

PROGRAM: SUNDAYS WITH THE ST. LAWRENCE

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 2014 / 2:30 PM / BING CONCERT HALL



ARTISTS

St. Lawrence String Quartet

Geoff Nuttall, *violin*

Scott St. John, *violin*

Lesley Robertson, *viola*

Christopher Costanza, *cello*

Jonathan Vinocour, *viola*

Robert Huw Morgan, *harmonium*

Sundays with the St. Lawrence is presented in partnership with Music at Stanford and generously supported by Paul and Iris Brest.

PROGRAM

Antonín Dvořák: Bagatelles, op. 47, B. 79 (1878)

Allegretto scherzando

Tempo di minuetto: Grazioso

Allegretto scherzando

Canon: Andante con moto

Poco allegro

Bohuslav Martinů: String Quartet No. 5 (1938)

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Allegro vivo

Lento – Allegro

INTERMISSION

Antonín Dvořák: String Quintet in E-flat Major, op. 97, B.180 (1893)

Allegro non tanto

Allegro vivo

Larghetto

Allegro giusto

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Please be considerate of others and turn off all phones, pagers, and watch alarms, and unwrap all lozenges prior to the performance. Photography and recording of any kind are not permitted. Thank you.

PROGRAM: SUNDAYS WITH THE ST. LAWRENCE

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904) BAGATELLES, OP. 47, B. 79 (1878)

“I am now writing some small bagatelles for two violins and viola—just imagine! This work gives me as much pleasure as if I were composing a great symphony,” Antonín Dvořák wrote to his publisher in the spring of 1878. The Czech composer, impoverished until now, was on a roll. A testimonial from Brahms had begun to make the cash registers ring for both composer and publisher. Later that year, a favorable review in Berlin for his *Slavonic Dances* led to what the writer of that review described as “a positive assault on the sheet music shops in the course of a day”—this at a time when the publication of printed music functioned much as a CD release in our own time. Within months, the *Slavonic Rhapsodies* would be on Dvořák’s drawing board, Vienna would be asking for a new symphony and string quartet, and he would be writing a concerto for Joachim, one of the great violinists of the day. In the midst of preparing existing works for publication, Dvořák spent the first 12 days of May 1878 writing five short bagatelles (*maličkosti*) for two violins, cello, and harmonium. The harmonium, a little foot-pedaled reed organ, had been invented when Dvořák was born and adds a gentle, complementary resonance to the sound of the string instruments. Dvořák’s target audience was the amateur musician, but his violin writing in particular calls for a skilled player. The first of the five bagatelles includes the Czech folk tune “Hrallydudy” (“The Pipes Are Playing”), and references to it add to the unity of these charming miniatures.

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ (1890-1959) STRING QUARTET NO. 5 (1938)

Of Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů’s seven mature quartets, No. 5 from

May 1938 is widely regarded as the finest. Like the quartet *Intimate Letters* that Janáček wrote a decade earlier, Martinů’s Fifth Quartet springs from a love affair and the accompanying intensity of expression. Long supported by his wife, Charlotte Quennehen, a Paris dressmaker, Martinů was head-over-heels in love with his student Vítězslava Kaprálová, a gifted Moravian composer and conductor 25 years his junior. Martinů withheld the original score for two decades, in part because of the political turbulence of the times and in part because it contains what his biographer Brian Large refers to as “whimsical cartoons” and “intimate marginalia recording a series of events, personal thoughts, and incidents resulting from a difference of opinion or quarrel [Martinů] had had with Kaprálová and from her sudden departure to Monte Carlo.” While the published score (1958) does not include these intimate details, the entire score is colored by the affair. “Its contents are tragic, uncompromising, and harsh to the point of aggressiveness,” Large concludes. “It is a work demanding much of the listener and the performer alike.” An uneasy G minor underpins the entire quartet, through the vigorous and turbulent opening theme of the first movement and the ecstatic, high-soaring second theme. The brooding slow movement draws musical material from a song titled “The Farewell Handkerchief” that Kaprálová wrote in 1937. The third movement is a bitter, even sardonic scherzo that is driven unremittingly forward. The slow introduction to the finale appears to offer some consolation as it meditates on themes heard earlier. By the end of this fastidiously crafted, deeply felt quartet, however, the mood remains melancholy, tragic, and unresolved.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK STRING QUINTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 97, B. 180, AMERICAN (1893)

