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1998 - 1999 SEASON SERIES

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STUDE CONCERT HALL * ALICE PRATT BROWN HALL * RICE UNIVERSITY
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1998, 8:00 P.M.

PRAŽÁK QUARTET

Vaclav Remes, Violin • Vlastimil Holek, Violin
Josef Kluson, Viola • Michal Kanka, Cello

PROGRAM

FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN (1732-1809)

Quartet in D Major, Op. 76, No. 5

Allegretto-Allegro • Largo: Cantabile e mesto

Minuetto: Allegro • Finale: Presto

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ (1890-1959)

Quartet No. 7 "Concerto da Camera"

Poco allegro • Andante

Allegro vivo

... *Intermission* ...

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Quartet in G Major, Op. 106

Allegro moderato • Adagio ma non troppo

Molto vivace • Finale: Andante sostenuto-Allegro con fuoco

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HOUSTON'S CLASSIC CHOICE

QUARTET IN D MAJOR,
OP. 76, NO. 5
 FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN

In 1796, Haydn was sixty-four and at the height of his fame. He had returned to Vienna from a highly successful London tour the year before, an event important enough to be recorded in the newspapers. Most of the work of his remaining years was concentrated on the last six masses and the two great oratorios. Of the very few instrumental works of this final period was the set of six quartets published as Opus 76, almost his last works in the medium. They were commissioned by Count Erdödy and dedicated to him. Some were performed as early as 1797, but the set was not printed until 1799. These quartets have remained among the most widely admired and performed of Haydn's works.

The fifth quartet of the set shows Haydn's inventiveness in both form and harmony. Instead of the usual sonata-allegro, Haydn begins with a movement that is an unorthodox theme and variations, opening with a *siciliana*-like *Allegretto* connoting pastoral serenity. After the melody is repeated with decorations in the first violin, it is developed in a livelier section in the minor. The major theme returns with further decorations and leads to a long coda marked *allegro*, which is essentially a second development section.

The fast coda of the first movement provides contrast for the slow second

movement, a *Largo* marked *cantabile e mesto*, "songlike and sad." Another element of contrast is that it is in the rather startling key of F-sharp major (six sharps), a key based on the third of the main key of D. Although it is in a major key, it expresses, in H. C. Robbins Landon's words, "a profound but *objective* sense of melancholy—as if its composer were mourning for some lost antique thing of beauty." A modified sonata form with only one real subject, this movement modulates very freely in its development, going to C-sharp major, E major, E minor, and G major before returning to F-sharp major and ending with quiet dignity.

The minuet, back in D major, begins with a motif that is a speeded-up version of the theme of the preceding movement. It becomes a flowing melody that is thrown off-center by the rhythmic changes in the second section. The trio, in D minor, features a rapid line in the low register of the cello.

Haydn's characteristic humor asserts itself in the finale. The movement begins with a cadential formula that is normally heard at the end of a movement. Bouncing eighth notes in the second violin and viola accompany a cheerful dance-like tune played by the first violin and then by the cello. After this material is thoroughly developed, the piece ends with the same chord figure with which it opened.

This is the third performance of this work on a Friends of Music program; it was last played in February 1979 by the Tel Aviv Quartet.

QUARTET NO. 7

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

"I am always more myself in pure chamber music," Martinů wrote. "I cannot express what pleasure it gives me when I start work and begin to handle four instrumental parts. In a quartet one feels at home. Outside it may be raining and darkness is falling but these four voices take no heed. They are independent, free to do what they like, free to create a unity, a new harmonious note."

Born and raised in Czechoslovakia, Martinů had spent seventeen years in France before World War II drove him to the United States in 1941; the Seventh Quartet was composed in New York in the summer of 1947. It was published with the title "Concerto da Camera," perhaps to emphasize the equality of the voices, and perhaps also to stress its intimate nature. It displays Martinů's individual mix of late Romantic chromaticism and folk-like pentatonic material, with some rhythms influenced by Stravinsky.

