Pavel Haas Quartet

Veronika Jaruskova, violin
Marek Zwiebel, violin
Radim Sedmidubsky, viola
Peter Jarusek, cello

Concertino for string quartet  IGOR STRAVINSKY  
(1882–1971)

Quartet in F Major  MAURICE RAVEL  
(1875–1937)

Allegro moderato
Assez vif
Très lent
Vif et agité

—INTERMISSION—

Quartet in A-flat Major, Op. 105  ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK  
(1841–1904)

Adagio ma non troppo: Allegro appassionato
Molto vivace
Lento e molto cantabile
Allegro non tanto

Discography: SUPRAPHON
Exclusive Management: ARTS MANAGEMENT GROUP, INC., New York, NY 10019
About the Program

**IGOR STRAVINSKY**

Born: June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum, Russia  
Died: April 6, 1971, New York City

**Concertino for Strings**

In *Igor Stravinsky: An Autobiography*, the composer described the genesis of the Concertino: "M. Pochon [Alfred Pochon, first violinist of the Flonzaley Quartet] wished to introduce a contemporary work into their almost exclusively classical repertoire, and asked me to write them an ensemble piece, in form and length of my own choosing, to appear in the programs of their numerous tours. So it was for them that I composed *Concertino*, a piece in one single movement, and treated in form of a free sonata-allegro with a definitely *concertante* part for the first violin, and this, on account of its limited dimensions, led me to give it the diminutive title: *Concertino* (*piccolo concerto*).”

Stravinsky began to work on the Concertino in July 1920, while on summer holiday at Carantec, Brittany; it was finished on September 24 and dedicated to the Flonzaley Quartet. Much later, in 1952, the piece was revised for twelve instruments—ten winds, violin and cello. Classified among Stravinsky’s earliest Neoclassical works, the Concertino strives to assert, in twentieth-century terms, the principles laid down in the eighteenth century—clarity, emotional restraint, detachment, and objectivity. As in most of his other works, Stravinsky tried to avoid any overt display of emotion. “I consider that music is by its very nature essentially powerless to express anything at all. *Expression* has never been an inherent property of music.” Stravinsky was also interested in jazz at the time, and a few traces of ragtime can be detected in the music.

The two principal musical gestures of the one-movement, six-minute Concertino are the harshly dissonant ascending scales that open the work and the busy, motoric figures that follow. The slower middle section, which comes after another scale, is largely a cadenza for the first violin and functions as the development, mostly of the scalar idea. The tempo and mood pick up for the final section, which recalls, in general terms, the two original themes—the rising scales and the active figuration. The music quiets at the end; Stravinsky wrote the word *sospirando*, sighing or plaintive, over the last notes.

**MAURICE RAVEL**

Born: March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France  
Died: December 28, 1937, Paris

**String Quartet in F Major**

Even though Ravel worked on his sole string quartet from late 1902 to April 1903, while still a student at the Paris Conservatoire, it is far from a student work. The piece integrates the several styles that he had incorporated into his own musical vocabulary. A major influence was Debussy, and particularly Debussy’s Quartet in G minor, with its Impressionist quality and fascinating tone colors. At the same time, the clear and transparent textures, the impelling logic, and tight control of the basic organization bear testimony to Ravel’s strong Neoclassical proclivity and admiration for Mozart. Finally, some of the strange and unfamiliar tonal effects reflect an interest in the exotic music of the Far East.

The generally excellent initial reactions to the quartet included some sharp criticism, with a few commentators even suggesting that Ravel make extensive revisions. Debussy, a good if not intimate friend of Ravel, advised the younger composer, “In the name of the gods of music, and in mine, do not touch a single note of what you have written in your quartet.” Despite this evidence of Debussy’s support and approval, a comparison of the Debussy and Ravel was moved to comment sadly, “It’s probably better for us, after all, to be on frigid terms for illogical reasons.”

The quartet opens with a thematic group that contains two distinctive ideas: a rich, warmly scored melody involving the entire quartet and a first violin melody of similar character over rapid figures in the second violin and viola. After speeding up to a climax, the music quiets, and the soaring second theme is stated by the first violin and viola playing two octaves apart, producing a most striking theme tone color. Although the rest of the movement follows the dictates of regular sonata form, the precise writing, the exciting tonal effects, and the powerful climax makes this a most impressive movement.

Ravel conjures up the sound of a Javanese *gamelan* orchestra in the swift-moving *pizzicato* opening of the second movement by having the outer instruments playing in ¼ meter (three groups of two eighth notes to a measure), while the inner parts play in 6/8 meter (two groups of three eighths in the same measure). Trills and tremolos create a lustrous sheen as the movement continues. The cello alone plays a transition to the slow, moody middle section. Although they are not exactly parallel, the extremely lyrical themes here seem to grow from the second subject of the first movement. A shortened reprise of the opening section concludes the movement.

Ravel achieves an improvisatory rhapsodic feeling in the slow third movement, with its continually shifting tempi and episodic construction. He is also able, with consummate skill, to weave the opening melody of the quartet in with the new melodic content. As in the previous movements, there is an ever-
changing progression of new and imaginative tone colors, a remarkable achievement, considering the fact Ravel had at his disposal only four instruments, not the strings, winds and percussion of a symphony orchestra.

The vigorous finale opens with an angry snarl followed by a long-held note, repeated twice before the movement starts moving forward. Its awkward five-beat meter, possibly Russian in inspiration, lends it an unsettling character. The rest of the movement alternates the contrasting expressive and lyrical melodies, including returns of the first movement theme, with repeats of the opening outburst.

The quartet, which was dedicated to Fauré, was introduced in Paris by the Heymann Quartet on March 5, 1904.

