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PAVEL HAAS QUARTET

Thursday 7 November, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

String Quartet No.22 in B flat major, KV589

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quartet No.7 ('Concerto Da Camera'), H.314

Bohuslav Martinů

Interval

String Quartet No.3 in E flat minor, Op.30

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Please ensure all mobile phones are switched off. Photographs and videos of the performance are not permitted.

There is a Sennheiser Infrared enhanced hearing system in the Djanogly Recital Hall; please request a headset from our front-of-house staff to enhance your enjoyment of this evening's concert.



CAVATINA
Chamber Music Trust

PROGRAMME NOTES

String Quartet No22 in B flat major, KV589

Allegro

Larghetto

Menuetto. Moderato

Allegro assai

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-91)

The B flat Quartet K.589 was composed in May 1790 and is the second of Mozart's three 'Prussian' Quartets, so called because they were written for King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia. Mozart travelled to Berlin to play before the King and Queen on 26 May 1789. As a result, he was commissioned to write six string quartets for the King and six easy piano sonatas for the young Princess Frederike Charlotte. This was a period when Mozart was desperately short of money and he must have been particularly pleased with his royal commissions. In fact, he only completed three of the quartets, the D major K.575, the B flat K.589 and the F major K.590.

The first performance of the B flat Quartet took place in Mozart's home on 22 May 1790 in the presence of his wealthy friend Michael Puchberg and his wife. The terse opening Allegro incorporates a more prominent part for the cello (the King of Prussia was a talented cellist) than is usual, the first theme being developed very shortly before the recapitulation. The Larghetto again places the cellist in a prominent position and is full of rounded singing melody, perhaps reminding us of Mozart, the opera composer. After the Menuetto the work ends more seriously, illustrated both by the length of the movement and the creation of a more reserved atmosphere touching on pathos.

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String Quartet No.7, 'Concerto da Camera', H 314

Poco Allegro

Andante

Allegro vivo

Bohuslav Martinů
(1890-1959)

Martinů is one of the twentieth century's most intriguing composers. The greater part of his life was spent away from his native Czechoslovakia (as it was then), first in Paris, then in America, the south of France, Italy and Switzerland, but he never became a cosmopolitan figure like Stravinsky, remaining essentially a Czech composer in exile. With his remarkable speed and fluency, and an almost compulsive need to write, he was astonishingly prolific. He rarely revised his scores once they were complete, and was seemingly indifferent to their subsequent performance and public reception. His output is often described as uneven in quality, but his finest works have earned him a place alongside the major figures of his time, and after years of comparative neglect, his music is being more widely performed again.

Chamber music was one of his greatest loves: "I am always more myself in pure chamber music. I cannot express what pleasure it gives me when I start work..." In spite of his comment, his chamber works rarely have the emotional depth of, say, the Bartók quartets. That side of his personality tends to be the preserve of his orchestral and stage works. But at its best, his chamber music is supremely well-crafted, and the composer's engaging personal presence is unmistakable. Three string quartets, and two shorter works for quartet, pre-date the first of Martinů's seven numbered quartets, which appeared in 1918.

Martinů composed his Seventh String Quartet in July 1947, while he and his wife, Charlotte, were based in New York. It was given its first performance by the Kroll Quartet in New York, in February 1949, though it had to wait until February 1960 for its Czech premiere. The work is dedicated to Charlotte, though Martinů did not write out a dedication on his autograph score. 'Concerto da Camera' (Chamber Concerto) is a title he had already given to a work for solo violin, piano, timpani, percussion and string orchestra, of 1941; the reason for him applying it as a subtitle to his Seventh Quartet appears to be unknown.

The first movement is dominated by the pert, energetic manner in which it sets off, full of lively backchat between the four instruments. After a calmer episode, a more jerky rhythmic figure is added to the mix. Following another quiet passage, the opening music returns, taking the movement to its no-nonsense ending.

Smoothly-flowing contrapuntal lines characterise the second movement – calmly introspective and sometimes verging on the melancholy.

The finale is, like the first movement, full of ebullient energy and deft interplay between the four instruments. Lightly skipping dance rhythms break out occasionally, but at one point the music withdraws into a more secretive space. The energy level rises again, and the movement ends with another unanswerable final cadence.

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String Quartet No.3 in E flat minor, Op.30

Andante sostenuto – allegro moderato

Allegretto vivo e scherzando

Andante funebre e doloroso, ma con moto

Allegro non troppo e risoluto

Pyotr Il'ych Tchaikovsky

(1840-93)

Although this is the last of Tchaikovsky's mature string quartets (there are, in addition, a number of separate pieces dating from his student years) it is still a relatively early work. It was composed in January and February 1876, interrupting progress on the ballet *Swan Lake*. The first performance was a private occasion, in the house of Tchaikovsky's friend and colleague Nikolay Rubinstein. It was enthusiastically received, but Tchaikovsky himself was not so sure. He wrote to his brother, Modest: "I think I've rather written myself out. I'm beginning to repeat myself and cannot conceive anything new." But this was to become a familiar complaint, often heard after he had completed a major work. Some time later, following another private performance, he is said to have commented: "I did not know I had composed such a fine quartet. I never liked the finale, but now I see it is really good."

