



CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES
Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 1 P.M. ET
Streaming at youtube.com/usmarineband

Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959)

Nonet No. 2, H. 374

Poco allegro
Andante
Allegretto

MSgt Elisabeth Plunk, flute
GySgt Tessa Vinson, oboe
SSgt Samuel Ross, clarinet
SSgt Stephen Rudman, bassoon
GySgt Douglas Quinzi, horn
GySgt Karen Johnson, violin
GySgt Sarah Hart, viola
SSgt Charlaine Prescott, cello
MGySgt Aaron Clay, double bass

Bedřich Smetana (1824–84)

String Quartet No. 2 in D minor

Allegro
Allegro moderato
Allegro non più moderato, ma agitato e con fuoco
Presto

GySgt Sheng-Tsung Wang and SSgt Sara Matayoshi, violin
MSgt Christopher Shieh, viola
SSgt Charlaine Prescott, cello

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

Serenade in D minor, Opus 44

Moderato quasi marcia
Menuetto; Trio: Presto
Andante con moto
Finale: Allegro molto

SSgt Trevor Mowry and GySgt Joseph DeLuccio, oboe
SSgt Jacob Moyer and SSgt Tyler Hsieh, clarinet
MGySgt Christopher McFarlane and SSgt Matthew Gregoire, bassoon
SSgt Stephen Rudman, contrabassoon
MSgt Greta Richard, SSgt Cecilia Buettgen, and SSgt Timothy Huizenga, horn
SSgt Charlaine Prescott, cello
MGySgt Glenn Dewey, double bass

PROGRAM NOTES

Nonet No. 2, H. 374

Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959)

The career of Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů closely paralleled that of fellow countryman Antonín Dvořák. Both achieved initial success outside their homeland: Dvořák in Berlin, and Martinů in Paris. Although highly influenced by the folk music of their native Czechoslovakia, both looked to more cosmopolitan models. In Germany, Dvořák gravitated to the music of Johannes Brahms, while Martinů's discovery of French art led him to Igor Stravinsky. Both composers spent time in the United States where their music was enthusiastically received by American audiences. Martinů served on the faculty of Princeton University in New Jersey for five years, while Dvořák directed the National Conservatory of Music in New York from 1892 to 1895.

Written in 1959, Martinů's Nonet was premièred at the Salzburg Festival by the Czech Nonet, to whom it was dedicated. Completed just five months before the composer's death, the work, with its unmistakably folksy wit and charm, served as a youthful tribute to the music of Martinů's homeland. The first movement sets the stage with a rustic three-note call in the clarinet, soon answered in kind by the other musicians. The music has an open, expansive, and communal feel, with obvious traces of the jazzy idioms that Martinů effectively integrated into much of his music. The second movement establishes a more restful atmosphere, as softly undulating murmurs in the flute and clarinet accompany the more rhapsodic offerings of individual soloists. The movement risks the combination of bittersweet melancholy and naive serenity to achieve a passionate honesty that is neither heavy nor trifling. The Nonet concludes with a lively rural dance in rondo form. All the usual folk music devices are fully employed while unexpected meter shifts give the music an off-kilter tint, as if the dancers were too clumsy (or perhaps too inebriated) to keep their proper footing.

String Quartet No. 2 in D minor

Bedřich Smetana (1824–84)

Bedřich Smetana, referred to as the “Father of Czech music,” was born to a Bohemian brewer who was also a talented amateur violinist. Smetana developed a passion for music and began playing violin and piano at an early age. After completing his training at the Prague Music Institute in 1847, he pursued a short-lived career as a concert pianist. His aspirations of becoming a piano virtuoso seeming unlikely, he spent the next several years making a modest living in Prague teaching, accompanying, and occasionally performing.

Frustrated with his limited success in his homeland, Smetana moved to Sweden, telling his parents, “Prague did not wish to acknowledge me, so I left it.” In Sweden, Smetana quickly rose to musical prominence as a teacher, performer, and conductor, but he had little time for composition. In spite of his successes, Smetana missed his homeland and moved back to Prague in 1861.

Smetana faced many hardships in his life. He was a poor music student who went days without food, he married his childhood sweetheart whose life ended at an early age, and he composed countless piano pieces that never launched his career. It wasn't until 1866 that the forty-two-year-old Smetana established fame, writing his best-known opera, *The Bartered Bride*. Sixteen years later, in June 1882, Smetana began composing his String Quartet No. 2. As his mental state was deteriorating, he used this work to paint a picture of his frustrating life, which appeared not to be entirely woeful, since the quartet does include a happy polka. Smetana's progress was slow, but the deaf and dispirited composer completed the piece in March 1883. Even though he wrote this quartet in difficult times, Smetana believed it was worthy of publication. His second string quartet eventually was published posthumously in 1889.

Serenade in D minor, Opus 44

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

Antonín Dvořák spent most of his life in the village of Nalahozeves, north of Prague. He studied music at the Prague Organ School and, by 1862, was principal violist in the Bohemian Provisional Theatre Orchestra. Bedřich Smetana became the chief conductor of that orchestra in 1866 and was clearly a tremendous influence on the young composer. Dvořák left his performing post in 1871 in order to commit more time to composition. A prolific composer, he won the Austrian State Stipendium three out of four years between 1875 and 1878, and he caught the attention of Johannes Brahms. Brahms championed Dvořák's work and convinced his own publishing company, Simrock, to take on the young Czech.

Shortly after Simrock agreed to publish Dvořák's works, it commissioned him to compose the first set of Slavonic Dances, no doubt hoping to capitalize on the success of Brahms' Hungarian Dances. One could surmise that it was through this prompting that Dvořák continued to evoke the spirit of Czech folk music in his work. His interest in folk music reached all the way to the United States, and he strongly influenced American composers such as George Whitefield Chadwick and Amy Beach to utilize their own cultural identity in their compositions. Dvořák later came to America, serving as the director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York from 1892 to 1895. While in New York, he wrote his best-known work, Symphony No. 9, *From the New World*, which contained elements of American spirituals and Native American music. He returned to his own country near the end of his life to assume directorship of the Prague Conservatory in 1901, a post he held until his death in 1904.

The Serenade in D minor was composed in 1878 and was premièred on November 17, 1878, with the composer conducting. Dvořák's only work primarily for wind instruments, the composition paid tribute to the Harmoniemusik pieces of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Louis Spohr. Though it was scored with the traditional wind octet in mind, Dvořák enhanced the bass register of the ensemble by adding contrabassoon, a third horn, a cello, and a double bass. Elements of Bohemian dance and folk melody permeate the four-movement work. In a letter to his friend, the esteemed violinist Joseph Joachim, Brahms stated, "Take a look at Dvořák's Serenade for Wind Instruments; I hope you will enjoy it as much as I do.... It would be difficult to discover a finer, more refreshing impression of really abundant and charming creative talent. Have it played to you; I feel sure the players will enjoy doing it!"