By early 1895, after having been in the United States about three years, Dvořák was eager to return to his native Bohemia. He missed his relatives and friends, the Bohemian countryside and cities, and yearned to see his country home in Vysoka, just outside Prague. While in this wistful mood, but still living in New York, Dvořák began composing a new string quartet, his Op. 105, on March 26, 1895. He finished exactly seventy measures of the first movement before sailing homeward in early April.

Dvořák spent the following months at Vysoka, but did no composing. In August he wrote to a friend, “My muse is now quite silent. For the whole four months I have not even taken up my pen.” In the fall, though, when he returned to Prague to resume teaching at the Conservatory, he felt ready to start writing again. Instead of continuing with Op. 105, however, he began a new quartet, which he marked Op. 106. On December 12, three days after Op. 106 was done, Dvořák returned to Op. 105, finishing it on December 30, 1895. Op. 105 proved to be the last of the fourteen quartets that Dvořák wrote, his last piece of chamber music; the production of the following years consisted entirely of symphonic poems and operas.

In Op. 105 there are no overt traces of either the Americanisms he acquired from his stay in the United States or of the Slavonic character that infused so much of his earlier music. Rather, these elements are integrated into a wholly unified work that seems both a celebration of Dvořák’s joy at being back home and his confident mastery of the quartet medium.

Before beginning the flowing, optimistic first movement, Dvořák inserts a sober, foreboding introduction. The gloom, though, is quickly dispelled by the first subject, which starts with an extroverted, rising phrase based on the melody heard in the introduction. After a bridge passage, the second theme is heard, a hunting horn call by the two violins over rushing triplets in the lower instruments, concluding the exposition (the only part that he wrote in New York). Dvořák imaginatively works out the various themes in the development section and brings them back for a final review in the recapitulation.

The second movement, one of Dvořák’s finest scherzos, is closely akin to a Furiant, the bohemian folk dance, with its verve and irresistible rhythmic energy. Written in traditional three-part form, the melody for the songlike middle section Dvořák draws from the final bars of the opening part. The movement ends with a repeat of the opening.

Intentionally, or unintentionally, the principal theme of the following Lento is somewhat similar in contour to the main theme of the first movement. The broadly conceived, romantic melody plays itself out before the highly chromatic subject of the middle section is heard above repeated notes in the cello. The music rises to an impassioned climax, and Dvořák then returns to the opening material. This time, though, the second violin plays a rapid little decorative figuration, which Dvořák marks scherzando (“playful”), adding a light touch to the predominately serious character of the first theme.

Starting at the very bottom of the cello’s range, the last movement appears to have some difficulty getting started and remains rather episodic throughout. The mood is one of warmth and geniality rather than of sparkling gaiety, of inner smiles rather than of joyful laughter. At the end, though, Dvořák’s exuberance breaks through for an all-out happy conclusion.

At Dvořák’s request the A flat quartet was introduced by four students at the Prague Conservatory on April 16, 1896, the first anniversary of his return home. Very shortly thereafter, it was taken up by professional quartets throughout Europe.

— Program notes from Guide to Chamber Music, Melvin Berger, ©2001
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The Pavel Haas Quartet has been called “the world’s most exciting string quartet” (Gramophone). Since winning the Paolo Borciani competition in Italy in spring 2005, they have established themselves as one of the world’s foremost chamber ensembles, performing at the world’s most prestigious concert halls and recording six award-winning CDs. Based in Prague, the quartet studied with Milan Skampa, the legendary violist of the Smetana Quartet, and still enjoy a close relationship with him.

In the 2017-18 season the quartet will give their debuts at the Vienna Musikverein, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Pierre Boulez Saal Berlin, and the Taipei National Concert Hall. They will return to Wigmore Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, LG Arts Center Seoul, SWR Schwetzinger Musikfestspiele, and tour the U.S. and Asia.

The Pavel Haas Quartet record exclusively for Supraphon, and their next recording of Dvořák’s String Quintet No. 3 with violist and former member of the Pavel Haas Quartet, Pavel Nikl, and Piano Quintet No. 2 with Boris Giltburg, was released in fall, 2017. Their previous recording of Smetana’s String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 was awarded both a BBC Music Magazine Award and a Gramophone Chamber Music Award in 2015. This is the fourth time the quartet have received this prestigious award, and Gramophone commented: “Their sound is, as always, immediately recognizable—partly due to the sheer richness of timbre, but also the sense of four personalities at play...at times it’s hard to believe you are in the presence of only four players, so intense is the sound.” The quartet won the same prize in 2014 for their recording of Schubert’s String Quartet Death and the Maiden and the String Quintet with cellist Danjulo Ishizaka, and their account of Dvořák’s String Quartets No. 12 “American” and No. 13 was awarded both the Gramophone Chamber Music Award and the most coveted prize, Recording of the Year in 2011. The Sunday Times commented: “Their account of the ‘American’ Quartet belongs alongside the greatest performances on disc.” The quartet also won the Diapason d’Or de l’Année in 2010 for their disc featuring Prokofiev’s String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2, and received yet another Gramophone Chamber Music Award in 2007 for their recording of Janáček’s Quartet No. 2 “Intimate Letters” and Haas’ Quartet No. 2 “From the Monkey Mountains.”

In 2007, the Cologne Philharmonic nominated the Quartet as ECHO Rising Stars, resulting in a tour to major concert halls worldwide. The Quartet took part in the BBC New Generation Artists scheme between 2007-2009, and in 2010, and was awarded the Special Ensemble Scholarship of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust.

The Quartet takes their name from the Czech composer Pavel Haas (1899-1944) who was imprisoned at Theresienstadt in 1941 and tragically died at Auschwitz three years later. His legacy includes three wonderful string quartets.