

Van Gogh VIGNETTES

(Image Music XXII-A)

version for
Violin & Viola
Duet

I. The Potato Eaters, 1885

II. Seascape near Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, 1888

III. Starry Night, 1889

IV. Wheatfield with Crows, 1890

Greg A Steinke

SCORE

FRONTISPIECE

“It is true that at moments, when I am in a good mood, I think that what is alive in art, and eternally alive, is in the first place the painter and in the second place the picture.”

Letter W08
Arles, c. 27 August 1888

“... it has always been my great desire to paint for those who do not know the artistic aspect of a picture.”

Letter W11
Arles, 30 April 1889

"Wouldn't cherishing the memory of good people be of greater value on the whole than being among the ambitious?"

Letter W13
Saint-Rémy, 2 July 1889

"The Letters"
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Vincent Willem van Gogh

(1853-1890)

Vincent Willem van Gogh, Dutch postimpressionist painter, whose work represents the archetype of expressionism, the idea of emotional spontaneity in painting. Van Gogh was born March 30, 1853, in Groot-Zundert, son of a Dutch Protestant pastor. Early in life he displayed a moody, restless temperament that was to thwart his every pursuit. By the age of 27 he had been in turn a salesman in an art gallery, a French tutor, a theological student, and an evangelist among the miners at Wasmes in Belgium. His experiences as a preacher are reflected in his first paintings of peasants and potato diggers; of these early works, the best known is the rough, earthy *Potato Eaters* (1885, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam). Dark and somber, sometimes crude, these early works evidence van Gogh's intense desire to express the misery and poverty of humanity as he saw it among the miners in Belgium.

In 1886 van Gogh went to Paris to live with his brother Théo van Gogh, an art dealer, and became familiar with the new art movements developing at the time. Influenced by the work of the impressionists (see Impressionism) and by the work of such Japanese printmakers as Hiroshige and Hokusai, van Gogh began to experiment with current techniques (see Ukiyo-E). Subsequently, he adopted the brilliant hues found in the paintings of the French artists Camille Pissarro and Georges Seurat.

In 1888 van Gogh left Paris for southern France, where, under the burning sun of Provence, he painted scenes of the fields, cypress trees, peasants, and rustic life characteristic of the region. During this period, living at Arles, he began to use the swirling brush strokes and intense yellows, greens, and blues associated with such typical works as *Bedroom at Arles* (1888, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh), and *Starry Night* (1889, Museum of Modern Art, New York City). For van Gogh all visible phenomena, whether he painted or drew them, seemed to be endowed with a physical and spiritual vitality. In his enthusiasm he induced the painter Paul Gauguin, whom he had met earlier in Paris, to join him. After less than two months they began to have violent disagreements, culminating in a quarrel in which van Gogh wildly threatened Gauguin with a razor; the same night, in deep remorse, van Gogh cut off part of his own ear. For a time he was in a hospital at Arles. He then spent a year in the nearby asylum of Saint-Rémy, working between repeated spells of madness. Under the care of a sympathetic doctor, whose portrait he painted (*Dr. Gachet*, 1890, Louvre, Paris), van Gogh spent three months at Auvers. Just after completing his ominous *Crows in the Wheatfields* (1890, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh), he shot himself on July 27, 1890, and died two days later.

The more than 700 letters that van Gogh wrote to his brother Théo (published 1911, translated 1958) constitute a remarkably illuminating record of the life of an artist and a thorough documentation of his unusually fertile output—about 750 paintings and 1600 drawings. The French painter Chaïm Soutine, and the German painters Oskar Kokoschka, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Emil Nolde, owe more to van Gogh than to any other single source. In 1973 the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, containing over 1000 paintings, sketches, and letters, was opened in Amsterdam.

Based upon:

The Potato Eaters, 1885



Seascape near Les Saintes-Maries-la-Mer, 1888, 1885



Starry Night, 1889



Wheatfield with Crows, 1890



Instrumentation:

Violin

Viola

Performance Notes:

In general, special performance techniques are indicated in the score and parts at the places where they occur. The various "free" sections, which involve a kind of "structured improvisation," all have specific instructions where they occur; the musical events specified should be performed within the durational, timbral and dynamic parameters indicated but also allow for artistic license and interpretational freedom for the performer, which the composer is very willing to accept. This approach may result in different readings in various performances, perhaps different readings by the same performers in subsequent performances. Again, the composer is comfortable with this.

Program Notes:

As has been expressed in a journal of the painter, Edvard Munch: "at times you see with different eyes," a composer "at times [hears] with different [ears.]" And so it is here of "hearing" these paintings at this moment in time. Another moment might produce a different "hearing," or "hearing" impression. I've attempted to create my "hearing" of these paintings and even create different possible hearings within the "hearing" through passages of structured improvisation, which in turn produce different hearings for the listener. So I've composed what I heard, to paraphrase Munch, at this moment in time.

Duration: c. 10'+