

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS  
CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

KENNETH SILLITO, LEADER

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HARVEY DE SOUZA, VIOLIN    DUNCAN FERGUSON, VIOLA  
MARTIN BURGESS, VIOLIN    STEPHEN ORTON, CELLO  
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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2004

— PROGRAM —

*Sextet for Strings in A major, Op. 48*

ANTONIN DVOŘÁK 1841-1904

Allegro moderato-Allegro con brio

Dumka (Poco Allegretto-Andante)

Furiant (Presto)

Finale: Theme with Variations

(Allegretto grazioso, quasi Andantino-Allegro-Presto)

*Sextet for Strings*

ERWIN SCHULHOFF 1894-1942

Composed in: 1924

Allegro risoluto

Tranquillo (Andante)

Burlesca

Molto Adagio

— INTERMISSION —

*Octet for Strings in C major, Op. 7*

GEORGES ENESCO 1881-1955

Tres modere-Tres fougueux-Lentement-Mouvement de Valse

*Additional Notes: the work is performed in one continuous movement.*

ANTONIN DVORÁK (1841-1904)  
*String Sextet in A Major, Op. 48 (1878)*

It was Dvořák's (and our) great good fortune to have in Brahms a generous and powerful admirer. The hegemony of German music was such that, as a Czech living in Prague, Dvořák's career would probably have failed to progress and he would certainly have failed to gain international notice were it not for the intervention of Brahms and his German circle. It was Brahms, among others, who as a member of the Austrian State Stipendium, established to assist young, poor and talented artists, voted the young composer a stipend of support during the early years of his career, and it was Brahms who succeeded in getting Dvořák's first compositions published in Germany, a step essential to the recognition of his name and his music. Ultimately, it was Brahms' two string sextets which were probably the inspiration for the work in the same format which we hear this evening. Despite the efforts of some of his German and Austrian well-wishers, Dvořák resisted advice to move to Austria. Instead, he stayed in Prague, taking on the contemporary ideal of exploiting the native music of the Czech people in his own compositions and introducing it to the musical world at large. We will hear this regional influence in the Sextet, which incorporates two important national musical forms, the *dumka* and the *furiant*.

Written in only two weeks, close on the heels of his first set of Slavonic Dances, the Sextet was his first chamber work to be noticed abroad, receiving its premier in Berlin. The first movement is notable for its ravishingly lovely opening melody. A Slavonic flavor, via the idiomatic rhythms and harmonies, is also unmistakable. The second movement is titled *Dumka (Elegie)*; *Poco Allegretto-Adagio, quasi tempo di marcia-Andante*.

As is characteristic of this form, it features multiple shifts in tempi, fast and slow, and contrasts of dynamics, loud and soft, as well as a variety of dance elements. Again, the seductive beauty of the melodic line is striking. In the third movement, Dvořák gives us a *furiant* (a lively dance in 3/4 time, usually with strong rhythms working at cross purposes) instead of the more usual Scherzo. This one is rather tame.

The Finale is a set of variations, *Thema mit Variationen: Allegretto grazioso, quasi Andantino*. In this theme one hears the full influence of the old Church modes which were the backbone of and gave the particular character to Czech (and Hungarian) music, differentiating it from music of Western Europe. After hearing what Dvořák does with this theme and with this entire wonderful work, it is not difficult to understand why, despite coming from the "wrong" part of Europe, Dvořák gained fame all over that continent and the New World, too.

*Program notes © by Nora Avins Klein, July, 2005*

## Ervin Schulhoff (1894-1942)

### *String Sextet* (1924)

Ervin Schulhoff's life reflects the tragedy of 20th C. Europe. Born into a comfortable Jewish family in Prague in the last decade of the 19th C., it started out well. His musical gifts were recognized early, and at the suggestion of Antonin Dvořák, he studied piano with the best teacher in Prague. He moved on to the conservatories of Vienna and Leipzig, winning the Mendelssohn Prize for piano performance. Then it was on to study composition with Reger and Debussy, and another Mendelssohn Prize, this time for composition. In 1915, as a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was recalled from Germany to be drafted into the Austrian army. In the aftermath of Austria's collapse he returned to Germany where the artistic life was more to his liking than in the newly-formed Czechoslovakia. There he became a leader of the post-war avant-garde scene, associating with such artists as Paul Klee, the German Dadaists and prominent young musicians, while organizing and performing in concerts of the New Viennese School and modernists of his own country. He also gained fame as a brilliant jazz pianist in night clubs of Berlin and Dresden. The collapse of the German economy in the 20's prompted his return to Prague to a position at the Conservatory. After what he had seen of war and economic chaos he began to take an active interest in the political ideologies of the time, ultimately joining the Communist Party and, as protection from the Germans, accepted Soviet citizenship. When the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia both his Jewish origins and his politics landed him in the Würtzburg concentration camp, where he died in 1942.

In 1920, he was living in Germany when, under the influence of Schoenberg, he wrote the first movement of the Sextet we hear tonight. He put it away, and when he took it up again four years later, he had left behind the fashionable styles of the day, turning instead to a somewhat Neo-classical style, inspired by Slavic folk tunes, and drawing on his own fertile inventions. He completed the last three movements in a matter of weeks. The work had its premiere at an international chamber music festival, performed by a Czech quartet which was rounded out by Paul and Rudi Hindemith playing second viola and cello. It is dedicated to Francis Poulenc. Although well received, it was not published until 1978, long after Schulhoff's death, as his music and his reputation were being retrieved.

