

PROGRAM

Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942)

Five Pieces for String Quartet

Alla valse viennese. Allegro

Alla Serenata. Allegretto con moto

Alle Czeca. Molto allegro

Alla Tango. Andante

Alla Tarantella. Prestissimo con fuoco

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Oboe Quartet K. 370 in F Major

Allegro

Adagio

Rondeau: Allegro

Arnold Bax (1883-1953)

Oboe Quintet

Tempo molto moderato - Allegro moderato - Tempo primo

Lento espressivo

Allegro giocoso - Più lento - Vivace

Intermission

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, Op. 51 "Slavonic"

Allegro ma non troppo

Dumka (Elegia). Andante con moto - Vivace

Romanze. Andante con moto

Finale. Allegro assai

Program and personnel subject to change.

As a courtesy to the artists, please remain seated until they have left the hall.

Telegraph Quartet and James Austin Smith appear by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists.

FEATURING

Eric Chin, violin

Joseph Maile, violin

Pei-Ling Lin, viola

Jeremiah Shaw, cello

The **Telegraph Quartet** was formed in 2013 with an equal passion for the standard chamber repertoire and for 20th and 21st century chamber music. The quartet claimed the prestigious 2016 Walter W. Naumburg Chamber Music Award as well as the Grand Prize at the 2014 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition. They have performed in concert halls, music festivals, and academic institutions from Los Angeles and New York to Italy and Taiwan, including Carnegie Hall, San Francisco's Herbst Recital Hall, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Chamber Masters Series and at festivals including the Chautauqua Institute, Kneisel Hall, and the Emilia Romagna Festival in Italy. In 2016, the quartet was one of a handful of emerging professional string quartets invited from around the world to the Biennale de quatuors à cordes to showcase at the Philharmonie de Paris for major concert presenters of Europe and Asia. The quartet is currently on the chamber music faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as their Quartet-in-Residence.

Beyond the concert stage, the Telegraph Quartet seeks to spread its music through education and audience engagement. In the fall of 2017, the quartet traveled to schools and communities in Mid-Coast Maine with Yellow Barn's Music Haul, a mobile performance stage that brings music outside the concert hall to communities across the U.S. The quartet has given master classes at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Collegiate and Pre-College Divisions, through the Morrison Artist Series at San Francisco State University, and abroad at the Taipei National University of the Arts and National Taiwan Normal University.

James Austin Smith, Oboe

James Austin Smith performs equal parts new and old music across the United States and around the world. Mr. Smith is an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), the Talea Ensemble, and the Poulenc Trio as well as co-Artistic Director of Decoda, the Affiliate Ensemble of Carnegie Hall. Mr. Smith received his Master of Music degree in 2008 from the Yale School of Music and graduated in 2005 with Bachelor of Arts (Political Science) and Bachelor of Music degrees from Northwestern University. He spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar in Leipzig, Germany at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater "Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy" and is an alumnus of Ensemble Connect, a collaboration of Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, the Weill Music Institute, and the New York City Department of Education. The son of musician parents and eldest of four boys, Mr. Smith was born in New York and raised in Connecticut.

PROGRAM NOTES

Erwin Schulhoff

Schulhoff was born in Prague into a family of Jewish German origin. Dvořák encouraged Schulhoff's earliest musical studies, which began at the Prague Conservatory when he was ten years old. He studied composition and piano there and later in Vienna, Leipzig, and Cologne, where his teachers included Debussy and Reger. He won the Mendelssohn Prize twice, for both piano and composition. He served on the Russian front in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. He was wounded and was in an Italian prisoner-of-war camp when the war ended. He lived in Germany after the war, returning to Prague in 1923 where he joined the faculty of the conservatory in 1929.

Anne Midgette, chief classical music critic of the Washington Post, wrote that Schulhoff went through a number of distinct stylistic periods, "from the endearing self-consciousness of talented youth in the Suite for Chamber Orchestra to the fierce somber aggression of the Fifth Symphony." She found that even as his style changed there was a certain commonality, so that even the "angular, forceful, even raw style" of the late Fifth Symphony reflected "the late Romantic tradition of orchestral color."

