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# PAVEL HAAS QUARTET

Thursday 27 April 2023  
Djanogly Recital Hall

## PROGRAMME

String Quartet No.15 in G, D.887

**Franz Schubert**  
**(1797-1828)**

*Allegro molto moderato*  
*Andante un poco moto*  
*Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Allegretto*  
*Allegro assai*

String Quartet No.13 in G, Op.106~

**Antonín Dvořák**  
**(1841-1904)**

*Allegro moderato*  
*Adagio, ma non troppo*  
*Molto vivace*  
*Andante sostenuto – allegro con fuoco*

There is a Sennheiser Infrared enhanced hearing system in the Djanogly Recital Hall, please ask for a headset from our front-of-house staff.

## PROGRAMME NOTES

### String Quartet in G, Op.161, D.887

*Allegro molto moderato*

*Andante un poco moto*

*Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Allegretto*

*Allegro assai*

**Franz Schubert**

**(1797-1828)**

Schubert's last String Quartet is a creative phenomenon in so many respects, not least in that the composer began writing the score on 20 June 1826 and finished it ten days later. Whether or not there had been prior thought and sketching (nothing survives), one can hardly imagine the white heat of inspiration involved or indeed simply the speed of writing down. In the music itself Schubert was following his muse into a remote future – not structurally to be sure, for he uses the overall four-movement design and its sonata, ternary and rondo forms largely in well-tried ways, to this extent resisting the radicality of Beethoven's contemporaneous last quartets. Yet in extravagance of gestural, textural and harmonic imagination, in expressive profile, this work surely takes decisive new paths.

The reach into the future was true also of its reception history: Schubert's friend and colleague Ignaz Schuppanzigh (performer and dedicatee of the Rosamunde Quartet) together with various publishers would not touch the work: Schubert may have included its first movement in his concert of 26 March 1828, but its first full public performance came as late as 1850 and it appeared in print for the first time the following year. When the Joachim Quartet performed it in 1871, the critique in Germany's leading music periodical was stridently condemnatory, and indeed it was not really until relatively late in the 20th century that the work found universal acceptance and admiration.

What then were the challenges of these new paths? At the very outset, the held major chord growing louder towards its violent outcome as minor, the following cadential tag with its surprised silences and pauses, the heart-stopping beauty of the succeeding exquisite but all-too brief tune over orchestral-style tremolo and descending harmonies – these fleeting elements together form a first subject of dramatically contrasted expressive moments, bonded together in a new type of continuity. The second subject, incorporating variation and development, is based on a one-bar rhythm and circles round a few restricted pitches, and it is a mark of Schubert's genius that he could so effortlessly fashion beguiling melody from such seemingly refractory material. In the recapitulation he reverses the opening chordal gesture to grow from minor to major, smooths out the cadential tag, and decorates the exquisite tune with fresh descants and accompaniments. The final cadence reviews the major-minor confrontation, resolving in favour of major, and thus the whole movement is framed and coloured by this contest between the two versions of the one tonic chord.

The slow movement invites comparison with the Heiliger Dankgesang of Beethoven's A minor Quartet of 1825 – it has the same overall structure of two contrasted sections in alternation ABABA, the first of which is vocally based (in Beethoven's case a harmonized chorale, in Schubert's an instrumental Lied), the second being more animated (in the Beethoven as the convalescent finds new strength in a joyful dance, in the Schubert as the music erupts into violence and terror). Schubert's opening Lied on cello (the viola provides the bass) elaborates in the main just two chords, the first with scales, the second with arpeggios: again, who else but Schubert could create such compelling melody on so constrained an harmonic base? The

eruptive middle of a slow movement (Schubert's 'volcanic temper' as one commentator has it) is something the composer had done before, for instance in the Wanderer Fantasia, but here the harmony is radically new in its distant modulations, while interjections from first violin and viola strive to preserve the point of harmonic departure, suggesting in doing so some kind of primal scream.

Goethe commented on the genre of the string quartet: 'One hears four intelligent people conversing with one another, believes one might learn something from their discourse and recognize the special characteristics of their instruments'. The first point has been much quoted, his follow-up is not so well-known – how the thematic dialogue and the special characteristics of the instruments interact. Schubert's Scherzo is made from pure figure. Just two such, quaver repeated notes and crotchet arpeggios, are deployed in the dialogue, as the instruments propose, respond, group and regroup, sharing the parsimonious figurative repertoire and drawing out its form-building possibilities. The Trio shines forth with greater luxuriance in this context, as the cello presents a further compelling melody, responded to by the first violin – tenor and soprano, as it were.

In the last movement Schubert draws on the classical 'hunting-rondo finale' topos – think Mozart's Horn Concerti or Beethoven's Violin Concerto – fast 6/8 rhythms, arpeggiatic themes, major keys. Here Schubert begins with such a theme, which also picks up on the major-minor confrontations of the first movement: the downward arpeggio is minor and loud, the responding upward arpeggio major and soft. And, just as in the Death and the Maiden Quartet, he complicates the structure by combining the rondo basis with sonata-form processes and developments. Each of the subject-groups has three distinct themes, of which only the last in the second subject-group marginalizes the propulsive 6/8 rhythms in favour of sustained chords. The middle return of the first subject leads to a serious sonata-form development of all its themes, including brief canons between the four instruments and melodic transformations. The coda includes a return of the opening, followed by the push of a syncopated fragment through a massive ascent, to arrive at the penultimate dominant chord, triple forte and incorporating oscillation between minor and major; this resolves into major for the final winding-down and cadence.