The quartet was written as a tribute to another of Tchaikovsky's colleagues on the staff of the Moscow Conservatoire, Czech-born violinist Ferdinand Laub, who had led the premieres of his First and Second Quartets, and who had died suddenly in 1875. When Tchaikovsky himself died it was played as a memorial to him in concerts held in St Petersburg and Moscow.

The first movement's introduction establishes a pensive mood with, after a few moments, a theme on the first violin, then the cello, marked *cantabile e molto espressivo* (song-like and very expressive). The main *allegro*, taking its point of departure from a speeded-up version of the introduction's opening bars, is serious but full of vitality, with a contrasting second theme in the shape of an airy idea for the first violin over repeated notes on the cello. When the opening music

returns at the recapitulation these two themes are separated by a third, a lyrical melody for the cello, with running accompaniment figures for the two violins. We haven't heard it before, and we don't hear it again, but it fits easily into the music's progress. A look back at the introduction finally brings this movement to rest.

Tchaikovsky originally placed the scherzo after the slow movement. He was right to change his mind; although the scherzo is relatively short, it offers a necessary breathing space before the intense, solemn ritual of the third movement.

This is the quartet's emotional heart, with its unmistakably sombre, steady tread. The second theme is an austere chant, through which the second violin threads a single repeated note, rhythmically articulated to suggest a liturgical text being recited. Tchaikovsky scholar Roland John Wiley has described this as "the first unambiguous inspiration from a churchly source in Tchaikovsky's music." The composer later made a transcription of this movement for violin and piano.

The finale, with its vigorous, dancing energy, far from seeming out of place in the context of the quartet as a whole, acts as a counterbalance to the dark third movement. A sudden slowing-up brings a moment's quiet reflection, before the music gathers momentum again for the brisk final bars.

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PAVEL HAAS QUARTET

Veronika Jarůšková - Violin I
Marek Zwiebel - Violin II
Šimon Truszka - Viola
Peter Jarůšek - Cello

The Pavel Haas Quartet is revered across the globe for its richness of timbre, infectious passion and intuitive rapport. Performing at the world's most prestigious concert halls and having won five Gramophone Awards and numerous others for their recordings, the Quartet is firmly established as one of the world's foremost chamber ensembles.

The Quartet appears at major venues including Wigmore Hall, London; Philharmonie and Konzerthaus, Berlin; Musikverein, Vienna; Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg; Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam; Tonhalle, Zürich; Théâtre de la Ville, Paris; Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome; BOZAR, Brussels; NCPA, Beijing; LG Arts Centre, Seoul and Carnegie Hall, New York. In celebration of its 20th anniversary, the Quartet was invited to be on the cover of *The Strad's* June 2022 issue and was the featured interview in *BBC Music Magazine* in the same month. They were included in the latter magazine's 10 greatest string quartet ensembles of all time and were described as "stylistically powerful and richly sonorous, [and] known for its passionate and fearless performances".

In the 23/24 season, the Quartet returns to the Wigmore Hall for four concerts; Rudolfinum Prague; Teatro La Fenice; Liverpool Philharmonic Hall; Göteborgs Konserthus; National Concert Hall, Dublin; Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam; Philharmonie Luxembourg. Further afield, the Quartet tours the United States and Asia regularly.

Since September 2022, the Pavel Haas Quartet has been Artist-in-Residence at the Dvořák Prague Festival and curate the chamber music concerts including programming all the Dvořák String Quartets and chamber music works over the three seasons.

The Pavel Haas Quartet records exclusively for Supraphon. Their most recent recording of the Brahms Viola and Piano Quintets with Boris Giltburg and their former member, Pavel Nikl, was released to critical acclaim in May 2022. The recording was described as “radiant and vivacious” by The Strad, and was Presto Classical’s Recording of the Week. For their previous album of Shostakovich String Quartets (2019), they received the Recording of the Year by Classic Prague Awards and were named one of the 100 best records of the year by The Times.

The Quartet received their five Gramophone Awards for their recordings of Dvořák, Smetana, Schubert, Janáček and Haas, as well as Dvořák’s String Quartets No.12 ‘American’ and No.13, for which they were awarded the most coveted prize, Gramophone Recording of the Year in 2011. The Sunday Times commented: “their account of the ‘American’ Quartet belongs alongside the greatest performances on disc.” Further accolades include BBC Music Magazine Awards and the Diapason d’Or de l’Année in 2010 for their recording of Prokofiev String Quartets Nos. 1 & 2.

Since winning the Paolo Borciani competition in Italy in 2005, further highlights early on in their career have included the nomination as ECHO Rising Stars in 2007, the participation in the BBC New Generation Artists scheme between 2007-2009 and the Special Ensemble Scholarship the Borletti-Buitoni Trust awarded to them in 2010. The Quartet is based in Prague and studied with the late Milan Skampa, the legendary violist of the Smetana Quartet. They take their name from the Czech-Jewish composer Pavel Haas (1899-1944) who was imprisoned at Theresienstadt in 1941 and tragically died at Auschwitz three years later. His legacy includes three wonderful string quartets.