

Fibonacci Quartet

Luna De Mol violin
Kryštof Kohout violin
Elliot Kempton viola
Findlay Spence cello

Erwin Schulhoff (1894–1942)

Five Pieces for String Quartet (1924)

14'

- i. Alla Valse Viennese
- ii. Alla Serenata
- iii. Alla Czeca
- iv. Alla Tango Milonga
- v. Alla Tarantella

Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884)

Quartet No.1 in E minor 'From My Life' (1876)

32'

- i. Allegro vivo appassionato
- ii. Allegro moderato à la Polka
- iii. Largo sostenuto
- iv. Vivace

Fibonacci Quartet is a Britten Pears Young Artist for 2024/25, here for a week-long residency on the Chamber Music in Residence course. One of Europe's leading young string quartets, the Fibonacci Quartet is the only ensemble to win both first and audience prizes at the Premio Paolo Borciani International String Quartet Competition in Italy (2024).

Formed at the Guildhall School, the Fibonacci Quartet is a resident ensemble at the Escuela Superior de Musica Reina Sofia in Madrid and the Dutch String Quartet Academy in Amsterdam. It was recently selected to join the Young Classical Artist Trust roster.

During the 2024/25 season, the Quartet will perform extensively throughout Europe, and undertake residencies with ProQuartet in Paris, as well as teaching and performing at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff in the position of resident quartet.

The Quartet has broadcast on Dutch National Television, Dutch Concert Radio, BBC Radio 3 and RAI tv, Italy. It was honoured to work closely with Kaija Saariaho on a new recording of 'Terra Memoria' made at the Barbican as part of the BBC 'Total Immersion' series.

Schulhoff: Five Pieces for String Quartet

The Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff was – by his own admission – extremely fond of night-club dancing. He indulged in it for hours at a time and occasionally danced all night – it provided, he said, phenomenal inspiration for his work. He was born in Prague to a German-Jewish family before studying in Vienna, Leipzig and Cologne, and absorbing the new American jazz rhythms along the way. The *Five Pieces* are a product of this colourful heritage – a satirical take on five popular dances, put together in the manner of a Baroque suite. That was their only link with the past: musically, Schulhoff built on the experimental sounds of Schoenberg and his flourishing Second Viennese School, along with a sprinkling of his beloved jazz. Together, the pieces vividly express 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.’

The *Five Pieces* had a triumphant premiere in 1924: according to one critic, Schulhoff was a composer ‘with the sense not to take himself too seriously’. The audience, he noted, was duly grateful.

Smetana: String Quartet No.1 ‘From My Life’

Smetana left us in no doubt as to the autobiographical nature of his first string quartet. Not only did he provide a detailed explanation of each movement and its relevance to his own experience, he underlined the fact by calling the work ‘From My Life’.

He was in his early fifties when he wrote it and was at last beginning to achieve recognition in his native Bohemia. The country was forging its own identity within the Austro-Hungarian empire and Smetana was fast becoming the ‘father’ of a new, nationalist style of music. But no sooner had he embarked on his ultimate expression of patriotism – the huge symphonic cycle *Ma Vlast* (‘My Fatherland’) – than his hearing began to deteriorate, and within a few weeks, he was completely deaf. In response, he turned to the intimate medium of the string quartet for a very private work, ‘purposely written’ he said, ‘for four instruments which, as in a small circle of friends, talk among themselves about what has oppressed me so significantly’.

The first movement depicts what Smetana called his ‘youthful leanings toward art – the Romantic atmosphere and the inexpressible yearning for something I could neither express nor define’. At the same time, a dramatic opening theme for the viola – which returns to haunt the finale – warns of his ‘future misfortune’. The second movement brings more cheerful memories and represents his ‘dancing’ years – a Bohemian Polka adding a touch of patriotism – and then comes a Largo in which Smetana looks back at the happiness of his first love.

But it is in the closing movement that the music most clearly mirrors both the triumph and the tragedy of the composer’s later years, as the initially buoyant mood is shattered by a disturbing, high-pitched note for the violin. This, along with the ‘warning’ theme from the opening, depicts the ringing in his ears that marked the start of his deafness and – as he saw it – the shattering of his dreams. There follows no grand conclusion, just quiet acceptance as the music simply fades away – much as it will have done for the composer himself.

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