

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 13 December 2022
7.30pm

Christian Tetzlaff violin
Florian Donderer violin
Timothy Ridout viola
Tanja Tetzlaff cello
Kiveli Dörken piano

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) Silent Woods from *From the Bohemian Forest* Op. 68 for cello and piano (1883-4)

Terzetto in C Op. 74 (1887)
*I. Introduzione. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Larghetto •
III. Scherzo. Vivace • IV. Tema con variazioni. Poco adagio*

Interval

Josef Suk (1874-1935)

From *Things Lived and Dreamt* Op. 30 (1909)
Allegro moderato • Poco allegretto •
On the recovery of my son. Adagio • Vivace

Piano Quintet Op. 8 (1893 rev. 1915)
*I. Allegro energico • II. Adagio religioso •
III. Scherzo. Presto • IV. Finale. Allegro con fuoco*

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This programme of Czech chamber music is very much a family affair. Not only was Suk Dvořák's favourite composition pupil, but their relationship was cemented when Suk married his teacher's daughter, Otýlie, in 1899. They were also connected by strong professional ties: when still a violin student at the Prague Conservatoire, Suk became a founder member of the Bohemian Quartet – created at the instigation of Dvořák's colleague, the cellist Hanuš Wihan – which went on to give the first performance of Dvořák's String Quartet in G Op. 106. And in 1922, Suk followed in the footsteps of his mentor and father-in-law when he himself was appointed professor of composition at the Conservatoire.

By the early 1890s, **Dvořák's** international fame was such that he was invited to become director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. Taking up this post was a momentous turning point in the career of a composer so attached to his homeland, and with his departure for America looming, during the early months of 1892 Dvořák embarked on a farewell concert tour of Bohemia and Moravia with two colleagues from the Prague Conservatoire, Hanuš Wihan and the violinist Ferdinand Lachner. For this tour some additional repertoire was required, and so Dvořák arranged for cello and piano a piece from his piano four-hands cycle *From the Bohemian Forest* (1883-4). The Czech title of this piece is simply *Klid*, meaning 'silence' or 'tranquillity'. In English, it goes under the rather more evocative title of *Silent Woods*. The arrangement was first played by Dvořák and Wihan at the opening concert of their tour, given in the Central Bohemian town of Rakovník in January 1892.

From 1877 the composer and his family lived in a house on Prague's Žitná street, where some years later one of their neighbours was a certain Josef Kruis, a chemistry student who was also a keen amateur violinist. Kruis was taking lessons with Jan Pelikán, a friend of Dvořák's who played in the orchestra of the National Theatre. As a young man, the composer had supplemented his income by playing the viola in the orchestra of Prague's Provisional Theatre, and after overhearing Pelikán giving a lesson to Kruis, he was inspired to dust down his viola and play some chamber music with them. The repertoire for this combination of instruments was practically non-existent, and so Dvořák decided to write something for them himself. Unfortunately, he rather overestimated the technical abilities of Kruis, and at the first run-through of the *Terzetto* early in 1887, the ill-matched nature of the ensemble soon became apparent. Undeterred, Dvořák quickly produced another piece better suited to the needs of amateur musicians – the *Bagatelles*, Op. 75a – leaving his original offering the preserve of professionals. The *Terzetto* is a delightful piece, in which the composer rose to the challenge of creating complex textures

with just three instruments so successfully that the absence of a string bass line hardly matters.

When Dvořák left for New York, the newly graduated **Suk** was already being seen as the natural successor to his teacher. The personal bonds between them grew even stronger following Dvořák's return from the States, especially after Suk's marriage to Otýlie. Sadly, within only a few years both Dvořák and his daughter were dead, and Suk was left a widower with a young son. He poured out his feelings of loss and despair in a series of works that included the *Asrael Symphony* (1906) and two piano cycles, *About Mother* (1907) and *Things Lived and Dreamt* (1909). By the time he came to write the latter, his grief had become slightly less raw, and the cycle gives the impression that the composer was slowly coming to terms with his loss. All the pieces are prefaced with detailed descriptions of their mood, intended as an aid to interpretation; two of them – including the fifth, *On the recovery of my son*, which forms part of this evening's programme – also have a specific programmatic content.

Suk later confided to Dvořák's biographer Otakar Šourek that his beloved teacher's departure for the United States in the summer of 1892 had left him somewhat rudderless. 'I lost my mentor and was alone, but I felt all the more the obligation to work and make my mark before my master returned,' he said. Feeling under pressure to produce music that would prove that he was worthy of the hopes vested in him, he embarked on what was his most ambitious work to date, the Piano Quintet in G minor. The Quintet was well received, but Suk admitted to Šourek that his urge to compose music of depth and complexity had militated against the spontaneous expression of emotion of his earlier works. In an attempt to rectify what he had come to see as a serious defect, in 1915 he subjected the work to extensive revision.

The Quintet is dedicated not to Dvořák but to Brahms, who with his own Piano Quintet in F minor composed some three decades earlier had signalled a similar intention to take the musical world by storm. In the mid-1870s Brahms had befriended Dvořák and helped to promote his music in the German-speaking world, and he was by now also becoming aware of the burgeoning talent of Dvořák's star pupil. Though a few fleeting moments in Suk's work appear to pay homage to Brahms – notably the more rhetorical passages of the first movement – the originality of the composer's voice still shines through, especially in the rapt *Adagio* and the energetic folk-inspired *Scherzo*. But perhaps inevitably, in the last two movements the influence of Dvořák's great Piano Quintet No. 2 in A major can also be heard.

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