

New England Piano Quartette, February 24th Concert

Schubert - Adagio and Rondo Concertante in F, D. 487

For a third and final time, music by Franz Schubert is featured as part of this year's concert series. But today's offering is Schubert of a very different character from the dramatic and profound works we have heard in previous weeks. It's time to relax and enjoy light, frothy music, sunny and untroubled, abundantly lyrical and overflowing with Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*. Schubert wrote this short piece in 1816, relatively early in his career. This was a most productive year yielding much of high quality, including many songs, the C minor symphony, and the delightful violin sonatinas.

The quartet starts with a brief *adagio*, which has more the character of a slow introduction to the brilliant rondo than a separate, freestanding movement. Stately fanfares and ear catching chords lead to a flowing succession of graceful phrases, consistently traded back and forth between the piano and the strings. While there is plenty of melodic charm for us to savor, no theme particularly stands out as a significant event. Always this remains an introduction, leading up to something, creating expectation - and even a slight impatience - deliberately calculated to make the *allegro vivace* tempo and catchy tunes of the rondo just that much more satisfying on arrival. There is no pause between movements. The description *concertante* means in the style of a concerto, and the ever sparkling and exhibitionistic piano part consistently takes the lead once the rondo is underway. At times the piano seems to be imitating the sound of a music box. One singing melody follows another until the middle of the movement, and then the whole glittering parade is repeated.

Lorenzo Mitchell

Fauré - Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 15

Though he focused primarily on small forms such as songs, short piano pieces and chamber works, Gabriel Fauré is a composer of central importance to French music during the later 19th Century. Fauré learned a great deal from his teacher Saint-Saëns, and in turn passed on much to his many pupils, including Koechlin, Ravel and Boulanger. Throughout his long career, Fauré was a conscientious exponent of chamber music with a French stamp, producing primarily works for piano with strings. Fauré wrote two piano quartets, and both are very fine, but the early one, which we hear today, is a special favorite of musicians and audiences. In it Fauré's characteristic elegance, control, transparency and flawless craftsmanship are most appealingly infused with youthful ardor, freshness and touching expressiveness. Fauré began work on his Op. 15 in 1876 at the age of 31. At this point he was still a daring, progressive young composer, not yet a pillar of the French musical establishment.

The key of the quartet is C minor, but this is far from the grim, heroic C minor of Beethoven, possessing more a gentle atmosphere of bittersweet longing. The music throughout breathes a subtle, but unmistakable French perfume, arising from its distinctive melodic inflection, harmonic palette, and instrumental timbre. Listening to this piece is a sensuous pleasure that does not require careful analysis or cogitation. One happily surrenders to the shifting passions and Gallic ambience, swept along by the delicious swirl of moods and generous flow of melodies. For all the abundance and enthusiasm, we are still always conscious of Fauré's underlying tact, sensitivity and refinement.

Movement one starts energetically and with stormy vehemence, however this soon gives way to passages of dreamy nostalgia and sweet reverie. The pianist is kept

especially busy throughout. During the pizzicato colored scherzo, Fauré makes playful use of *ostinati* and shifting meters. The romantic slow movement allows Op. 15 to touch its deepest emotions, especially in the lush middle section. The finale harkens back to the first movement's intensity, with a surging, yearning, propulsive opening theme. Gentler music intervenes at times, but the entire quartet reaches its last big climax with a carefully prepared and brilliant coda.

Lorenzo Mitchell