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NAXOS

# DVOŘÁK

## String Quartet No. 2

Bagatelles · Rondo in G minor

### Fine Arts Quartet

Ralph Evans, Violin · Efim Boico, Violin  
Gil Sharon, Viola · Niklas Schmidt, Cello

Ryoko Morooka, Harmonium · Stepan Simonian, Piano

## Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

### Bagatelles • String Quartet No. 2 • Rondo in G minor, B. 171

Czech music before and after the French Revolution is a story of exodus and return. Of imperial supremacy and national rebirth. Of old guard conservatives resisting new blood radicals. Of the many who took refuge in other, more economically rewarding, socially conducive, pastures (Vienna, Paris, Berlin, London). Of the few, who in trying to bridge the divide, never left. Of the conflict between the language and culture of the ruling Habsburg aristocracy (German) and the vernacular and custom of the people (Czech). Fired by the European insurrections of 1830 and 1848/49, Czech romantic nationalism was about the rhythm, colour and sound of Czech life, Czech history, Czech speech, Czech landscape and Czech feeling. Voříšek and Škroup flagged the way. Smetana staked the road. Dvořák – self-confessed ‘simple Czech musician’ from the valleys of the Vltava – illumined it. Janáček and Suk trumped its glory. ‘In Dvořák’s music,’ complementing Smetana’s, wrote the Austrian critic Max Graf, ‘peasants dance around the maypole and old crones tell old tales ... armouries in the Czech nation’s struggle for political independence’ – a struggle won only in 1918, after Dvořák’s death.

Dedicated to Josef Srb-Debrnov, a well-known Prague music writer and dilettante, the *Bagatelles*, *Op. 47 (Maličkosti*, ‘Little Things’, 1–12 May 1878) date from between Dvořák’s piano and violin concertos. Contemporary with the *Serenade for Winds in D minor*, the first set of *Slavonic Dances* for piano duet, and the three *Slavonic Rhapsodies* for orchestra, they abound in a wealth of melody and folk-imbued nuances, sensuality of harmony and lyric rhythms to the fore. Suggestive as the scoring for two violins and cello is – reminiscent of early 19th-century Viennese dance and tavern ensembles, cello substituting for double bass – their sound world is essentially circumscribed by the addition of a harmonium, the reed timbres and sustaining abilities of which are otherwise impossible in the piano alternative sanctioned in Simrock’s Berlin first edition. Srb-Debrnov, in whose rooms friends would meet to make afternoon music, owned one – he and Dvořák, a few years younger, grew to know each other in one of Prague’s *Nové Město* cafés. The first performance, on 2 February 1879, was led by the violinist Ferdinand Lachner, with Alois Neruda on cello and the composer at the harmonium. Genially charming, the first and third of the five movements (G minor) quote from an old Bohemian folk song, *Hrály dudy u Pobudy* (‘The bagpipes played at Pobuda’): ‘A bagpiper is like a flower, he will come to me, he will choke me, everyone will envy. Give me a little song, my sweet song! If you come tonight, I’ll give you a sweet little sipful.’ The second movement is a dotted-rhythm minuet (G major); the slow fourth, malleably 6/8, is canonic (E major). Cyclically, from afar, the finale (G major) echoes the folk song.

The G minor *Rondo*, *Op. 94* (‘Rondo for Professor [Hanuš] Wihan’, 25–26 December 1891) – originally for cello (or viola/clarinet) and piano, subsequently orchestrated in 1893 – was jotted down for Dvořák’s farewell tour of Bohemia and Moravia prior to taking up his appointment as director of New York’s recently founded National Conservatory of Music (1892–95). Premiered by Wihan and Dvořák in Kladno northwest of Prague, 6 January 1892, a mix of foursquare and free underlines the score. ‘When the composer’s imagination comes into play,’ maintained the cellist and academic John Clapham (*Antonín Dvořák: Musician and Craftsman*, Faber & Faber), it ‘becomes impossible to predict with any certainty what path the music will be likely to take’; similarly what landscape its keys and modulations might traverse.

Dvořák wasn’t always the rural Bohemian familiar from his maturity. That poet of field and flower brushed by the vernacular of Schubert. Genius of the final symphonies, the B minor *Cello Concerto*, the post-*New World* folk-ballade tone poems. Master hand of the ‘fairy tale’ epic *Rusalka*, the *Requiem* and *Te Deum*. The expressive voice of places removed from St Stephen and the Viennese Danube, but intimately responsive to St Vitus, the Vltava, *Karlův most*, and that ancient castle of kings on the hill coronating Prague. A generation earlier, in his latter teens, he’d come under the influence of Richard Wagner. Wagner had got to know the city as a boy in the late 1820s (his sister worked there as an actress). ‘The foreign nationality, the broken German of the people, the peculiar headgear of the women,’ he chronicled in his memoirs, ‘the native wines, the harp-girls and musicians, and finally, the ever present signs of Catholicism, its numerous chapels and shrines, all produced on me a strangely exhilarating impression.’ Years later, in February 1863, Wagner conducted a concert in the hall on Žofín Island, including the *Faust* and *Tannhäuser* overtures and extracts from *Meistersinger* and *Tristan und Isolde*. Dvořák attended: ‘I was perfectly crazy about him ... following him as he walked along the streets to get a chance now and again of seeing the great little man’s face’ (*Sunday Times*, London, 10 May 1885). A decade on, with his *Third Symphony* introduced by Smetana in 1874, he celebrated the memory and the essence.