The poet Franz Grillparzer provided the epitaph for Schubert's grave: 'The art of music buried here a rich possession, but yet far fairer hopes'. Perhaps particularly after listening to D.887 we are left pondering what might have been.

Robert Pascall

## String Quartet No.13 in G major, Op.106

*Allegro moderato*

*Adagio, ma non troppo*

*Molto vivace*

*Andante sostenuto – allegro con fuoco*

Antonín Dvořák

(1841-1904)

Composed in November and December 1895, Dvořák's G major Quartet, Op.106, is the first new work he began after finally returning to his native Bohemia from his three years as director of the National Conservatory, New York. He had already begun his A flat Quartet, Op.105 while still in America, but put it to one side, only returning to finish it after completing the new work. Op.106 was given its first performance in Prague, on 9 October 1896, played by the celebrated Bohemian (later re-named Czech) Quartet. This had been established five years earlier by pupils of the cellist Hanuš Wihan, for whom Dvořák wrote his Cello Concerto (the second violinist was Josef Suk, Dvořák's star composition student and eventually his son-in-law, who was to become one of the most significant Czech composers of his generation).

A combination of leaping energy and relaxed, buoyant freshness animates the first movement's opening theme. Viola and cello start dropping hints of a new idea, which is worked up to a climax, before the first violin brings in a gentler new theme. Dvořák dwells on it for some considerable time before bringing this opening section to a close. Phrases from all three ideas are combined in the build-up to the movement's central climax, after which the opening theme returns, as chirpy as when we first heard it. This time round, Dvořák moves straight to the third of the movement's main themes, saving the second one for the imposing final bars.

The powerfully meditative second movement is a theme and variations which follow one another seamlessly, moving from major key to minor and back in a way that recalls Schubert. The theme itself is terse and subdued at first but later flowers into a broad, singing line that eventually arrives at a powerfully sonorous climax. The theme in more or less its original form leads the music to its gentle close.

The brisk, dance-like scherzo that follows has some delightful moments of musical humour, such as the accompaniment figure for the viola and cello about 20 seconds in, their rhythmic patterns never quite synchronising. A more flowing section is launched by a new idea exchanged between the viola and first violin, before the dance returns. The slower central trio section is relaxed, sunny and lyrical. The dance, without the earlier flowing episode, rounds the movement off.

After a slow introduction, a fast, lively theme launches the main part of the finale, its first four notes being those of the introduction speeded up. The first violin adds a second theme, in the minor and starting with an upward octave leap and a more gradual descent. As this comes to rest, a change of key brings a new theme, shared initially between the viola and cello. The first quick theme returns, then the pace slackens again, including a glance back at the introduction, and leading to a more sombre episode that recalls themes from the first movement. The viola/cello theme restores the quick tempo, bringing back the second theme – the one with the octave leap – but the music soon settles back into its slower tempo for a meditative episode based on the viola/cello theme and the third main theme from the first movement. The tempo picks up again for one last time, and the finale's main theme rounds the quartet off in high spirits.

Mike Wheeler

## **PAVEL HAAS QUARTET**

**Veronika Jarůšková** violin

**Marek Zwiebel** violin

**Dana Zemstov** viola

**Peter Jarůšek** cello

The Pavel Haas Quartet was founded in 2002 by the violinist Veronika Jarůšková and the violist Pavel Nikl, who was a member of the ensemble until 2016, when he left due to family reasons. Yet their collaboration has continued – Pavel Nikl has been the ensemble's permanent guest for string quintet performances.

Following their victory in the Prague Spring Festival Competition and Premio Paolo Borciani in Reggio Emilia, Italy in 2005, the Pavel Haas Quartet soon established themselves as one of the world's most exciting contemporary chamber ensembles. Performing at the most renowned concert venues around the globe, the PHQ have to date recorded nine critically acclaimed albums, which have received numerous prestigious awards. The ensemble members studied with Milan Škampa, the legendary violist of the Smetana Quartet.

In 2007, the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO) named the Pavel Haas Quartet one of its Rising Stars, following which they were afforded the opportunity to give numerous high-profile concert appearances all over the world. Between 2007 and 2009, the Pavel Haas Quartet held the title of BBC New Generation Artist. In 2010, the ensemble was granted a classical music fellowship from the Borletti–Buitoni Trust.

The venerable BBC Music Magazine has ranked the Pavel Haas Quartet among the 10 greatest string quartets of all time, alongside the Alban Berg Quartet, Amadeus Quartet, Borodin Quartet and other stellar ensembles.

The Pavel Haas Quartet records exclusively for the Supraphon label. The ensemble's recordings include major works of the repertoire by Czech composers (Leoš Janáček, Pavel Haas, Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana) and foreign authors (Sergei Prokofiev, Franz Schubert, Dmitri Shostakovich), and in both areas they have won top international awards. For the eight albums released so far, the ensemble has earned the Gramophone Award six times (their recording of the Dvořák quartets was honoured as Recording of the Year), the BBC Music Magazine Award twice, in one case the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, and countless acknowledgements in review columns of prestigious media around the world. For the Franz Schubert recording, the guest cellist is Danjulo Ishizaka. The new album of the quintets of Johannes Brahms ties in with the recording of Antonín Dvořák's quintets, when the Pavel Haas Quartet repeatedly invited the pianist Boris Giltburg and the violist Pavel Nikl to collaborate with them.

The quartet bears the name of the Czech composer Pavel Haas (1899–1944), the most talented pupil of Leoš Janáček, who in 1941 was imprisoned by the Nazis in the Terezín ghetto and three years later died in Auschwitz. Pavel Haas's oeuvre includes three splendid string quartets.