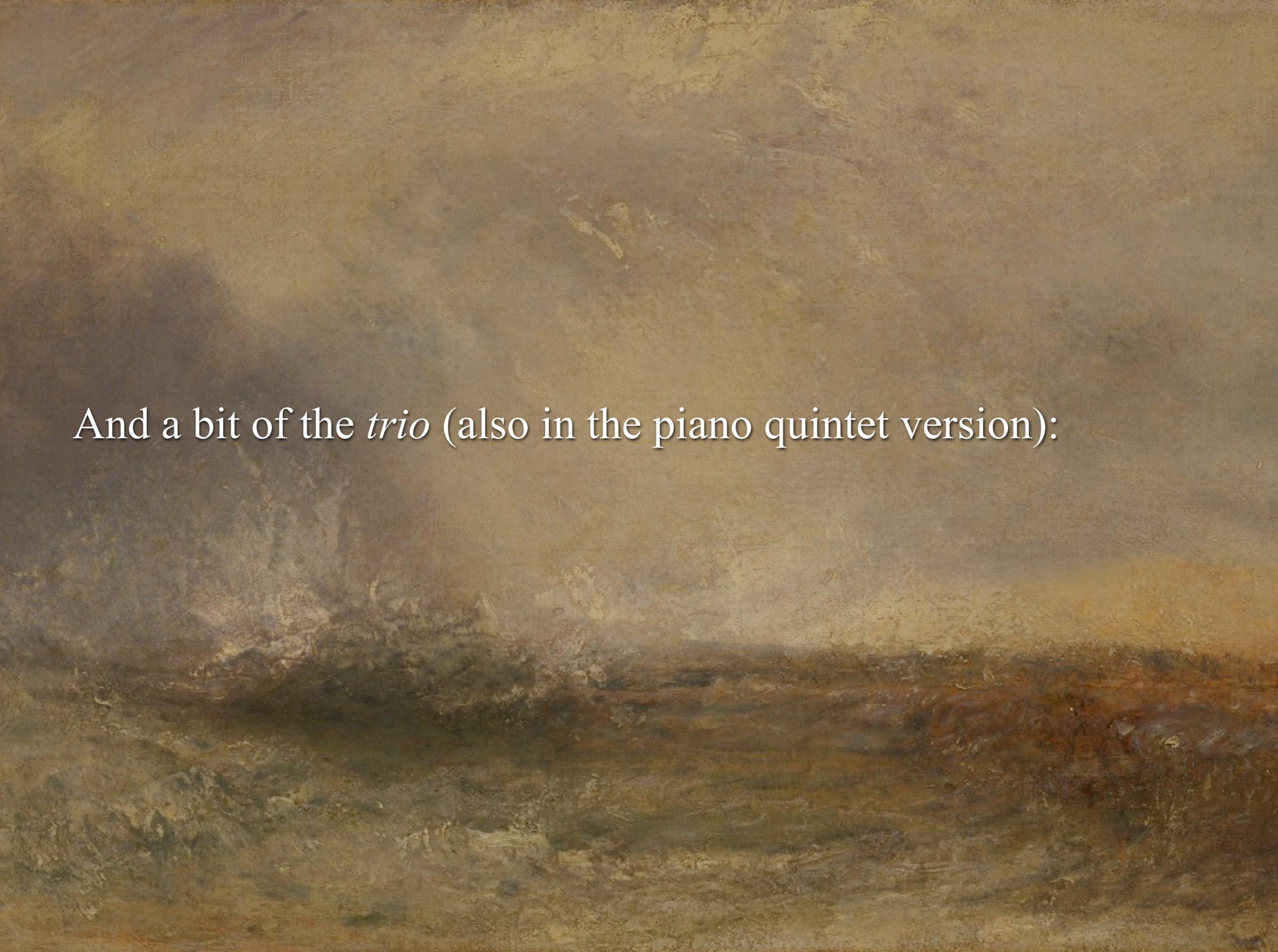
The third movement, a Beethovenian *scherzo*, is laid out in classical compound song form, or as it is sometimes called, “song form with trio.” It consists of two separate complete *scherzi*, with the first *scherzo* repeated *da capo* (that is, by turning back to the beginning and playing it without any modification.)



