



**BELIN
QUARTET**

Free Summer Concert Series

Date: Wednesday, July 22, 2020

Repertoire: Smetana, String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor, "From My Life"

- I. Allegro vivo appassionato
- II. Allegro moderato alla polka
- III. Largo sostenuto
- IV. Vivace

Bedrich Smetana composed his "From My Life" string quartet in 1876, his first of only two string quartets. Smetana was known as "the Father of Czech Classical Music". From Bohemia, he possessed a strong nationalistic identity. Smetana wished to encapture the language, music and culture of the Czech people within all of his works.

In 1874, Smetana developed hearing problems and became entirely deaf by the end of that year. Although he was forced to resign as a conductor and performer, Smetana continued to successfully compose music for the next 10 years until his death in 1884. "From My Life", composed just two years after going deaf, is quite programmatic and reflects on Smetana's own personal narrative. In a letter to Josef Srb-Debrnov, a musician and close friend of Smetana, Smetana painted a portrait of what "From My Life" is all about:

"My intention was to paint a tone picture of my life. The first movement depicts my youthful leanings toward art, the Romantic atmosphere, the inexpressible yearning for something I could neither express nor define, and also a kind of warning of my future misfortune . . . The long insistent note in the finale owes its origin to this. It is the fateful ringing in my ears of the high-pitched tones which in 1874 announced the beginning of my deafness. I permitted myself this little joke, because it was so disastrous to me. The second movement, a quasi-polka, brings to mind the joyful days of youth when I composed dance tunes and was known everywhere as a passionate lover of dancing. The third movement . . . reminds me of the happiness of my first love, the girl who later became my wife. The fourth movement describes the discovery that I could treat national elements in music and my joy in following this path until it was checked by the catastrophe of the onset of my deafness, the outlook into the sad future, the tiny rays of hope of recovery, but remembering all the promise of my early career, a feeling of painful regret."