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PAVEL HAAS QUARTET

Veronika Jarůšková | Violin
Marek Zwiebel | Violin

Šimon Truszka | Viola
Peter Jarůšek | Cello

Friday, March 14, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

DVOŘÁK

String Quartet in C Major, Opus 61

Allegro
Poco adagio e molto cantabile
Scherzo: Allegro vivo
Finale: Vivace

INTERMISSION

TCHAIKOVSKY

String Quartet No. 3 in E-flat Minor, Opus 30

Andante sostenuto; Allegro
Allegro vivo e scherzando
Andante funebre, ma con moto
Finale: Allegro non troppo e risoluto

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of
Michael Mueller and Christine Cullens.

Pavel Haas Quartet is represented by Kirshbaum Associates Inc.
307 Seventh Avenue, Suite 506, New York, NY 10001 kirshbaumassociates.com



ENSEMBLE PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents the Pavel Haas Quartet for the sixth time. The Quartet made its SF Performances debut in April 2011.

The **Pavel Haas Quartet** is revered across the globe for its richness of timbre, infectious passion and intuitive rapport. Having performed at the world's most prestigious concert halls and won five *Gramophone* Awards and numerous others for 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 featured on the cover of *The Strad's* June 2022 issue and was the featured interview in *BBC Music Magazine* the same month. The ensemble was included in the latter's 10 greatest string quartet ensembles of all time and described as "stylistically powerful and richly sonorous, [and] known for its passionate and fearless performances."

In the 2024–25 season, the Quartet returns to Carnegie Hall for an all-Czech program honoring the centennial of the Year of Czech Music, initiated in 1924 to acknowledge the contributions of Czech composers. Other North American performances this season include Chamber Music Houston; Ensemble Music Society in Indianapolis; Calgary Pro Musica; Artis Naples with pianist Milana Strezeva; San Francisco Performances; Chamber Music in Napa Valley; and Friends of Chamber Music Vancouver. Internationally, the Pavel Haas Quartet returns to London's Wigmore Hall and performs in the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and Belgium.

Since September 2022, the Pavel Haas Quartet has been Artist-in-Residence at the Dvořák Prague Festival and curates 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. Its recording of the Brahms Viola and Piano Quintets with pianist Boris Giltburg and the group's former violist, Pavel Nikl, was released to critical acclaim in May 2022. The album was described as "radiant and vivacious" by *The Strad* and was *Presto Classical's* Recording of the Week. A previous album of Shostakovich String Quartets (2019) was named

Recording of the Year by Classic Prague Awards, and one of the 100 best records of the year by *The Times*.

The Quartet has received five *Gramophone* Awards for recordings of Dvořák, Smetana, Schubert, Janáček and Haas, as well as Dvořák's *String Quartets No.12 'American'* and No. 13, which was awarded the coveted *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 a recording of Prokofiev *String Quartets Nos. 1 & 2*.

Since winning the Paolo Borciani competition in Italy in 2005, subsequent career highlights have included a nomination as ECHO Rising Stars in 2007, participation in the BBC New Generation Artists scheme between 2007–09 and a Special Ensemble Scholarship awarded by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust in 2010. The Quartet is based in Prague and studied with the late Milan Skampa, legendary violist of the Smetana Quartet. The ensemble takes its 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.

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in C Major, Opus 61

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
(1841–1904)

Throughout his creative life, Dvořák was caught between two conflicting artistic impulses. He wrote in the great German classical forms, yet in his heart he was a devout Czech nationalist, happiest when he could infuse his music with the characteristic rhythms and sounds of his homeland. Usually he could balance these claims, but at times they came into conflict.

Such a collision occurred in 1881, when Joseph Hellmesberger commissioned a string quartet from Dvořák. Hellmesberger, a violinist and conductor, must have seemed to Dvořák the symbol of Vienna: he was director of the Vienna Conservatory, the founder and first violinist of his own string quartet, and for 40 years he conducted the concerts of the Vienna Gesellschaft. It was Hellmesberger who had championed the young Brahms after the latter's arrival in Vienna 20 years earlier, and Dvořák recognized how great a compliment it was to have a work commissioned by Hellmesberger. But such a commission raised uncomfortable artistic problems for Dvořák. Should he remain true to his own impulses and write the kind of music he wanted, full of Czech melodies, rhythms, and dances? Or should he write in a more classical—a more Viennese—manner? Viennese audiences, he knew, tended to sneer at local color (particularly foreign local color) in music. Critics have been unanimous in their belief that Dvořák—faced with an important commission from Vienna—capitulated, erasing Czech elements from this quartet and attempting to write in the style of the Viennese masters. One critic hears echoes of Beethoven in the first movement, another hears Schubert in the scherzo, and so on.

