

FRANCIS POULENC has been described as being the *enfant terrible* of "Les Six", the erstwhile group of Parisian composers who were supposed to be in reaction against the more personally expressive or picturesque music of their seniors. His early work therefore had an irreverent twist often reflecting the café-concert, music-hall, and circus. On the other hand, he soon showed a marked affinity for lyricism and melody that served him admirably throughout his career. Poulenc composed at the piano, and his pianistic fluency is evident in the keyboard parts of his chamber music. Taking all this into account, one might be excused for hearing the *Trio* as a theatrical vehicle, an operetta perhaps, or even a "sitcom without words" before its time: It opens with a mock solemnity in the piano, with recitative passages for the bassoon and oboe in turn to introduce the characters. The action follows immediately with much scurrying around, relieved by tender and even impassioned lyric statements before a return to the patter-song energy and a final shuffling off into the wings for the commercial break. The slow movement presents our protagonists in a more mellow and sentimental mood, the oboe and bassoon exchanging beautifully nostalgic melodies to the quiet accompaniment of the piano. The finale begins with a veiled and recurring reference to the Scherzo of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony and plunges into renewed frenzy, perhaps with the addition of an annoying character or two from across the hall, a certain amount of explaining and clearing the air, matters finally resolving with an optimistic fanfare looking toward the future—or at least to next week's episode.

The idiosyncratic HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS, Brazil's gift to the world of 20th century music, continues to astound us both through the sheer immensity of his compositional output as well as the striking originality of his best efforts. He claimed to have invented the "choros", a structure suggested to him by the improvisations of itinerant musicians in their instrumental serenades on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. He retained their practice of the frequent change from major to minor keys and their rhythmic sentimental quality, but he enlarged the form and adapted it to include any typical melody of a popular character. The *Quintette en forme de choros* is one of a number of wind chamber pieces by the composer, this one scored originally for flute, oboe, clarinet, English horn, and bassoon. (Anecdote has it that when asked to consider re-arranging the piece for the standard wind quintet combination, thereby enabling more frequent performances of the work, Villa-Lobos eyed the score and calmly crossed out "English" and pencilled in "French" for the horn). The *Quintette* is a continuous work, whose separate sections are strung together in a "choros" with liberal extremes of dynamics and pitch in all the instrumental lines. The complexity of the score does not negate the popular character of the music: lengthy themes flowing together produce shifting textures in the slower material and hyper-kinetic energy in the faster sections. From the mysterious jungle-like beginning to the shrieking concluding chord, the *Quintette*, with its quasi-improvisations and sheer fascinating sound seldom fails to capture and hold the attention of the listener.



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S67
2000
4-4

presents a Faculty Recital:

SONI VENTORUM

Felix Skowronek, *flute* Rebecca Henderson, *oboe*
William McColl, *clarinet* David Kappy, *horn*
Arthur Grossman, *bassoon*

with Faculty Guest Artist

CRAIG SHEPPARD, *piano*

8:00 PM
April 4, 2000
MEANY THEATER

DAT 13,683
CD 13,684

PROGRAM

CD
1] *QUINTET IN D MINOR*; OP. 88, #4 (ca. 1814) ^(27:26)..... ANTON REICHA
(1770-1836)

Larghetto – Allegro assai
Andante
Menuetto: Allegro
Finale: Allegro

INTERMISSION

2] *WIND QUINTET NO. 1* (1965) ^(10:45)..... ISTVAN LÁNG
(b. 1933)

Allegro: La forma obbligata della sonata classica
Andante: Il notturno dolcissimo - - - - -
Vivace: Scherzo satanico, (attacca)
Tranquillo: Intermezzo
Allegro giocoso: Il finale obbligato ottimista

3] *TRIO FOR OBOE, BASSOON, AND PIANO* (1926) ^(12:12)..... FRANCIS POULENC
(1899-1963)

Lent – Presto
Andante con moto
Rondo: Très vif

4] *QUINTETTE EN FORME DE CHOROS* (1928) ^(10:26)..... HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS
(1887-1959)

The name of ANTON REICHA figures prominently on Soni Ventorum programs for three very good reasons: [1] his 24 wind quintets were the first serious body of works written expressly for what was then a new ensemble and are in fact the basis of its classic repertoire, [2] the challenges presented in the performance of these works have remained undiminished over a century and a half, and [3] not many other groups own the complete set of the 24 quintets as they were out of print for many years, and have yet to be reissued in their entirety. Reicha, a prestigious professor of composition and theory at the Paris Conservatoire, was considered a great experimenter as well as something of an eccentric. As such, he readily responded to a request by five Parisian virtuoso wind players to help establish an ensemble that might rival, equal, and even perhaps (blasphemous thought) surpass the string quartet as the reigning chamber music medium for, after all, the winds were the closest of all instruments to the human voice. Reicha's quintets did in fact enjoy a great vogue for a time, undoubtedly propelled by the spectacular nature of their performance. This popularity waned however, and interest in the ensemble languished until the early 20th century. Critics scored Reicha for his prolixity and sometime substitution of invention for inspiration while nonetheless acknowledging flashes of genius: his writing for winds was recognized as superior to anything current. The meteoric rise and fall of his quintets left a rich legacy but few performance traditions, and it is no great exaggeration to aver that these are yet to be formed in our day. Reicha's first set of six quintets, Op. 88, dates from the years immediately following 1810, and the D Minor Quintet is the strongest display of the characteristics found in these early essays: solemnity and sonority, energy and excitement, impetus and invention, vibrancy and virtuosity. His later quintets would tend toward the problematic with their abundance of themes and increasing length and even greater demands on the performers, and with the D Minor Quintet the die had been cast, and there was no turning back.

ISTVAN LÁNG, a leading representative of the generation of Hungarian composers born in the 1930s, studied at the Budapest Conservatory. In 1966 he was appointed musical director of the State Puppet Theater, and in 1979 visited the University of Colorado as a guest lecturer and later joined the Budapest Academy as lecturer. His compositional style evolved during a time of gradual acceptance of contemporary techniques in Eastern Europe after the relatively conservative postwar years. His *Wind Quintet No. 1* (he has written two others since) was a featured composition of the Eighth International Music Competition of Budapest in 1965, and his tentative usage of quarter-tones and aleatoric elements represented a certain daring on his part albeit incorporated in more traditional motivic and textural material. While he might outwardly seem to convey something of a seriously-structured classical nature, the inherently entertaining quality of the work, with its carefully-chosen movement indications, lip-service to both contemporary techniques and folk elements, and the inclusion of an "extra" movement, makes it apparent here that the composer has crafted both a clever parody and an intrinsically valid work.