Between 1869 and 1870, 'at the height of his strongly [chromaticised] Wagnerian phase' (Clapham), Dvořák drafted three string quartets: *B17–19*, in B flat major, D major and E minor respectively – *Nos. 2–4* in the overall canon of his 14 works for the medium. He didn't think much of them – 'all prolix to a degree', remarked Paul Griffiths 40 years ago – burning the scores. But the parts (those of the B flat in another hand albeit corrected by him) survived, discovered after his death in the possession of the violinist and retired director of the Prague Conservatoire, Antonín Bennewitz (teacher of Léhar and Dvořák's son-in-law Josef Suk). Published in 1962, the first known performance of the B flat was undertaken privately in Prague by the Ondříček Quartet on 16 November 1932.

Among the longest of Dvořák's chamber works, the transiently unified B flat favours a largely open-ended, through-composed, broadly monothematic stance, eschewing Classical sonata design, at its best foreshadowing later developments in the output of others. Ondřej Šupka ([www.antonin-dvorak.cz](http://www.antonin-dvorak.cz)) suggests that in its course Dvořák 'appears to have attempted to create ... a kind of chamber counterpart to the monumentalism of Wagner's scores: none of the movements are written in traditional form, but instead represent an unending stream of music without clear divisions or the reappearance of previous passages ... more characteristic of sections of improvisation with no points at which a listener can find bearings in the overall structure. The nature of thematic treatment is such that we have difficulty identifying the kind of clearly arranged and distinctive melodies Dvořák would produce later in his career.' A highlight is the E flat *Largo*, the melody of which was to seed the slow movement of the *Sixth Symphony* ten years hence.

**Ateş Orga**

## Ryoko Morooka



Ryoko Morooka was born in Fukuoka, Japan. After studying Chinese history at the Kyoto University she moved to Germany to study organ and church music at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hanover. Alongside her work as an organist at the St Pauls and Nazareth churches in Hanover, she also teaches at the Musikhochschule. Morooka regularly appears as a concert organist in Europe and Japan, where she appeared as the soloist in Poulenc's *Organ Concerto* at the Takaoka music festival. Since 1995 she has been a member of the Baroque Brass of London, with whom she has undertaken several tours. She is much in demand as a harmonium specialist, and has collaborated with ensembles including the Jewish Chamber Orchestra Munich, Linos Ensemble, Polish Chamber Choir and RIAS Kammerchor Berlin. *Little Sister of the Organ – Ryoko Morooka and Harmonium* was recently broadcast by Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (rbb).

## Fine Arts Quartet



From left to right: Ralph Evans, Efim Boico, Gil Sharon and Niklas Schmidt

The Fine Arts Quartet ranks among the most distinguished ensembles in chamber music today, with an illustrious history of performing success and an extensive legacy of over 200 recorded works. Founded in Chicago in 1946, the Quartet is one of the elite few to have recorded and toured internationally for over three-quarters of a century. The Quartet's renowned violinists, Ralph Evans (prizewinner in the International Tchaikovsky Competition) and Efim Boico (former concertmaster of the Orchestre de Paris under Barenboim) have performed together for 40 years. They are joined by two eminent musicians: violist Gil Sharon (founder of the Amati Ensemble), and cellist Niklas Schmidt (co-founder of Trio Fontenay). Many of the Quartet's recent releases have been selected for inclusion on

GRAMMY Awards entry lists in the categories Best Classical Album and/or Best Chamber Music Performance, and have received multiple awards and distinctions, among them: *Gramophone Award Winner* and *Recording of Legendary Status* (*The Gramophone Classical Music Guide*), *Key Recording/Top Recommendation* (*Penguin Guide to Recorded Classical Music*), *Editor's Choice* (*Gramophone* magazine), *two times Critic's Choice* (*American Record Guide*), *BBC Music Magazine Choice*, *three times Recording of the Year* (*MusicWeb International*), and a *GRAMMY Award* for producer Steven Epstein (*Fauré Quintets* with Cristina Ortiz). The Quartet also received the *CMA/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming*, given jointly by Chamber Music America and the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. Recent releases for Naxos include *Beethoven: Fugues and Rarities* (8.574051), *Dvořák: Spirit of Bohemia* (8.574205) and *Enescu: Early Chamber Music* (8.574487).