Although written during two separate musical periods, the work is supremely confident, unified by a single motif appearing in all four movements consisting of the triad C-D flat-G—sometimes played in sequence, sometimes simultaneously. Its form is quite different from the classic 19th C. string sextets of Brahms and Dvořák; it is difficult to recall that Schulhoff's life actually intersected with Dvořák's! The influence of the Second Viennese School on the opening Allegro risoluto is unmistakable. *The Tranquillo (Andante)*, on the other hand, gives clear homage to his French tutelage. Slavic folk dance elements are heard in the *Burlesca (Allegro molto con spirito)*. The final movement, *Molto adagio*, with no easily-recognizable structure, leaves one with an impression of profound introspection, a premonition of the darkness to come, and a desire, I think, to hear more.

Program note © by Nora Avins Klein, August, 2005

GEORGES ENESCO (1881-1955)  
*Octet for Strings in C Major, Op. 7*

Today regarded as Romania's foremost composer, Gheorghe Enescu was born in 1881 in Liveni, which is located in the northeastern section of the country. (The more commonly known form of his name, Georges Enesco, results from the French transcription of the Romanian ending.) Enescu was the last and the only surviving child of his mother's twelve children; four did not live past birth and the others died of meningitis and diphtheria. Understandably, he was over-protected by his mother and had very little contact with children of his age. His early musical exposure was to both the local fiddlers and gypsy bands of Moldavia, and to Romanian liturgical music. Both of Enescu's grandfathers, as well as several uncles, were Orthodox priests, and his father, a somewhat well-to-do landowner, also sang and conducted a choir.

At the age of four Enescu was given a violin and he began violin lessons with a gypsy violinist who could not read music and who taught his students to imitate him by ear. When Enescu's talent became apparent he was sent to study with the violin professor at the Conservatoire of Iasi (the capital of Moldavia). He quickly learned to read music and added piano studies to his agenda, enabling him to follow his inclination toward composition.

At the age of seven he entered the Conservatory in Vienna. He was only the second student to enter below the age of ten—the other student being Fritz Kreisler. During his seven years in Vienna, Enescu was exposed to the two great composers of the time, Brahms and Wagner. Opposing camps of followers had developed around these two men, but Enescu felt nothing but admiration for the work of both men.

Enescu then transferred to the Paris Conservatory where his composition instructors were Massenet, Faure, and Andre Gédalge, his favorite. Enescu agreed with Gédalge that polyphony was the essence of music. Enescu felt that, "Harmonic progressions only amount to a sort of elementary improvisation. However short it is, a piece deserves to be called a musical composition only if it has a line, a melody, or, even better, melodies superimposed on one another." By the time Enescu left the Conservatory in 1899, he was an accomplished violinist, pianist, and composer.

*The String Octet*, dedicated to Gédalge, was completed in 1900 when Enescu was nineteen years old, and was the most massive contrapuntal work that he ever wrote. He declared of his work on the Octet, "I was gripped by a problem of construction: I wanted to write this Octet in four connected movements, in such a way that although each movement would have its own independent existence the whole piece would form a single movement in sonata form, on a huge scale." The listener who is familiar with Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht" may notice some similarities in voicing, harmony and style. However Schoenberg's work, composed in 1899, was probably still unknown to Enescu in 1900.

The first movement is a spacious presentation of themes and counter themes in 3/2 time. Its opening melody is a unison narrative lasting nearly a minute, somewhat reminiscent of the opening statement in Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3. The second movement is an energetic fugue. The third is a nocturne that leads directly into the fourth movement. This final movement, composed to some extent in the character of a waltz, is a complicated restatement of all melodies used in the first three movements, in combination as well as superimposed.

The themes throughout the Octet have common characteristics that are revealed in the last movement; similarities of interval leaps, lengthy narrative style, much use of unisons, and recognizable modal tonality. These techniques continued to be used prominently in Enescu's work as he matured as a composer. Enescu eventually sanctioned the playing of the Octet by a full string orchestra, restricting the melodic parts to soloists.

*Program notes* © by Margaret Bragg, July, 2005

## *The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble*

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The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields was formed in 1959 by a group of eleven enthusiastic musicians with the aim of performing in public without a conductor. Their first three recordings led to a succession of long-term contracts, and the Academy quickly took their place among the most recorded ensembles in history. As the repertoire expanded from Baroque to Mozart, Bartok and Beethoven, so it became necessary for the principal violin, Neville Marriner, to conduct the larger orchestra.

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble was created in 1967 to perform the larger chamber works—from quintets to octets—with players who customarily work together, instead of the usual string quartet with additional guests. Drawn from the principal players of the orchestra, the Chamber Ensemble tours as a string octet, string sextet, and in other configurations including winds. Its touring commitments are extensive, with annual visits to France, Germany, and Spain, and frequent tours to North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan.

The Ensemble's fall 2005 North American tour brings them to eleven cities, including (among others) The Mondavi Center (Davis, CA), Anchorage, Salt Lake City, Houston, San Antonio, and Dartmouth College.

Contracts with Philips Classics, Hyperion, and Chandos have led to the release of over thirty CDs by the Chamber Ensemble.

*The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists, Marblehead, MA.*