

Montgomery Philharmonic

Intersecting with the Community

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Montgomery Philharmonic 2014 - 2015 Concert Season – SINGULARITY Chamber Music – Sunday, June 7, 2015

Ravel - String Quartet (1903) | Nielsen – Quintet for Winds | Spohr – Nonet | Arnold – Quintet for Brass

About Maurice Ravel –

Joseph-Maurice Ravel was a French composer, pianist, and conductor. He is often associated with impressionism along with Claude Debussy, his elder contemporary, although both composers rejected the term. Ravel went to the Paris Conservatory as both a pianist and a composer and won his first prize for piano in 1891. He studied harmony with Émile Pessard and composition with Gabriel Fauré. It is said that he was an average student both in piano and composition. In 1895, Ravel was expelled from the Paris Conservatory because he had been there for several years and was no longer winning any prizes. At about this time, Ravel’s father introduced him to Erik Satie. Ravel recognized Satie’s genius and was a champion of his music.

Born: March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France

Died: December 28, 1937, Paris, France

Compositions: Daphnis and Chloe ballet, Bolero, L’Infant et les sortilèges, Rhapsodie Espagnole for orchestra, String Quartet, many works for piano alone and two pianos, Le tombeau de Couperin, Sonate for violon et violoncelle, 2 sonatas for violin and piano, Chansons madécasses for soprano, flute, and piano, La Valse for Orchestra, several pieces for voice, chorus, and orchestra, Piano trio in A minor

Siblings: Édouard Ravel

Parents: Marie Delouart, Joseph Ravel

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) – *String Quartet* (1903)

Ravel completed this beautiful string quartet in early April 1903, at age 28, specifically as an entry for the Prix du Rome and dedicated it to his teacher, Gabriel Fauré. The Heyman Quartet in Paris premiered the quartet on March 5, 1904. The piece was rejected as a prize composition for the Paris Conservatory and also by the jury of the Prix du Rome. Even Fauré, his beloved teacher, called the fourth movement “stunted, badly balanced, in fact a failure.” As a result, Ravel left the Paris Conservatory in 1905 and the rebuff was forever called the “Ravel Affair.”

His friend Claude Debussy had a different opinion, however, and in 1905, wrote the following to Ravel: “In the name of the gods of music and in my own, do not touch a single note you have written in your Quartet.” Ravel’s String Quartet in F Major stands as one of the most widely performed chamber music works in the classical repertoire, representing Ravel’s early achievements and rise from obscurity. On CD, it is often coupled with Debussy’s own string quartet. This makes some wonder just how close Debussy and Ravel were socially, because every string quartet musician knows this story and the two are now inexorably linked.

Ravel was asked to tour the United States in 1927, and his works enjoyed terrific response from both audiences and the music critics. In the same year, he oversaw the first recording of his String Quartet in F Major by the famed International String Quartet (Andre Mangeot, Boris Pecker, Frank Howard, and Herbert Withers).

The form of the string quartet is a look back at the classic era string quartets, with Ravel’s language throughout. The first movement is a reimagining of sonata form—the three-part structure that governed instrumental music of the late 18th century. Musical themes are presented, then taken on an adventure, and finally brought back home again. The listener will notice that all of the elements of sonata form are there, but are disarticulated: The harmonies are logical, dissonant pitches are left hanging in the air, and chords of four and five notes replace standard triads. The second movement breaks from the mold of typical fast-movement forms by referring to fandango guitar playing. The third movement is a hybrid of instrumental and vocal gestures, its three main sections interrupted by passages emulating Fauré’s arias. The fourth movement—a rondo—recalls the themes of the previous movements to provide structural cohesion for the quartet as a whole, while complicating its own internal logic.

Instrumentation – 2 violins, viola, cello

Artifact –

<http://imslp.org/wiki/File:SIBLEY1802.26086.4943-39087009241094score.pdf> – Original Score

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Ravel#/media/File:Maurice_Ravel_1925.jpg –Photo of Maurice Ravel

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Ravel#/media/File:Maurice-Ravel-soldier-1916.jpg – Maurice Ravel in an Army Uniform (1916)

iTunes Links –

Debussy & Ravel: String Quartets - Emerson String Quartet

Debussy, Ravel & Dutilleux: String Quartets - Juilliard String Quartet

Debussy, Ravel & Dutilleux: String Quartets - Orpheus String Quartet

Amazon.com Links –

String Quartets by Debussy and Ravel: Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10/Debussy; Quartet in F Major/Ravel (Dover Chamber Music Scores)

Impressions:Debussy/Ravel String Quartets

Debussy: Quartet In G Major & Ravel: Quartet In F Major

YouTube Video Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ky5-NA3dEEE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs7mjxLSQco>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp58sIFaNKQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp58sIFaNKQ>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Tojf874_w8