Schulhoff's early works exhibit the influence of composers from the preceding generation, including Debussy, Scriabin, and Richard Strauss. Later, during his Dadaist phase, he composed a number of pieces with absurdist elements, including a silent piece consisting entirely of rests that anticipates John Cage's 4'33" by over thirty years (Schulhoff's piece is notated in great rhythmic detail, employing bizarre time signatures and intricate rhythmic patterns.)

Schulhoff's third period dates from approximately 1923 to 1932. The pieces composed during these prolific years are his most frequently performed works. These include the Five Pieces for String Quartet, which integrate modernist vocabulary, neoclassical elements, jazz, and dance rhythms from a variety of sources and cultures. Schulhoff wrote that no one had yet successfully blended jazz and art music. (His jazz oratorio H.M.S. Royal Oak tells the story of a naval mutiny against a superior who prohibits jazz on board ship.)

Dedicated to Darius Milhaud, the Five Pieces are a dance suite, a neoclassical glance back to the Baroque era with the spiky dissonances, irony and rhythmic drive characteristic of the modern period. The music is skillfully wrought, accessible and compelling. It provides a perfect synopsis of several aspects of Schulhoff's multi-faceted music: a sense of parody occasionally bordering on the grotesque (Alla Valse and Alla Serenata), a clear element of Czech folk music (Alla Czeca), a love of modern, popular dance (Alla Tango), and a brilliant facility for rhythmic vitality (Alla Tarantella). Together, the pieces vividly express Schulhoff's words:

"Music should first and foremost produce physical pleasures, yes, even ecstasies. Music is never philosophy, it arises from an ecstatic condition, finding its expression through rhythmical movement."

The influential American music critic Olin Downes praised a Salzburg performance of his Five Pieces for String Quartet in 1924: "These pieces . . . had spontaneous humor, sentiment, a fluent and admirable technique. The idiom has enough modern pepper in it to constantly stimulate the ear; but the music is not forced, any more than it is portentous. A young composer of talent disported himself in these pieces, and his audience was duly grateful. Not all composers, old or young, have the good sense not to take themselves, now and again, too seriously." Following the performance Schulhoff reportedly played ragtime numbers on piano at a local inn "til the walls tottered."

In general, Schulhoff's music remains connected to Western tonality, though—like Prokofiev, among others—the fundamentally triadic conception of his music is often embellished by passages of intense dissonance. Other features characteristic of Schulhoff's compositional style are use of modal and quartal harmonies, dance rhythms, and a comparatively free approach to form. The Second Viennese School was also important to Schulhoff, though he never adopted serialism as a compositional tool.

In the 1930s, Schulhoff faced mounting personal and professional difficulties. Because of his Jewish descent and radical politics, he and his works were labelled degenerate and blacklisted by the Nazi regime. He could no longer give recitals in Germany, nor could his works be performed publicly. His politics also brought him trouble in Czechoslovakia. Taking refuge in Prague, Schulhoff found employment as a radio pianist, but barely got by. When the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939, he had to perform under a pseudonym. In 1941, the Soviet Union approved his petition for citizenship, but he was arrested and imprisoned before he could leave Czechoslovakia.

In June 1941, Schulhoff was deported to the Wülzburg concentration camp, where he died on August 18, 1942 from tuberculosis.

—Adapted from notes on MedLibrary.org and by Kai Christiansen

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart's Oboe Quartet is one of several he wrote for strings and featured instrument (others include the famous works for clarinet and horn). Before his move to Vienna and the "mature" chamber works, Mozart was still employed by Salzburg's Archbishop Colloredo, from whom he managed to secure a leave to travel to Munich for an opera commission. There, Mozart re-encountered his friend, the brilliant and celebrated oboist Friedrich Ramm, for whom he ultimately composed the quartet in early 1781. The quartet was certainly a vehicle for Ramm's virtuosity as well as Mozart's enduring ability to write idiomatically for a given instrument's essential personality.

