BELIN QUARTET

Free Summer Concert Series

Date: Wednesday, June 24, 2020
Repertoire: Dvorák, String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat major, "Slavonic", Op. 51, B. 92
  I.   Allegro ma non troppo
  II.   Dumka - Andante con moto - Vivace
  III. Romanza: Andante con moto
  IV.   Finale - Allegro assai

Antonín Dvorák was known for his use of folk music and dance within many of his works. After publishing his Moravian Dances and then his Slavonic Dances in 1878, Dvorák grew to be known as a nationalistic composer. The Slavonic Dances were such a success that the Florentine Quartet approached Dvorák and asked him to compose a string quartet in "the Slavic style". As an accomplished violist himself, Dvorák did not disappoint. String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat major, Op. 51 also known as, "Slavonic", was published in 1879. The piece has been described as the perfect combination of classical music and Bohemian folk spirit.

The Slavic style seen within many of Dvorák's compositions recreates the folk music of the slavs, people from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Folk songs were typically sung or performed by bowed string ensembles, which included the gusle, a flat instrument with many strings that were plucked. Over time, the instrument evolved to resemble the fiddle.

The first movement begins with a lyrical sonata and is accented with a rhythmic lilt, representing the two step dance of the Polka, a Bohemian dance. The development section displays Dvorák's "flickering" style, or shifting between the major and minor modes. The second movement, titled "Dumka", represents a heroic folk ballad that alternates between contrasting tempos, as well as the major and minor modes. The third movement is the proper slow movement, recognized for its beauty and simplicity. The final movement is filled with energy, and is truly slavic in nature. Musicologists have identified the perpetual motion of the movement as a representation of the "skacna", a song played with a Bohemian fiddle similar to an Irish reel.