

Collegiate Capital Management, Inc. & Chamber Music Raleigh present

## Amernet String Quartet

North Carolina Museum of Art

Sunday, October 23, 2022

Misha Vitenson, violin

Avi Nagin, violin

Michael Klotz, viola

Jason Calloway, cello

### Janacek -- Quartet #1 'Kreutzer Sonata'

I. Adagio con moto

II. Con moto

III. Con moto - Vivo - Andante

IV. Con moto (Adagio) - Più mosso

### Schulhoff -- Five Pieces

I. *Alla Valse viennese*. Allegro

II. *Alla Serenata*. Allegretto con moto

III. *Alla Czeca*. Molto allegro

IV. *Alla Tango milonga*. Andante

V. *Alla Tarantella*. Prestissimo con fuoco

### INTERMISSION

### Dvorak -- Quartet in G major, Op. 106

I. Allegro moderato

II. Adagio ma non troppo

III. Molto vivace

IV. Finale. Andante sostenuto -- Allegro con fuoco

This Amernet String Quartet performance is funded in part by a grant from South Arts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the North Carolina Arts Council.

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## Amernet String Quartet – October 23, 2022

### String Quartet No. 1, “*Kreutzer Sonata*”

Leos Janáček  
1854-1928

Until his early sixties Leos Janáček was little known outside his native Moravia (now in the Czech Republic), where he served as music teacher, folk music collector and composer. He was valued primarily as a composer of operas, but these were seldom performed beyond Brno, Moravia's main city.

In 1916, when Janáček was 62, events occurred that changed his life and gave him the inspiration and the impetus to write the music on which his fame now rests. First came the successful performance of his opera *Jenufa* in Prague, as well as the concomitant rise in his awareness of the nationalist movement in what was to become Czechoslovakia. At the same time Janáček, a married man, fell in love with 24-year-old Kamila Stösslova, the wife of an antique dealer. Kamila maintained a warm Platonic relationship with the composer, but there was no actual affair. Nevertheless, she served as inspiration to an unceasing flow of magnificent music: Four operas, the *Glagolitic* (old Slovenian) *Mass*, two string quartets, the *Sinfonietta* and the wind sextet *Mládi* (Youth).

Janáček's Quartet No.1, subtitled “*Kreutzer Sonata*”, was inspired not by Beethoven's work, but by a novella of the same name by Leo Tolstoy, a great believer in free relationships outside of formal wedlock, a belief that Janáček clearly empathized with. It is the story of a man traveling on a train who shares a compartment with a total stranger. The stranger recounts the story of how he came to murder his wife, whom he suspected of having an affair with a violinist who he himself had introduced her to. The catalyst for the murder was their performing Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*. The husband returns home unexpectedly from a trip to find the violinist in his wife's intimate company, and stabs her to death as the violinist flees. The murderer is acquitted because the court decided he was a wronged husband who'd killed his wife in order to defend his outraged honor.

Janáček composed the Quartet in 1923, using parts of a similarly titled piano trio written in 1909 for a celebration of Tolstoy's 80th birthday. The trio was performed a number of times but never published and vanished when the Quartet appeared. In one of the very few examples of program music for chamber ensemble, the music unfolds over the sporadic rhythmic sound of the moving train that appears in each movement. In fact, the four movements are the only concession to the traditional string quartet structure.

The piece is, frankly, puzzling and leaves much to the personal associations of the listener. While its title alludes to Tolstoy's novella, the music is in no way narrative. The opening theme recurs repeatedly in all four movements, suggesting a kind of *idée fixe* that perhaps portrays the jealous passion of the husband, but there is no external evidence for such an interpretation. The nervous grinding of the strings is also a persistent motive throughout the work. Rather, the listener should attend more to the innovative structures, harmonies and string writing inspired by an illicit passion. As part of the puzzle, a distorted fragment of the *Kreutzer Sonata* appears in the third movement, but even this is hard to find.

## Five Pieces for String Quartet

Erwin Schulhoff  
1894-1942

One of the glib sayings in the 1930s, following the rise of Nazism and the expulsion of so many artists from Germany, was that Germany's loss was our gain. What the world forgot was the fate of the many artists who did not escape the Nazi death machine.

In the last decades there has been a concerted effort to rescue the music of some talented composers whose potential for greatness perished in the German concentration camps. As these artists gradually disappeared, victims of starvation, disease or the gas chambers, some of their manuscripts were hidden or smuggled out.

One of the most notable of these artists was the Czech composer Ervin Schulhoff, who died in the Wülzburg concentration camp in Bavaria in 1942. He was also a virtuoso pianist, well known in the 1920s and '30s for his jazz performances and recordings. Schulhoff showed precocious musical ability, and it was Dvořák who, in 1901, recommended that the seven-year-old boy follow a musical career. He studied composition, piano and conducting in Germany, and at the outbreak of WWI was conscripted into the Austrian army, serving to the bitter end of the war.

Composed in 1923, the Five Pieces for String Quartet juxtaposes the Baroque dance suite with the dissonances and spiky rhythms of 1920s Berlin. The work expresses the words Schulhoff wrote in 1919: "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". It was dedicated to French composer Darius Milhaud.

1. *Alla Valse Viennese*. This spiky piece with its sense of parody, takes its rhythm and tempo from the dance but its harmonies from Schulhoff's contemporaries.
2. *Alla Serenata*. Not music for wooing.
3. *Alla Czeca*. The composer's Czech background comes clearly through, but in a modern dress.
4. *Alla Tango*. The ostinato accompaniment figure and the formal structure is that of the South American dance.
5. *Tarantella*. A wild prestissimo dance.

## String Quartet in G major, Op. 106

Antonín Dvořák  
1841-1904

With the great popularity of Antonín Dvořák's "American" String Quartet, Op. 96, we tend to overlook, unjustifiably, the 13 others he completed throughout his life. While the early ones are often naïve and derivative, many of the later ones are original and exciting works that deserve at least as much exposure as the "American".

When in April 1895 homesickness for his native Bohemia brought Dvořák back from his three-year stay in America, he carried among his papers an incomplete string quartet in A flat major. After a summer's rest, he went back to composing in November, but instead of finishing the incomplete quartet, started on a new one in G major that became Op.106.

Dvořák's joy at being back in his beloved Bohemian countryside permeates every movement of the Quartet. He was happy to be back in his native Bohemia, with his friends and his family, and especially his country home in Vysoka, outside Prague. But the joy is tinged with significant moments of poignant melancholy. The birdcall-like opening sounds as if the music is bounding off the instruments, yet the themes themselves are spare by Dvořák's standards. It is in their elaboration that they build in richness and emotional intensity.

The slow second movement is the emotional heart of the Quartet, its intensity resembling the parallel movement of the "American" Quartet. It presents a single theme elaborated through a series of free-form variations, alternating between the cheerful major mode and the melancholy minor. It gradually builds up in intensity before returning to the gentle mood of the opening. The rhythmically vigorous *Molto vivace* third movement is a scherzo in all but name. By contrast, the two trios are gentle pastoral songs.

The finale, with its richness of themes includes a reprise of the main theme from the first movement. It opens hesitantly and simply, as if Dvořák were unsure how to proceed, but quickly bursts forth with unsurpassed ebullience. But the movement involves a multitude of major/minor mood swings, right down to the coda, where Dvořák quickly rescues it from a downturn.

Program notes by:  
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