



# Celebrity Series of Boston

Sunday, April 22, 2018 at 3pm  
Symphony Hall

Evgeny Kissin piano  
Emerson String Quartet

## Notes on the Program

**W.A. Mozart** (1756-1791)  
*Piano Quartet in G minor, K.478* (1785)

As a freelancer in Vienna with a growing family to feed, Mozart pursued a range of income streams: He taught keyboard lessons, pursued opera commissions, and produced a popular series of subscription concerts where he debuted his new piano concertos and other works that exploited his talents as a performer. He also began to compose works specifically for publication as sheet music, a market that was gaining steam thanks to improved intellectual property protections.

In 1785, upon request from the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister, Mozart began what was meant to be a series of three piano quartets. Unfortunately, Hoffmeister assessed that the Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor (K.478) was far too demanding for amateurs who would purchase such scores for home use, and he canceled the contract. In the *Allegro* first movement, running sixteenth-notes in that fast tempo demand dexterity from all the players, but the pressure is greatest on the pianist, whose role at times resembles that of a soloist in a concerto. The gestures of rapid scales even carry over into the placid *Andante* movement, which juxtaposes simple melodies with churning, multi-layered accompaniments. The finale, set in a cheerful G major instead of the stormy G minor of the opening, introduces a principal theme littered with chromatic alterations, like a musical tongue twister.

**Gabriel Fauré** (1845-1924)  
*Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Opus 15* (1879, revised 1883)

Several generations of French composers neglected chamber music through much of the nineteenth century, when opera and other grand styles reigned supreme. Camille Saint-Saëns addressed the issue in 1871 by cofounding the National Society of Music, providing a platform for young French composers including Fauré, Franck, and Massenet to present chamber music in the years to come. Fauré unveiled his first work of chamber music, a violin sonata, on a Society program in 1877. The Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor was Fauré's second chamber music endeavor; he worked on it from 1876 to 1879, and he played the piano part at the premiere on February 14, 1880, on a Society concert that also introduced his Berceuse for violin and piano. Fauré revised the quartet's finale in 1883, in advance of its first publication in 1884.

As of when Fauré composed the Piano Quartet No. 1, he was best known for his songs, and this quartet lives up to that reputation with an abundance of singing melodies, starting with the opening phrases brought forth by the strings. The angular leaps and snapping rhythms set up a contrast with the secondary theme, which counters with stepwise motion and smooth rhythms.

A scherzo comes next to lighten the mood, with the piano chirping the bird-like theme over lopsided, three-measure phrases plucked by the strings. A middle section functions as a traditional "trio" to offset the scherzo, using mutes on the strings to emphasize the character change. The *Adagio* third movement returns to the home key of C minor for a dark opening statement, but a flowing piano accompaniment and expressive melodies lift the movement from its state of gloom. The finale picks up in the same key of C minor for a sprightly first theme that again employs the snap of dotted rhythms, creating cohesion with the opening movement. The sonata-form structure builds expectation toward an arrival in C major, closing this masterful example of French chamber music in triumphant fashion.

**Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904)

*Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Major, Opus 81* (1887)

Dvořák might have been stuck forever in Prague, underpaid and unknown to the world, had it not been for an intervention on his behalf by Brahms, who set Dvořák up with his publisher in 1877. A decade later, the Czech composer was an international star, beloved for such works as the *Slavonic Dances* that embraced the folk traditions of his homeland.

Throughout his career, Dvořák followed the example of Brahms and grappled with the old, established forms of chamber music, a tradition that extended back through Schumann and Mendelssohn to Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. As a violist himself, Dvořák proved to be especially well attuned to the genre, whether writing for string quartet (a format that long flummoxed Brahms) or an ensemble such as the piano quintet, combining piano and string quartet.

Dvořák wrote his first Piano Quintet in A Major in 1872, but he withdrew it after the premiere. He started to revise that score in 1887, and then he decided to just start fresh on a new piano quintet in the same key. What resulted was one of the crowning gems of the chamber music repertoire, a work that balanced Dvořák's intuitive feel for melody, his mastery of formal construction, and his celebration of his Czech roots.

The opening melody for cello, accompanied only by piano, sets a relaxed tone for the quintet, until the full ensemble steps on the cello's last note and counters with a forceful theme in A minor. The tonal dichotomy, torn between A major and A minor, plays out throughout the first movement and sets up a larger context for the whole work. That pattern relates back to Czech folk music, a link that becomes more explicit in the second movement, which Dvořák identified as a *dumka*—a Slavic term, with Ukrainian origins, for a type of folk music characterized by wild mood swings.

After two substantial movements spanning 25 minutes or more, a spirited scherzo clears the air with music in the style of a *furiant*, a fast Czech dance. As in the *dumka*, pizzicato passages bring the ensemble closer to the plucking and strumming of folk music, like the sound of the zither that Dvořák's father played. The finale once again straddles major and minor modes, and it marries the folksy energy of dance rhythms with the more studious aspects of Dvořák's craft, even incorporating a proper fugue.

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