Actually, this quartet sounds like Dvořák throughout. True, one does not hear the rhythms and national dances typical of much of Dvořák's Czech music, but no one would guess that the *Quartet in C Major* is the work of any composer but Dvořák. He creates memorable themes, the music is full of harmonic adventures, there are surprising thematic links between movements, and this quartet bristles with energy—for this exciting music to make its full effect, it needs a real virtuoso performance.

The extended first movement is in sonata form; Dvořák supplies an extremely dramatic coda which—surprisingly—gives way to a gentle close. The marking for the second movement—*Poco adagio e molto cantabile*—is crucial, for this intense music sings throughout. The haunting main theme grows more florid and ornate as it develops, and the music is full of chromatic figurations and spiky accompaniment figures. The main theme of the *Scherzo* is derived from the main theme of the opening movement, and suddenly we are back in that same world of furious energy, with the music racing along on triplet rhythms; the scherzo section itself is in the expected 3/4 meter, but Dvořák sets the trio in 2/4. The rondo-like finale, marked *Vivace*, is the most impressive movement of the quartet: the main theme sounds unmistakably like a Czech dance, and it is on the energy of this music that Dvořák brings his most “Viennese” composition to a sparkling close.

String Quartet No. 3 in E-flat Minor, Opus 30

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
(1840–1893)

In January 1876, shortly after the premiere of his *Third Symphony*, Tchaikovsky took a quick trip to Paris, and two things of interest happened there. First, he attended a performance of *Carmen*, which had been premiered only months earlier, and fell in love with that opera. And he made sketches for a new string quartet, which would be his third. He returned to Moscow and completed the quartet in February. A private performance on March 1 was warmly received, but Tchaikovsky was not satisfied and revised the quartet before its “official” premiere on March 28 at a concert in honor of Grand Duke Constantine Nicholas.

Tchaikovsky dedicated the quartet to the memory of Czech violinist Ferdinand Laub, professor of violin at the Moscow Conservatory, who had died the previous year at age 43. Laub had been a colleague and friend to Tchaikovsky (Laub's quartet had given the premieres of Tchaikovsky's first two quartets), and the composer was devastated by his death—the somber third movement of this quartet was intended specifically as a memorial to the violinist. The *Third Quartet* is a big work—it stretches out to nearly forty minutes—and its memorial character is underlined by Tchaikovsky's choice of the dark key of E-flat minor.

The character of this music is established

by its long opening movement. This begins with a lengthy slow introduction based on several different themes, one of them a grieving violin melody over pizzicato accompaniment that Tchaikovsky marks *cantabile e molto espressivo*. The sonata-form main section, *Allegro moderato*, is built on two theme-groups, and after an active (and extended) development Tchaikovsky brings back the slow introduction to round off the movement. By contrast, the ternary-form *Allegretto vivo e scherzando* is brief, spirited, and engaging. The melodic line jumps brilliantly between different voices in the outer sections, which frame a dark trio introduced by the viola; after all this energy, the movement's understated ending is particularly effective.

The third movement—*Andante funebre e doloroso*—is the memorial to Ferdinand Laub. Long and heartfelt, this movement is made up of a wealth of ideas. Fierce muted opening chords give way to an expressive violin melody, which Tchaikovsky marks *piangendo* [weeping] *e molto espressivo*. A softly-pulsing transition theme sounds like something out of a church chant, dark and numbed, and Tchaikovsky then introduces an entirely new thematic group. The composer liked this movement enough that the year after the premiere of the quartet he made an arrangement of it for violin and piano.

The intensity of the third movement appears to have satisfied Tchaikovsky's need to remember and commemorate his friend. He moves to a major key for his finale—E-flat major—and offers what is almost a conventional ending, full of brusque energy, attractive tunes, and high spirits. Just before the coda, Tchaikovsky slows the pace and recalls some of the dark mood of the third movement, and then the quartet races to its close on a *Vivace* coda.

Tchaikovsky's three string quartets are not often performed, but critics agree that the *Third Quartet* is the best of them. Tchaikovsky was at first pleased by its success, but within months of the premiere he was assailed by the self-doubt that tormented him throughout his life. To his brother he wrote: “It seems to me I have written myself out a little. I am beginning to repeat myself and can't think of anything new. Is it possible that my song is finished and that I shall go no farther?”

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger