

## “SONGS AND ECHOES OF HOME”

### **Aizuri Quartet**

Emma Frucht and Miho Saegusa, violins

Ayane Kozasa, viola

Karen Ouzounian, cello

### **PROGRAM**

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904): Selections from *Cypresses* (8 mins)

I. Já vím, že v sladké naději (I know that on my love to thee)

VII. Kol domu se ted' potácím (I wander oft past yonder house)

XI. Nad krajem vévodí lehký spánek (Nature lies peaceful in slumber and dreaming)

Lembit Beecher (b. 1980): *These Memories May Be True* (2012) (18 mins)

I. Old Folk Song

II. The Legend of the Last Ship (and Other Collective Memories)

III. Estonian Grandmother Superhero

IV. Variations on a Somewhat Old Folk Song

Komitas Vartabed (1869-1935): *Armenian Folk Songs*, arr. Sergei Aslamazian (12 mins)

*Yergink Ampel A* (It's Cloudy)

*Haprapan* (Festive Song)

*Shoushigi* (For Shoushig)

*Echmiadzni Bar* (Dance from Echmiadzin)

*Kaqavik* (The Partridge)

### *Intermission*

Rhiannon Giddens (b.1977): *At the Purchaser's Option* (4 mins)

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957): String Quartet in D Minor Op. 56, *Voces Intimae* (32 mins)

Andante—Allegro molto moderato

Vivace

Adagio di molto

Allegretto (ma pesante)

Allegro

### **NOTES ON THE PROGRAM**

“Songs and Echoes of Home” features music that embodies a sense of homeland and national identity, but at a distance, one step removed by the forces of psychology, geography and time. Folksong is a powerful force for the composers featured here, and the program includes three sets of song arrangements beginning with Dvorak’s beautifully touching *Cypresses*. Originally titled “Echoes of Songs,” Dvorak arranged this series of voice and piano songs, written by himself 22 years earlier, based on love poems by the Czech poet Gustav Pflieger-Moravsky that revel in the beauty of nature. The arrangement for quartet turns these expressions of Czech identity into something more abstract. A few years after writing *Cypresses*, Dvorak would leave his homeland for a lengthy sojourn in America. The first half of the program concludes with another set of songs, these written by the Armenian priest Komitas, whose music has become an enduring symbol of home deeply treasured by the Armenian diaspora. At times joyously upbeat and at times melancholic, these folk songs were written before the genocide that scattered Armenians across the world. Unable to cope with the trauma, Komitas would later die in a psychiatric hospital in Paris. But for so many Armenians this music provided a connection to their homeland as they built new lives abroad; and for listeners they provide a window into the Armenian soul.

Santa Cruz, CA native Lembit Beecher also writes from a diasporic perspective. His *These Memories May Be True* is a series of musical poems on elements of Estonian culture that his grandmother passed down to him. The outer movements are settings of folk songs while the inner movements evoke two of his grandmother’s dramatic and rambunctious stories of escape during WWII. A natural storyteller through music, Beecher writes: “This piece is a little like the scattered image of Estonia that I had while growing up, filtered through many layers of retelling, and touched by a sense of nostalgia, a sense of something beautiful that has been lost in the wash of time.”

The second half of the program begins with another song arrangement, Rhiannon Giddens’s *At the Purchaser’s Option* (from her album “Freedom Highway” and arranged for string quartet by Jacob Garchik). A harsher reflection of national character, this song was inspired by a 19th-century advertisement Giddens found for a 22-year-old female slave whose baby was also available for sale. Giddens, a musical historian, imagines the interior world of a slave who defines her homeland as her soul, the only thing out of reach to her captors.

Sibelius’s *Voces Intimae* turns deeply inward, written during a period of psychological crisis and self-imposed exile in his rural home “Ainola” (named after his wife Aino), as he tried to escape the alcoholism that plagued him in Helsinki. His music during this period began to shift from the grand optimistic expression of Finnish nationalism that dominated his youth to something more dark and personal. Yet there is still something innately Finnish about this music (and perhaps one can hear the connections to the Estonian influences in the Beecher, given how deeply intertwined the languages and cultures of Finland and Estonia are) and this introspective quartet transforms in its finale into a virtuosic Allegro buoyed by the feeling of folk fiddling.

- Program Notes by Karen Ouzounian