

Talich String Quartet

The College of Wooster
Scheide Music Center
525 E. University Street
Wooster, Ohio 44691

Sunday, November 16, 2003
3:00 P.M.

entire output. The listener may detect a suggestion of the tune "Three Blind Mice" at the outset, a tune also found subtly in the "New World" Symphony. Following is an energetic Scherzo marked "Molto vivace." For the Finale ("Andante sostenuto - Allegro con fuoco") Dvořák deploys a slow introduction which eventually builds into a dance-like rondo. Thematic elements from the first movement can be heard in the Finale, as well as a very quick return to the "Three Blind Mice" motive of the second movement before the piece draws to a delightful and satisfying conclusion.

Program Notes by Brian Biddle



Talich String Quartet

Jan Talich, violin
Petr Macecek, violin
Vladimir Bukac, viola
Petr Prause, cello

Recognized internationally as one of Europe's finest chamber ensembles, the Talich Quartet is the embodiment of the Czech musical tradition. The Quartet was founded by Jan Talich, Sr. during his studies at the Prague Conservatory, and named for his uncle, the renowned chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, Vaclav Talich.

From its inception in 1964 (Messiereur, Kvapil, Talich, Rattay) through the early nineties, the Talich quickly gained a significant position among the world's leading quartets. On CD they recorded, among others, the complete works of Mozart and Beethoven which have received many international prizes, including the "Diapason d'Or," "Grand Prix du Disque," "Diapason du Siècle," and "Golden Disc." Gradually during the 1990s, there was a complete change in personnel, resulting in the present, more youthful membership, which continues in the tradition of its predecessors with its involvement in a wide spectrum of performance and recording activities. The current first violinist is the son of the Quartet's founder.

The Talich Quartet performs to great acclaim in France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Japan, and North and South America. It is regularly invited to prestigious chamber music festivals and venues such as New York's Carnegie Hall, le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Salle Gaveau in Paris, London's Wigmore Hall, the Pablo Casals Festival in Prades, Prague Spring Music Festival, Europalia Festival, Printemps des Arts in Monte Carlo, Tibor Varga Festival of Music, and International String Quartet Festival in Ottawa.

The Quartet has been asked by the Steven Spielberg Foundation to record classical works for a film documentary on the holocaust, and is currently recording the complete string quartets and other chamber works of Félix Mendelssohn. This will be followed by a similar project of Schubert compositions, all for the French label Calliope, with which the Talich has cooperated for nearly 40 years. Its latest recording for the company is Shostakovitch's Quartet No. 8 and his Piano Quintet with the Cliburn medalist Yakov Kasman.

Written by Sarah Buck

PROGRAM NOTES

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

QUARTETTSATZ IN C MINOR, D. 703 – Schubert’s contributions to the musical canon are remarkable, especially when considering how tragically brief his life was. The sheer quantity of music which he created is difficult to comprehend; by age 23 he had already written eleven full string quartets. None of these full four-movement quartets matched the enduring accomplishment of this single movement for quartet, written in 1820. Known as the *Quartettsatz* (“Quartet Movement”), the piece represents a coming of age for Schubert; for the first time the composer’s instrumental work matched the significant talent evident in the well-known lieder he had already written.

The existence of a 41-bar fragment of a second movement indicates that Schubert did intend the *Quartettsatz* as the opening movement of a larger work, but the single movement has nonetheless gained acceptance as a whole work in itself. This is one common characteristic shared by this quartet and Schubert’s most widely recognized work, the B minor “Unfinished” Symphony. There are other parallels; consider, for example, the opening gesture of both works, both tumultuous ascending harmonies giving way to more lyrical melodic lines. Following is an exploration of dramatic and dynamic extremes while remaining intense throughout. Though brief, the *Quartettsatz* signals a new era for the young Schubert, and serves as a foretaste for the glorious instrumental works to come in the ensuing years. Like many of Schubert’s works, this piece unfortunately was never performed publicly during his lifetime; it was not until 1867 that this extraordinarily worthy piece received the public exposure of which it deserved.

Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959)

QUARTET NO. 7 (“CONCERTO DE CAMERA”) – One of the most respected Czech composers of his generation, Bohuslav Martinu enjoyed a successful and prolific career which earned him renown throughout Europe as well as in the United States. Achieving success in Prague first as a violinist (he performed off-and-on with the Czech Philharmonic beginning in 1913), Martinu’s growing interest in composition led him to Paris in 1923 to study with Albert Roussel. The cosmopolitan environment of Paris introduced Martinu to many new influences brought on by the presence of many of Europe’s greatest composers as well as the influx of jazz. By the late 1920s, these new influences had led to many compositional successes in Paris, and, thanks to the attention of Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, in America as well. The Nazi invasion of France at the beginning of World War II led Martinu and his wife, Charlotte, to flee France and seek refuge in the United States.

Martinu spent the war years teaching composition at Tanglewood, and when the war ended he made plans to return to Prague, but these plans were aborted due to a freak accident. In the summer of 1946, Martinu fell from the balcony of his apartment in New York and sustained severe injuries which rendered him unable to travel. His

seventh and last string quartet (completed in 1947) was written during the painful recovery process, but the mood of the piece hardly reflects the personal trauma experienced by the composer at the time. The spirited and rhythmically active piece seems to rise above Martinu’s own misfortune.

The quartet’s unusual three-movement structure likely contributed its descriptive title “Concerto de Camera,” harkening back to the three-movement chamber concerti of the 17th and 18th centuries. The first movement, marked “Poco allegro,” features an ebullient melodic line fraught with persistent sixteenth-note motion. The melody is carried through the movement in the context of a harmonic language which retains Romantic-era accessibility while still providing some interesting surprises. The second movement (“Andante”) is highly lyrical, full of flowing and expressive melodic lines which create an introspective repose from the driving first movement. For the final movement, marked “Allegro vivo,” Martinu returns to his Czech roots, producing a robust rollick evocative of the composer’s homeland. The joyous and optimistic spirit of the movement is suddenly interrupted at the halfway point with a somewhat somber interlude, perhaps betraying the composer’s yearning for his home. But this introspection is short-lived, and the energetic spirit of the movement returns to bring the piece to a close.

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

QUARTET NO. 13 IN G MAJOR, B. 192, OP. 106 – Dvořák three-year sojourn in the United States (1892-1895) produced some of his most memorable pieces, most notably the String Quartet no. 12, B. 179 (the “American”) and the Symphony no. 9 (“From the New World”). Though a prolific time for the composer, the stay in America carried with it some hardships. With each successive year Dvořák missed Bohemia and his family more, and the financial hardships of his American employer, Jeannette Thurber of the National Conservatory of Music of America, called into question her capability to fulfill her obligations to the composer. The mounting uncertainty eventually prompted Dvořák to end his contract with Thurber and return to his hometown of Vysoká in Bohemia a year early.

Dvořák was very much relieved to be in his home country once again, and after a short period of recuperation he returned to his work. In November he returned to his teaching position at the Prague Conservatory and he resumed composing shortly thereafter. Among the first pieces to be completed upon the composer’s return to Europe is this work, Dvořák second-last foray into the realm of the string quartet (though labeled Op. 106 the piece was actually completed before his last quartet, labeled Op. 105). Even knowing nothing of Dvořák personal circumstances at the time of its composition, it would be obvious to the listener from the outset of the first movement (“Allegro moderato”) that this was an expression of profound happiness. The second movement (“Adagio ma non troppo”) opens with a classic example of Dvořák expert tune-writing abilities. Full of alternating dramatic tension and release, the movement is regarded by some as among the most emotionally expressive of Dvořák

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Program

Quartettsatz in C Minor, D. 703	Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Quartet No. 7	Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959)
Poco allegro Andante Allegro vivo	

INTERMISSION

Quartet No. 13 in G Major, B. 192, Op. 106	Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
Allegro moderato Adagio ma non troppo Molto vivace Finale: Andante sostenuto, Allegro con fuoco	

Jan Talich, violin
Petr Macecek, violin
Vladimir Bukac, viola
Petr Prause, cello

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