[www.fineartsquartet.com](http://www.fineartsquartet.com)

## Niklas Schmidt



The cellist of the Fine Arts Quartet, Niklas Schmidt was a founding member of the internationally acclaimed Trio Fontenay, with whom he spent two decades. Trio Fontenay recorded virtually the complete piano trio literature for the Teldec, EMI and Philips labels, and most of its discography received international awards such as the Diapason d'Or and the German Record Award (notably for its recordings of the complete Beethoven *Trios*). Schmidt has also recorded the Beethoven *Triple Concerto* with the Philharmonia Orchestra, cello sonatas by Schubert, Strauss and Rachmaninov, preludes by Moscheles, and, most recently, all of Bach's solo cello suites. He is director of the International Mendelssohn Festival (IMF) in Hamburg, has been professor of violoncello and chamber music in Hamburg since 1987, and regularly gives masterclasses all over the world. Schmidt plays a Rogeri cello (Brescia) from the year 1700.

[www.niklasschmidt.com](http://www.niklasschmidt.com)

## Stepan Simonian



Photo: Yvonne Schmedemann

The recipient of the Silver Medal at the International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition in Leipzig 2010, Russian-born German pianist Stepan Simonian (b. Moscow, 1981) has performed as a guest artist at some of the most prestigious festivals and concert venues throughout Europe, including Bachfest Leipzig; international piano festivals La Roque d'Anthéron and Piano aux Jacobins in France; the Martha Argerich Festival in Germany; Mosel Music Festival; the ProArte concert series in Hamburg; Pro Musica Hannover; Alte Oper Frankfurt; Konzerthaus Berlin and the Prinzregententheater in Munich. He has appeared as a soloist with the Bach-Collegium Stuttgart, Hamburg Symphony Orchestra, Kirov Ballet Orchestra, Sinfonia Varsovia and Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie Koblenz. Simonian's performances have been broadcast by a number of television and radio stations in Germany and Radio France, and his debut album of J.S. Bach's complete *Toccatas for Keyboard* was highly critically acclaimed. Simonian studied in Moscow and Hamburg, and since 2009 has worked as a tenure professor at his alma mater, the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, where he lectures in solo piano performance.

[www.stepansimonian.com](http://www.stepansimonian.com)

Antonín Dvořák is revered as one of the greatest composers of late 19th-century Romanticism. He is celebrated for the kind of poignant melodies redolent of Czech folk music found in the utterly charming *Bagatelles* and *Rondo* – the haunting tunes and harmonic twists of which represent the distinctive style that brought him international fame. Less known is that during the years 1868–70 Dvořák composed in a style so wild for the time that it foreshadowed the modernistic innovations of Schoenberg and his contemporaries. Dvořák's *Second Quartet* reveals fascinating examples of early experimentation before his transition into the harmonious Slavic style for which he is so beloved.

Antonín  
**DVOŘÁK**  
(1841–1904)

**Bagatelles, Op. 47, B. 79 (1878) 17:17**

- |   |                                    |      |
|---|------------------------------------|------|
| 1 | No. 1. Allegretto scherzando –     | 2:57 |
| 2 | No. 2. Tempo di minuetto: Grazioso | 3:03 |
| 3 | No. 3. Allegretto scherzando       | 3:08 |
| 4 | No. 4. Canon: Andante con moto     | 3:43 |
| 5 | No. 5. Poco allegro                | 4:20 |

**String Quartet No. 2 in B flat major, B. 17 (1868–70) 51:12**

- |    |   |       |
|----|---|-------|
| 6  | I. Allegro ma non troppo                            | 13:12 |
| 7  | II. Largo   | 14:09 |
| 8  | III. Allegro con brio                               | 6:59  |
| 9  | IV. Finale: Andante – Allegro giusto                | 16:44 |
| 10 | <b>Rondo in G minor, Op. 94, B. 171 (1891) 6:27</b> |       |

**Fine Arts Quartet**

Ralph Evans, Violin I 1–9 • Efim Boico, Violin II 1–9

Gil Sharon, Viola 6–9 • Niklas Schmidt, Cello 1–10

Ryoko Morooka, Harmonium 1–5 • Stepan Simonian, Piano 10

Recorded: 20–21 December 2022 6–9 at Die Abteikirche Marienmünster and 20 September 2021 1–5  
and 7 March 2020 10 at the Forum der Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Hamburg, Germany

Producer, engineer and editor: Phillip Schulz • Booklet notes: Ateş Orga

Publisher: Bärenreiter Verlag • Special thanks to Dr Sidney Grossberg

Cover: *The Beginning of Autumn* (1920) by František Kaván (1866–1941)

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