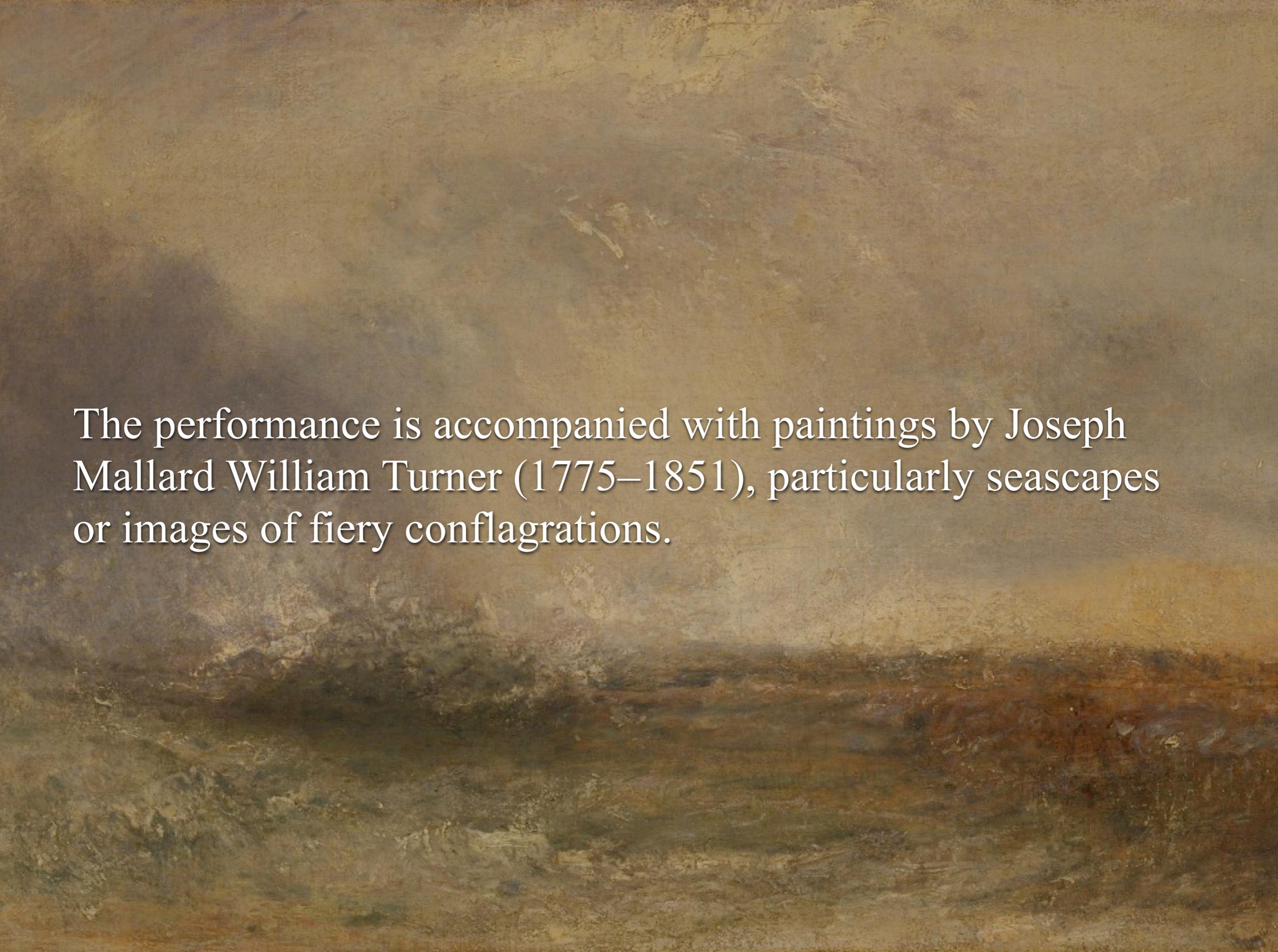
Many of Brahms' *scherzi* create a strong contrast between the *scherzo* and the *trio*, as here: the *scherzo* is dynamic, surging, and stormy, while the *trio* is noble and grandly voiced.



A bit of the *scherzo* (here in its more familiar version for piano quintet):



And a bit of the *trio* (also in the piano quintet version):



The performance is accompanied with paintings by Joseph Mallard William Turner (1775–1851), particularly seascapes or images of fiery conflagrations.





# Elgar: Violin Sonata in E Minor, Op. 82: I

Hugh Bean, violin / David Parkhouse, piano (rec. 1971)

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Edward Elgar wrote three chamber works during the closing years of World War I: a string quartet, a piano quintet, and the E Minor Violin Sonata.

The sonata has never been ranked among Elgar's greatest works, but it has been achieving enhanced visibility these days after nearly a century of near-neglect.

The celebrated English violinist Albert Sammons was long associated with the work, having given it the premiere recording in 1935.

Sammons' most distinguished student was the wonderful musician and violinist Hugh Cecil Bean (1929–2003), leader of the Philharmonia Orchestra under Otto Klemperer and founder of the renowned London Music Group.

In this recording of the first movement, made by Bean and his London Music Group pianist David Parkhouse, we are hearing a performance of absolute authority, a tradition of grandly-gestured Romanticism passed down from Elgar to Sammons and hence to Bean.

Bean is playing his 1734 Pietro Guarneri violin in a recording noted not only for its magnificent musicianship, but also for superlative recorded sound. It was made in the Kingsway Hall, one of the world's greatest recording venues, in 1971.



Hugh Bean / David Parkhouse / Eileen Croxford

1P

2P

1T

S

2T

## Exposition - First Primary Theme

1Pa Violin leads; *risoluto* with piano punctuations

1Pb Rising line, rhythm similar to 1Pa

1Pc Like a “break”; climactic and emphatic

1Pa Piano takes the lead in extended version

1Pb Piano in extended version

1Pc Violin retakes the lead; again emphatic

## *Postscript: About Kingsway Hall*

Kingsway Hall was a church in Holborn, London, built in 1912 for the West London Methodist Mission. Due to some mysterious alchemy of materials and shapes, Kingsway proved to be a near-ideal recording space.

From the 1920s through the early 1980s, Decca, EMI, and RCA all made as many recordings as possible in the drafty and uncomfortable space. More legendary albums were recorded in Kingsway than any other recording venue.

Kingsway Hall was noisy—the Piccadilly underground line ran directly underneath and sometimes you can hear the “Kingsway rumble” in quiet spots of a recording. There was a great deal of traffic immediately outside and sometimes you can hear it as well.

It had terrible bathrooms, lacked food service, was dingy and drafty, and parking was next to nonexistent. Every time the studios used it for recordings they had to unbolt the pews from the floor and put them in a nearby storage room.

But Kingsway Hall was an acoustic marvel, so everybody put up with its manifold discomforts.

Unfortunately, Kingsway Hall had deteriorated terribly by the early 1980s, to the point at which it was no longer safe for use. The Greater London Council bought it, and the record labels contemplated buying it. However, by that time the expense of renovating the structure and getting it up to code was prohibitive; even with both Decca and EMI sharing the costs, there was no way that the renovation could hope to pay for itself.

In addition, the studios feared (rightly) that renovation might spoil the magic acoustic—which was probably a combination of the hall's porous and leaky wooden roof, its soft plaster walls, the hollow floor, and its sloping seating area that allowed an orchestra to fan upwards from the conductor.

So the studios regretfully passed on the project, and Kingsway Hall was bought and gutted. It is now the Kingsway Hall Hotel.

But stand by the main reception desk and you're just about at the conductor's podium for many orchestral recordings.



Such as Benjamin Britten in 1963 leading the legendary recording of his brand-new *War Requiem*.

