

# THE ZEMLINSKY STRING QUARTET

**František Soucek, violin; Petr Strížek, violin  
Petr Holman, viola; Vladimír Fortin, violoncello**

## ARTICTIC VISION

The *Dissonant* is one of our favorite Mozart quartets because, though it is very well known, it is most extraordinary. *String Quartet C major K. 465* is a little unusual because of the slow, suspenseful beginning. It doesn't happen that often in Mozart but it sets the tone nicely for the various contrasts in the remainder of the programme.

The Smetana *String Quartet No.2 D minor* is also a little extraordinary. Although you can hear similar, beautiful singing melodies of *Symphony No.1*, Smetana composed the *Symphony No. 2* when he was quite old and at the end of his career. He was a very nationalistic composer; the most famous Czech composer full of art, pride and his work was very joyful and light coming from the Czech folk songs. But this quartet is not like this. It is more modern, and in a letter he wrote to a friend, he said "...this is how I would like to compose, not like they want me to compose."

What makes *Test Run for String Quartet* by Canadian composer John Estacio stand out for us is that it was composed for the 2001 Banff International String Quartet competition. All too often these compositions don't get much further for the simple reason that they don't find themselves in regular repertoires. For our group, this composition remained in our heads. We enjoyed it very much and come back to it every couple of years. It is well balanced in that it is not too modern, yet artistically challenging and gives all four instruments that chance to shine. Certainly, it is not a piece the audience will have had the chance to enjoy often.



We finish with the most famous Dvorak chamber piece. Sometimes a quartet has a tendency to think, 'alright, the American. I know it. I've played it so much already.' Possibly the audience has heard it so often too. The important thing to remember is that the piece is so famous and important as a composition because it is really so good. It always comes back to a beautiful, lyrical melody. That is a typical Czech way of composing yet it was called the American because it was composed in America. You can even hear some influences from the emerging black music of the time which would have been approximately 1896. Dvorak was very happy at this time and other compositions of this period have the same exuberance because he spent his summer vacation in a Czech village in the US while at the New York conservatory. (*Petr Holman*)