

ONEPPO CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

David Shifrin, *artistic director*

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# Brentano String Quartet

Tuesday, January 24, 2023 | 7:30 pm  
Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Robert Blocker, Dean

# Program

African-American spiritual  
arr. Alfred Pochon

**Deep River**

Antonín Dvořák  
1841–1904

**String Quartet No. 14 in A-flat major, Op. 105**

- I. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro appassionato
- II. Molto vivace – Trio
- III. Lento e molto cantabile
- IV. Finale. Allegro non tanto

INTERMISSION

Dvořák

**String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96, “American”**

- II. Lento

William Grant Still  
1895–1978

**Lyric Quartette (1960)**

- II. The Quiet One

Charles Ives  
1874–1954

**String Quartet No. 1 (1896)**

- II. Prelude. Allegro

George Walker  
1922–2018

**String Quartet No. 1 (1946)**

- II. Molto adagio

Robert Pete Williams  
1914–1980  
arr. Steven Mackey

**I’ve Grown So Ugly (1960)**

African-American spirituals  
arr. Alfred Pochon

**Go Down Moses / Swing Low, Sweet Chariot**

# Artist Profile

Brentano String Quartet

Mark Steinberg, *violin*

Serena Canin, *violin*

Misha Amory, *viola*

Nina Lee, *cello*

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. Within a few years of its formation, the quartet garnered the inaugural Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In recent seasons the quartet has appeared in the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, and Australia.

The Brentano String Quartet has performed many musical works that pre-date the string quartet as a medium, including the madrigals of Gesualdo, fantasias of Purcell, and secular vocal works of Josquin. The quartet has also worked closely with some of the most important composers of our time, including Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Steven Mackey, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág, and has commissioned works from Wuorinen, Adolphe, Mackey, David Horne, and Gabriela Frank. The quartet has been privileged to collaborate with such artists as Jessye Norman, Joyce DiDonato, Richard Goode, Jonathan Biss, and Mitsuko Uchida.

In fall 2014, the quartet became the quartet-in-residence at the Yale School of Music, succeeding the Tokyo String Quartet in that position.

» [brentanoquartet.com](http://brentanoquartet.com)

# Program Notes

Dvořák and the American Identity  
*Serena Canin*

When the Bohemian composer Antonín Dvořák was invited to New York to direct the National Conservatory of Music of America in 1892, he was charged with the unusual task of helping to establish an American musical identity. It is perhaps no surprise that this task should have fallen to a European, given that Europe was considered the arbiter of musical culture, but what Dvořák had to say turned the musical establishment upside down:

“In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music...There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot be supplied with themes from this source. The American musician understands these tunes and they move sentiment in him.”

Dvořák proceeded to infuse his own compositions with these themes, yielding magnificent results; the pieces Dvořák wrote in America are among his most beloved. Dvořák’s pronouncement revealed an open and deeply egalitarian spirit which resonated perfectly with the progressive mission of the Conservatory: to offer music education for all—including African-Americans, women, and the disabled. During Dvořák’s three-year tenure, tuition was waived for anyone who demonstrated need or possessed musical talent. If his conviction was that the future of American music lay with our own people, then he made certain that all of our people had the opportunity to learn.

Tonight’s program pays tribute to Dvořák and his American legacy. Featured is his late Quartet in A-flat, Op. 105, written largely in New York, but completed and published upon his return to Europe in 1895. In the spirit of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century recital, we have chosen some “encore” pieces for the second half to reflect Dvořák’s simple wisdom: that the foundation of an American musical identity would be discovered in our own backyard. Included are some of the spirituals he found so moving, works by William Grant Still and George Walker that may never have been written had Dvořák not been an early champion of Black music, music by Charles Ives that quotes American popular songs, and one blues arrangement by Steven Mackey. If the program has an emblem, it is the soulful and evocative slow movement from Dvořák’s “American” Quartet, which bridges the two halves as the music itself bridges two continents. The question of American musical identity may have yet to be resolved, but, whatever it may be, Dvořák and his music certainly influenced its trajectory.

String Quartet No. 14 in A-flat major

DVOŘÁK

*Misha Amory*

In the years between 1892 and 1895, Antonín Dvořák was across the ocean, forsaking his native Bohemia to become the director of New York's National Conservatory, and rather grandly to undertake the task of helping America articulate its own musical identity. It is uncertain if he helped accomplish the latter goal, but during his time in the United States he was acclaimed and feted as a pre-eminent European composer and an Old World cultural ambassador. Besides his activities in New York, he was to spend time in the rural Czech community of Spillville, Iowa, and to be captivated by the rich traditions of African-American spirituals and Indigenous music. Few European figures of Dvořák's cultural stature had ventured to explore America in such depth, at a time when London, Paris and Vienna remained so much the center of artistic life. It is telling that, whereas Brahms quailed at the thought of journeying to England to accept an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University, Dvořák was enterprising enough to cross the ocean and remain abroad for three years.

Nevertheless, even Dvořák—an artist who identified deeply with his native land—became homesick. He was to return home in the summer of 1895, at first just for a visit, but ultimately for good, submitting his resignation to New York a few weeks later. He had been extremely productive while in the States, composing his famous Cello Concerto and his even more famous

“New World” Symphony. Two of his best-known chamber works also date from this time: the “American” Quartet and the Viola Quintet, which is also nicknamed “American.” In his final days before setting sail for home, he began work on his A-flat String Quartet, Op. 105, but did not finish it until December, when he had been home for several months.

Listeners disagree on the flavor of the A-flat Quartet, composed on both sides of the Atlantic; some claim to hear persistent American strains in it, some hear an affirmation of the composer's Slavic roots, some just hear an expat yearning for home. Whatever its essence, this piece is one of Dvořák's chamber masterpieces, a showcase for all of the traits that make him beloved: rich harmonizations, imaginative, layered textures, irresistible rhythmic verve. Couched in such a rich, darkly stained key, it nevertheless overflows with joy, a uniquely Dvořákian combination.

The first movement opens in minor-key shadows, starting deep down in the cello and traveling up the instruments; it recalls the opening of Beethoven's famous Op. 132 quartet at first, lost and searching, chromatically fraught. But Dvořák is not one to follow Beethoven too far into his philosophical labyrinths: where the earlier composer erupts into cascades of questions, the later one chooses to blossom miraculously into sunlight and celebration, an Allegro brimming with positive energy. The progress of this main section seems effortless, a carriage ride in a new stretch of countryside on a perfect afternoon. At

## Program Notes *cont.*

times motoric, at times sweetly touching, at times even mock-ferocious, every time the music turns a corner it seems to encounter more good news, a new delightful scenario.

Following this comes a Scherzo, a dance with a darker, Furiant-like energy. This is spiky, whirling music; it flirts with demonic tendencies but always retains a suave balance, filled with grace and charm. The contrasting Trio section in the middle is an extraordinary episode, a kind of lovers' tryst: slightly removed from the dance scene but retaining its rhythmic sway, this is loving, wistful music, starting as duet between violin and cello but gradually becoming transformed into an ecstatic exchange between the two violins, amazing music from a master of string writing.

The slow third movement is hushed and choral; a simple and tender stanza is heard, then repeated as a variation; then a second stanza, the answer to the first, is stated and repeated in its own variation. Composed at Christmas in 1895, it is easy to imagine the glowing candlelight, the intimacy and peace of a scene at home or in church among loved ones. By contrast, the middle section of the movement is foreboding, hunted, restless; starting with feverish chromatic motion and constant changes of key, it eventually whips itself up to a crisis point. The thunder and lightning dissipate, and we find ourselves magically back in the clarity and simplicity of the opening material, this time adorned with second-violin bird-song, a kind of laughing disbelief at the bad dreams that came before.

The Finale is at first mock-menacing: the cellist as bad guy, his face muffled in a black cape. Not fooled for a minute, the first violin takes his material and transforms it into folksy celebration, a festive, friendly round dance. Filled with good cheer, ebullient but not urgent, the music irresistibly beckons us to cut a rug in the finest Bohemian tradition. Lyrical episodes intervene, a choral melody in simple rhythms, and later on a more undulating, lovely tune in triplets. Ultimately the movement spirals upward into a triumphant coda, wherein we hear these themes transformed, presented in a newly energized, blazing light, rocketing unstoppably to a final cadence.

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*List as of January 18, 2023*

# Upcoming Events at YSM

- JAN 27 **Leonard Slatkin, *guest conductor***  
**Yale Philharmonia**  
7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall  
Tickets start at \$12, Yale faculty/staff start at \$8, Students FREE\*
- JAN 29 **Benjamin Verdery, *guitar***  
**Faculty Artist Series**  
3 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall  
Free admission
- FEB 1 **Bach Collegium Japan**  
**Masaaki Suzuki, *conductor* & Roderick Williams, *baritone***  
**YSM Special Events**  
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall  
Tickets start at \$28, Students \$13
- FEB 3 **Jesse Hameen II & Elevation**  
**Ellington Jazz Series**  
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall  
Tickets start at \$23, Students start at \$10
- FEB 5 **Daniel S. Lee, *violin* & Jeffrey Grossman, *harpsichord***  
**Faculty Artist Series**  
3 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall  
Free admission

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