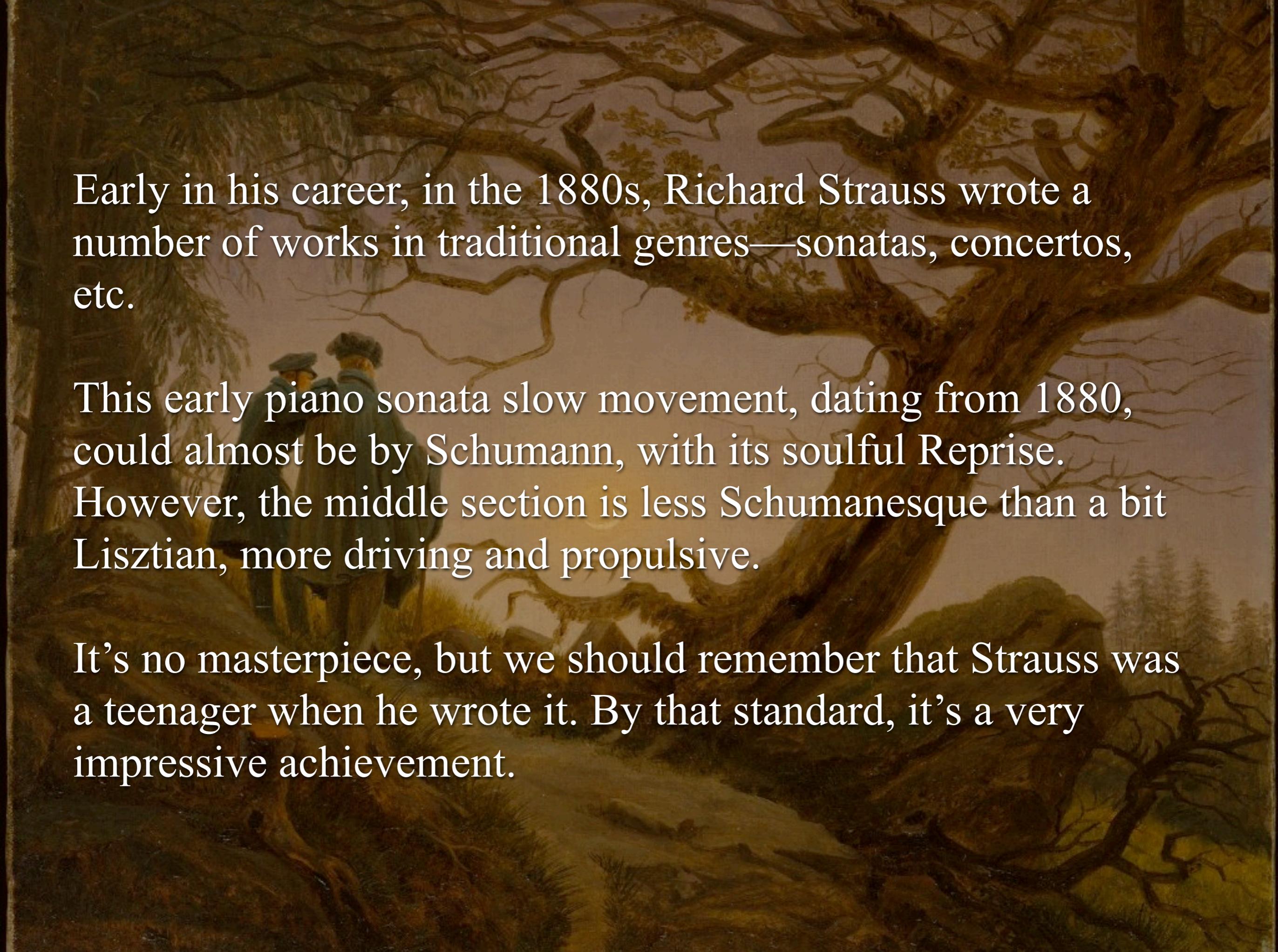




# Richard Strauss: Piano Sonata, Op. 5: II

Glenn Gould, piano

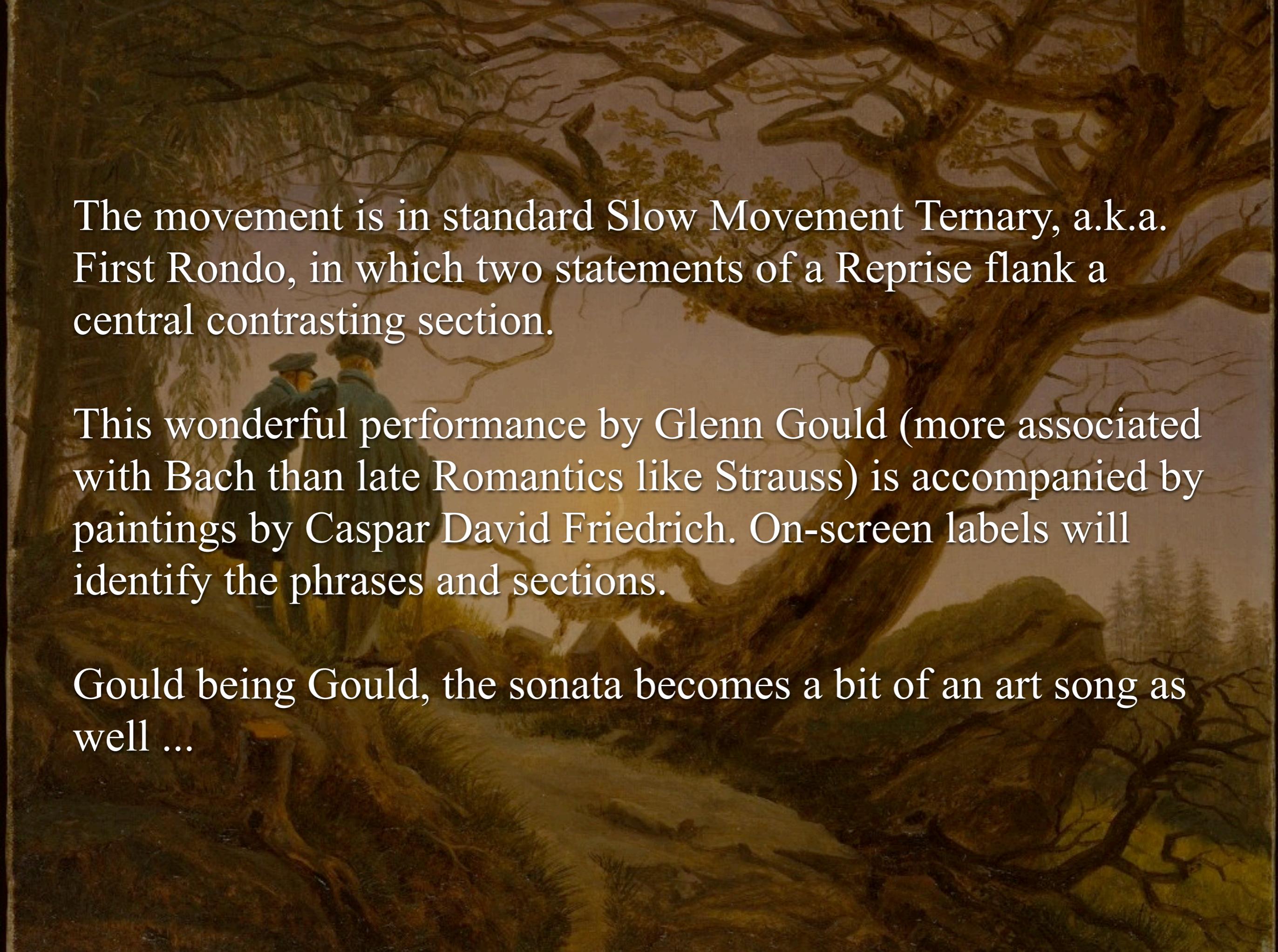
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Early in his career, in the 1880s, Richard Strauss wrote a number of works in traditional genres—sonatas, concertos, etc.

This early piano sonata slow movement, dating from 1880, could almost be by Schumann, with its soulful Reprise. However, the middle section is less Schumanesque than a bit Lisztian, more driving and propulsive.

It's no masterpiece, but we should remember that Strauss was a teenager when he wrote it. By that standard, it's a very impressive achievement.



The movement is in standard Slow Movement Ternary, a.k.a. First Rondo, in which two statements of a Reprise flank a central contrasting section.

This wonderful performance by Glenn Gould (more associated with Bach than late Romantics like Strauss) is accompanied by paintings by Caspar David Friedrich. On-screen labels will identify the phrases and sections.

Gould being Gould, the sonata becomes a bit of an art song as well ...