The first movement is built on the opening five-note motif sounded in unison by all but the first violin. This motif is developed by inversion, augmentation, and fragmentation, often with a motoric rhythmic propulsion, until, after a quiet passage, it appears in its initial form.

The *Andante* begins with a duet in the violins and proceeds without an immediately graspable tune but with a texture sweetened by parallel thirds and sixths. One germ that soon appears and is developed extensively is a pair of descending eighth notes. The

first part of the movement tends toward a gently descending motion, while the latter part tends to rise, with shorter note values.

According to his biographer Brian Large, Martinů shows his enthusiasm for the work of Haydn in this quartet. The finale, marked *Allegro vivo*, is the most Haydnesque movement in the quartet; both the spirit and some of the figures of the finale of Haydn's D major quartet—the one just heard—are echoed in Martinů's finale. The form and the harmonies, however, are pure Martinů.

This is the first performance of this work on a Friends of Music program; however, the Friends have presented six other Martinů works in previous concerts.

QUARTET IN G MAJOR, OP. 106

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Dvořák composed this quartet in 1895 on returning to Prague after his successful and productive visit to the United States. Gervase Hughes says this quartet, "the finest he ever wrote," may be regarded as "a hymn of thanksgiving for his safe return, alive and well, to his native land."

The quartet opens with a pair of motifs that provide much of the material for the rest of the first movement: the violins leap upwards twice, tremble, and then the first descends in rapid triplets. The lower strings announce a related theme that is picked up and developed by all voices, punctuated by the descending triplets. The first violin introduces a more lyrical second subject in slower triplets, supported by a figure in the

lower strings that accompanied the opening motif. Dvořák develops this material with great skill and ingenuity, providing both variety and unifying elements.

Returning to Prague seems to have unleashed Dvořák's Slavic spirit in the *Adagio*. A single plaintive theme is sung in the major and then in the minor; as the movement proceeds, the accompanying patterns and countermelodies grow more complex, leading to a climactic moment when all four instruments, straining for ever more sound, play three- and four-note chords. After a return to a quieter and simpler statement of the theme, a final burst of passion relaxes into a quiet close.

The third movement, a scherzo, begins in B minor with a rhythmic theme that turns into a galloping figure in the lower strings over which the second violin chases the first. The first of the two trio sections features playful alternations between triple and duple rhythms. After a repeat of the scherzo, the second trio is waltzlike and a bit slower, until it accelerates into the final statement of the scherzo.

As if to gather its energies, the finale begins slowly and quietly (*Andante sostenuto*) before it turns into an *Allegro con fuoco* ("with fire"). The syncopated initial theme leads to a transitional theme with the violin high above a busy accompaniment. The viola and cello introduce the next section, which is followed by a return to the initial *allegro* theme. Then the opening *andante* returns, this time leading to a section that brings

back the principal themes from the first movement. After the tempo picks up, the viola-cello duet returns, mixed with the material from the first movement. The initial syncopated theme returns only in the coda, which brings the quartet to an energetic, almost orchestral close.

This is the third performance of this work on a Friends of Music program; it was last played in October 1990 by the Pražák Quartet. Program notes by Edward Doughtie.

PRAŽÁK QUARTET

Founded in 1972 by students at the Prague Conservatory, the Pražák Quartet quickly secured top prizes from prestigious competitions, including the Evian and the Prague International Competition. Since 1979 they have toured worldwide, appearing regularly on major stages throughout Europe, North America, Japan, and Australia, earning critical acclaim for their technical mastery and expressive lyricism. On their last visit to Houston, the *Houston Chronicle* noted that "the group produced a luminescence almost never heard in American quartets." Their recordings—on the Supraphon, Panton, Orfeo, Ottavo, Nuova Era, and Harmonia Mundi labels—have been awarded the *Grand Prix International du Disque* and the *Diapason d'Or*. Vaclav Remes plays a violin made by Lorenzo Guadagnini around 1730; Vlastimil Holec plays a 1995 violin by Tomas Pilar, who also made Josef Kluson's viola in 1985. Michael Kanka plays a cello by Giovanni Grancino from 1710; it is on loan from the State Collection.