

# Zdenek Fibich—The Chamber Music

by Renz Opolis



*(The author wishes to thank Messrs Peter Lang and John Wilcox for providing the parts to some of the works discussed in this article)*

If reputation could be likened to a horse race, then in the “19th Century Czech Composer’s Derby” Antonin Dvorak would cross the finish line several lengths ahead of his nearest rival, Bedrich Smetana, and then, after an even greater distance, would come Zdenek Fibich, far behind in third place. But reputation must not be confused with

quality. Fibich (1850-1900) is no third rate composer. The issue of whether his chamber (and other) music is as fine as Dvorak’s

or Smetana’s is, of course, a subjective one governed, like all such questions, primarily by taste. Having said this though, I would argue that his music is of very high quality, and totally undeserving of the near obscurity into which it has fallen.

The fall into obscurity can be explained by the fact that Fibich lived during rise of Czech nationalism within the Habsburg empire. And while Smetana and Dvorak gave themselves over entirely to the national cause consciously writing Czech music with which the emerging nation strongly identified, Fibich’s position was more ambivalent. That this was so was due to the background of his parents and to his education. Fibich’s father was a Czech forestry official and the composer’s early life was spent on various wooded estates of the nobleman for whom his father worked. His mother, however, was an ethnic German Viennese. Home schooled by his mother until the age of 9, he was first sent to a German speaking gymnasium in Vienna for 2 years before attending a Czech speaking gymnasium in Prague where he stayed

## A Fresh Look At Fauré’s String Quartet

### And Its Place In French Quartet Literature

by Ron Erickson

The later chamber music of Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) has had a tough time of it; in fact, Fauré himself was not generally appreciated, even in France, for most of his life, except by a few highly gifted and subsequently influential students, particularly Charles Koechlin, Maurice Ravel, Nadia Boulanger, and Darius Milhaud. Only stage works got much attention in France, and that was not Fauré’s strength, nor was orchestral writing – much of his orchestra music was scored by Koechlin. Not until after 1905, when he became director of the Paris Conservatory, did Fauré begin to achieve status as an eminent composer and teacher. Eric Blom, in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of Grove’s Dictionary, sums up a general ambivalence towards the appreciation of Fauré’s music: “*He is not a musician for the masses, and never will be, nor is he quite a musician’s musician, for all the impeccable finish of his technique, as far as it goes, since it does not go quite far enough for those who like masters who, they fancy, can do everything. But for a cultivated and civilized minority his music will remain a precious possession.*” With such further dubious encomiums as “evanescent” and “fastidious,” Blom seals Fauré’s epitaph with qualified praise.

The general listening public has come to treasure Fauré’s *Requiem*, a number of short works, and, of his chamber music, the Op. 13 sonata for violin and piano and the Op. 15 *Piano Quartet*. But the later works remain something of a mystery, though often revived, and the songs and piano music, perhaps the core of his artistic expression, are rarely included in recitals. *(continued on page 8)*



## A TALE OF TWO OCTETS

Otakar Zich & Joseph Rheinberger

by John Wilcox

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....Over the past year, I “fell into” the editing of several chamber works with Rosewood Publications. The purpose of this article is to share those editing experiences regarding two octets for mixed winds and strings and to share information about these newly published works.

### The Octet by Otakar Zich

I had been searching for many years for the Otakar Zich (1879-1934) *Octet*, which employs the Schubert *Octet* forces of 2 violins, viola, cello, bass, clarinet, horn, and bassoon. I had seen references to this work in several Czech chamber music reference works, and the composition was also described in one non-Czech book, Koenigsbeck’s *Bassoon Bibliography*, an excellent single-volume work published by Musica Rara in 1994. I knew that the Zich *Octet* was probably a very good work because I had played a version arranged by the composer’s son for standard nonet (wind quintet

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