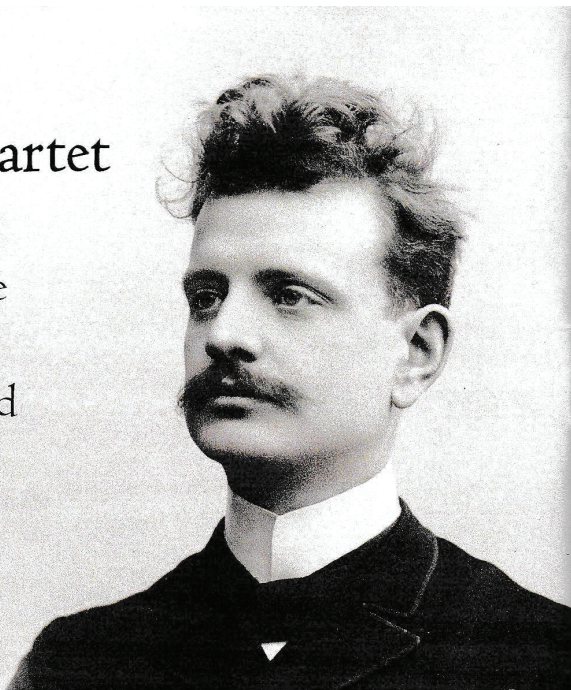


The Varro Quartet

The young ensemble aiming to introduce Sibelius's rarely heard Piano Quartet to the USA



The **Varro Quartet** was formed by four young musicians from Georgia: Didi Stone (violin), Lucas Nyman (violin), Richard Wang (cello) and Erin Li (Piano) for the Franklin Pond Chamber Music 'Fall into Spring' Program. Franklin Pond Chamber Music is an organization that provides training for young musicians year-round to learn and perform chamber music. While searching for a piece of music appropriate for their unique instrumentation, they heard the Sibelius Piano Quartet [JS 157] online performed by Finnish musicians, and fell in love with the piece.

'That was when we commenced our quest to look for the sheet music', explains Ching-Ching Yap, the ensemble's trainer for its bimonthly rehearsals. 'With the help of Sibelius One, we were granted permission to use the music and perform the piece from the granddaughter of Sibelius. We received a copy of the manuscript from the National Library of Finland and a digital

copy of the piece put together by Folke Gräsbeck, the pianist from the Finnish quartet group that performed the piece.'

Since September 2022, the Varro Quartet has been rehearsing this piece. Through the Franklin Pond Chamber Music Program, the players receive coaching from Atlanta Symphony Orchestra musicians once a month and participate in three masterclasses until May 2023.

Although it had been known since Erik Furuholm published the first biography of the composer in 1916 that Sibelius wrote music for piano quartet, it was only in the 1980s, after the donation of Sibelius's manuscripts to Helsinki University Library, that it became apparent that a full-scale work – rather than just a brief fragment – had survived. Folke Gräsbeck comments: 'The melodic inventiveness found here reflects a considerable amount of enthusiasm on the part of Sibelius who, at the age of eighteen and self-taught, was still a keen



adherent of the Viennese Classical style.'

'During our rehearsals, we use the only recording available as a guide for interpretation', Ching-Ching Yap explains. 'In general, we work on the very specific dynamic markings and the balance of the instruments, especially between the piano and the cello. The players enjoy the rapid changing of melodic themes and the interesting and surprising chord progressions. The beautiful melodic themes are their favourites. The movement they liked the least is the third. One of the members mentioned that maybe the first movement, with its the grand ending, should be placed fourth.'

The Varro Quartet will perform this piece for the

final concert of the Franklin Pond Chamber Music Program on 30 April 2023 – the first performance of the work in the USA. It may also be played this piece in the context of the Franklin Pond Chamber Music Competition in May 2023. A YouTube video is in preparation and the link will be posted on www.sibeliusone.com as soon as it is ready.



Photos of the Varro Quartet: © Ching Ching Yap