Dvořák composed the most popular of his 14 string quartets, the *American*, in the summer of 1893 in Spillville, Iowa, a rural community of Czech immigrants in Iowa. Three days after completing it, on June 26, he began work on the string quintet to be played today. He completed the score August 1, and it, too, is sometimes called the *American*. It is easy to overstate the particularly American qualities of this fine quintet, though, especially when listening to the distinctive melody that opens its first movement. Played on Dvořák’s own instrument, the viola, it is rhapsodic and a little exotic in its coloring. It is based on the pentatonic scale (a five-note scale). Dvořák had already identified this (along with a few other technical matters) as characteristic of Afro-American and Native Indian music when he was interviewed by the *Chicago Tribune* a few weeks earlier. But the pentatonic scale is also found in Bohemian music. So what can be interpreted as Dvořák’s curiosity for the new country could equally be explained as nostalgia for the old. And, meanwhile, it forms the starting point for an exhilarating, richly scored movement which ranges widely over the emotional spectrum. The rhythmically dynamic second movement raises the temperature even more. Its contrasting middle section gives a beautifully yearning, soaring melody first to viola, then to violin. The slow movement begins with a melody that Dvořák wrote in New York for a new national anthem, setting the words “My country, ’tis of thee.” Formally, the movement is a theme and five variations. The finale alternates a bouncy, good-natured theme with more inward-looking episodes in a thoroughly satisfying way.

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ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

The St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has established itself among the world-class chamber ensembles of its generation. Its mission: bring every piece of music to the audience in vivid color, with pronounced communication and teamwork and great respect to the composer. Since winning both the Banff International String Quartet Competition and Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1992, the quartet has delighted audiences with its spontaneous, passionate, and dynamic performances. Alex Ross of the *New Yorker* magazine writes, “The St. Lawrence are remarkable not simply for the quality of their music making, exalted as it is, but for the joy they take in the act of connection.”

Whether playing Haydn or premiering a new work, the SLSQ has a rare ability to bring audiences to rapt attention. It reveals surprising nuances in familiar repertoire and illuminates the works of some of today’s most celebrated composers, often all in the course of one evening. John Adams has written two critically acclaimed works expressly for the quartet, including *String Quartet* (2009) and *Absolute Jest* (2012), which it premiered with the San Francisco Symphony in 2012. In 2011, the SLSQ premiered *Qohelet*, a work by Osvaldo Golijov, also composed for it.

The SLSQ maintains a busy touring schedule. Some 2013–14 season highlights include visits to Vancouver, Princeton, Portland, Toronto, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, Palm Beach, and Washington, D.C. The quartet also will premiere a new work by George Tsontakis in Carmel, California. It will perform *Absolute Jest* with the Toronto Symphony and on a European tour with the San Francisco Symphony. During the summer season, the SLSQ is proud to continue its long

association with Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

Since 1998, the SLSQ has held the position of ensemble-in-residence at Stanford University. This residency includes working with music students as well as extensive collaborations with other faculty and departments using music to explore myriad topics. Recent collaborations have involved the School of Medicine, the School of Education, and the Law School. In addition to their appointment at Stanford, the musicians of the SLSQ are visiting artists-in-residence at Arizona State University. The foursome’s passion for opening up musical arenas to players and listeners alike is evident in its annual summer chamber music seminar at Stanford and its many forays into the depths of musical meaning with preeminent music educator Robert Kapilow.

Violist Lesley Robertson is a founding member of the group and hails from Edmonton, Alberta. Cellist Christopher Costanza is from Utica, New York, and joined the quartet in 2003. Violinists Geoff Nuttall and Scott St. John both grew up in London, Ontario; Nuttall is a founding member, and St. John joined in 2006. According to concert repertoire, the two alternate in the role of first violin. All four members of the quartet live in and teach at Stanford.

JONATHAN VINOCOUR

Jonathan Vinocour joined the San Francisco Symphony as principal violist in 2009, having previously served as principal violist of the Saint Louis Symphony and guest principal violist of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

As a soloist, Jonathan Vinocour has appeared with the Saint Louis

Symphony and with the San Francisco Symphony under Michael Tilson Thomas in Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy* and Morton Feldman’s *Rothko Chapel*. His first solo album, featuring works of Britten and Shostakovich, was recorded with the support of the Holland America Music Society.

Vinocour has been a regular participant at the Marlboro Music Festival and has toured extensively with Musicians from Marlboro. He has also participated in numerous other festivals, including the Steans Institute at the Ravinia Festival, Open Chamber Music at Prussia Cove, the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Tanglewood Music Center. Vinocour has been a guest of the Boston Chamber Music Society and International Sejong Soloists, and he has collaborated with artists such as Paula Robison, Yefim Bronfman, Gilbert Kalish, Miriam Fried, Yo-Yo Ma, Jaime Laredo, and members of the Amadeus, Arditti, Cleveland, Guarneri, Juilliard, Jupiter, Mendelssohn, and Orion string quartets.

ROBERT HUW MORGAN

Robert Huw Morgan is the university organist at Stanford University, a position he has held since 1999. A native of Wales, he received his B.A. and M.A. from Cambridge University and in 1989 became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. Between 1985 and 1988, he was an organ scholar at St. John’s College, Cambridge University, where his duties included playing the organ for the daily services in the College Chapel and assisting the renowned choral conductor George Guest in the direction of the celebrated choir of boys and men. In addition to his duties as university organist, he also holds the positions of lecturer in music, director of the Stanford University Singers, and director of the Stanford Memorial Church Choir. ❁