The quartet comprises three movements in a traditional fast-slow-fast pattern after the manner of a sonata or concerto rather than the four-movement design of string quartet or symphony. The first movement is essentially monothematic, unusual for Mozart. The oboe introduces a lilting, ornamented theme with active imitative textures in the top strings. After some transitional materials, the second key-area shifts the main theme to the violin with oboe countermelodies, a contrast of key and scoring that retains the original theme. As Mozart often did, he begins the exposition with fresh material, in this case a little floating fugue with a short subject in long notes with close imitations. The recapitulation adds new contrapuntal textures to the opening material, and the 4-note head motive from the little fugue cleverly joins the mix. As throughout the quartet, the cello part tends to outline the essential base line with stock figures rather than joining in full four-part textures typical of Mozart's later quartets.

The central slow movement Adagio is brief but intense. It resumes the slower half-note pace of the little fugue for a deliberate, somber dramatic. The mood is by turns mournful, pleading and dark, an ideal lyrical showcase for the plaintive timbre of the oboe.

Shadow is followed by beneficent light in a buoyant Rondo allegro whose joyous lilt recalls the first movement but with the greater freedom of a sectional dance form with lively episodes joined by a repeating refrain. The melody and 6/8 bounce create the effect of a French or English country dance with the oboe almost suggesting a pipe or flute. Towards the end, there occurs a famous polyrhythmic section of thirteen bars where the oboe plays in common time (4/4) against the strings in 6/8 with a oddly shimmering effect of four beats against three. One is tempted to speculate that Mozart was perhaps hinting at a Turkish sound with its idiomatic melismas often heard on a double-reed instrument similar to the oboe.

—Kai Christiansen

Arnold Bax

In its day, Bax's Oboe Quintet was pioneering, for the oboe quintet was an unfamiliar form at the time. Bax was influenced by the playing of the celebrated oboist Leon Goossens, then in his mid-twenties, to whom the Quintet is dedicated, and Bax was probably the first big name composer to write such a piece for him. Goossens's distinctive artistry would inform the writing of a generation of British composers, including Bax, who later conceived the oboe part in his Nonet with Goossens in mind.

Bax wrote his Quintet very quickly in the autumn of 1922, but it was not played until May 1924, when Leon Goossens and the celebrated Kutcher Quartet gave the premiere at London's Hyde Park Hotel.

The jig of the work's finale reflect Bax's engagement with Ireland, as do the first two movements, which have the mood and atmosphere of the Irish songs he had written earlier that year. After an elegiac progression of chords, the oboe's first entry, an improvisatory tempo molto moderato, has a plaintive cast, reminiscent of Peter Warlock's despairing cor anglais in *The Curlew*. The central section is vigorous, even finding rustic, but Bax is certainly not evoking Irish folk music as he is in the finale. The range of color Bax extracts from the strings is amazing, at the outset having the first violin playing tremolando in octaves with that characteristic sound that comes from playing close to the bridge, the cello and viola playing pizzicato and the cello declaiming a bold repeated motif. Soon, while the oboe plays an upward-lying phrase unaccompanied, the strings quickly put on their mutes for the return of the opening, much transformed. The ending is magical as the strings play soft chords underpinned by threatening repeated Gs on the cello and a final distant flourish from the oboe.

The mutes come off for the slow movement which is the emotional heart of the work. It opens very quietly with a serenely beautiful folk-sounding tune sung out molto espressivo by the first violin, warmly accompanied by the strings. Eventually the oboe sounds a plaintive improvisation, reminding us how Bax once unexpectedly heard pipe-music in a London street and asked, in a brief verse, "What aged war wouldst thou awake in me, / Thou subtle world-old bitter Celtic voice?" This plangent tone contrasts poignantly with the beauty of the opening and is underlined and elaborated by the strings and oboe now together. Eventually the opening tempo returns and with it the violin's opening tune, now clouded by troubled shifting string textures, and the spectral effect of the first violinist's sul ponticello tremolandi. Even the oboe's serene closing phrase is shadowed by the soft tremolando strings, and an uneasy repose is not achieved until the final chord.

The finale is an Irish jig, written by a composer who had seen and taken part in the real thing, though as far as is known the authentic-sounding themes were composed by Bax himself. Yet all too soon clouds cover the sun and the spectres return.

The dance continues and although the ending is thrown off brilliantly we are aware that this is no mere Irish picture postcard. In 1922 no one, certainly not Bax, could fail to be torn by the horrors, the terror and the infinite sadness overshadowing the picturesque scene.

A final enigma. Does Bax quote a real folk song in the finale when what sounds like the opening of the slow movement of Brahms's Fourth Symphony makes a vigorous appearance? The question as to its origin has never been satisfactorily explained. What is quite certain is that Bax did not take it from Brahms, a composer he never warmed to.

—Adapted from a note by Lewis Foreman

Antonín Dvořák

Dvořák first attracted significant attention as a composer with two sides of the same coin: folk music and dance. Aided by Brahms who recognized his talents and recommend Dvořák to his own Viennese publisher Simrock, Dvořák first published a set of Moravian Dances followed by collection of Slavonic (i.e. Bohemian) Dances thereby covering the two chief regions of what would eventually become Czechoslovakia. The Slavonic Dances, Op. 46, published in 1878 when Dvořák was in his late thirties, were wildly successful and immediately established his international reputation as an emerging Nationalistic composer. In the thrall of this excitement, the Florentine Quartet approached Dvořák asking for a new string quartet “in the Slavic style.” Dvořák, a professional violist who had already written numerous chamber works, responded by composing his tenth string quartet, Op. 51 published in 1879 and subsequently known by its nickname “Slavonic.” Essentially marking the beginning of his mature, celebrated chamber works, it has been often described as the perfect fusion of classical style and Bohemian folk spirit and, a wonderfully revealing contrast to his more famous quartet, the “American,” where ostensibly a different, new world folk spirit prevails.

The quartet opens with a warm, lyrical sonata typically played at a moderate tempo. The flowing quality of the music is punctuated by a rhythmic lilt suggesting the quick two-step beats of the Polka, originally a Bohemian dance. The dance qualities become more pronounced with the transitional material and the second theme. The development section features Dvořák's characteristic “flickering” between the major and minor modes, a trait recalling Schubert as well as the exotic flavor of Eastern European folk music (and a trait vividly continued in the second movement). The development also shifts briefly into something more reverent in the manner of a church hymn that Dvořák achieves by slowing the main theme to half its speed. The quartet famously projects a pronounced Slavic folk character with the second, movement Dumka subtitled Elegie. Dvořák would compose many more Dumky throughout his oeuvre, the term “Dumka” designating a heroic folk ballad beginning as a slow lament with contrasting sections of celebratory exuberance in a

faster tempo. A mournful tale begins in G minor with a soulful duet between violin and viola to the guitar-like strumming of pizzicato in the cello (featuring a plangent shift between major and minor within a phrase). As soon as the sorrow is fully developed, the music abruptly shifts to G major, from a slow duple meter *andante* to a swift triple meter *vivace* and a lively Czech peasant dance known as the *furiant*. Dvořák will take the movement through these contrasts twice with thrilling tempo modulations for truly folk, improvisational feel as well as a constantly fresh treatment of the musical materials. Originally seeming like the slow movement, the second movement leaves one with the impression of a rhythmic scherzo.

The third movement is the proper slow movement, a beautiful Romanze that any lover of Dvořák's music will quickly recognize for its atmospheric, lyrical poignancy. While not representing a specific Slavic trait, the music exhibits the heartfelt directness, warmth and finely wrought “simplicity” for which Bohemian musicians and composers have long been famous. The languid interlude is a perfect foil for the rollicking finale, a swift rondo based on what musicologists have identified as the *skačna*, a Bohemian fiddle tune akin to an Irish reel with a jolly perpetual motion. An unmistakably vivacious dance energy animates the momentum. Dvořák exploits the rondo form for a great deal of contrast in rhythm, tempo, key and overall mood including a wonderful bluster of classical counterpoint and constantly shifting textures amidst otherwise directly accessible music with an infectious rustic folk character, a superb blend of high art and music from and for “the people.”

—Kai Christiansen