WIGMORE HALL

Friday 23 October 2026
7.30pm

Pavel Haas Quartet
- **Veronika Jarůšková** violin
- **Marek Zwiebel** violin
- **Šimon Truszka** viola
- **Peter Jarůšek** cello

Pavel Nikl viola
Ivan Vokáč cello

Pavel Haas (1899-1944)	String Quartet No. 3 Op. 15 (1938) *I. Allegro moderato • II. Lento ma non troppo e poco rubato • III. Thema con variazioni e fuga. Con moto – Allegro vicace*
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	String Quartet No. 1 'The Kreutzer Sonata' (1923) *I. Adagio – Con moto • II. Con moto • III. Con moto – Vivo – Andante • IV. Con moto – Adagio*
	Interval
Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)	String Sextet in A Op. 48 (1878) *I. Allegro moderato • II. Dumka. Poco allegretto • III. Furiant. Presto • IV. Finale. Tema con variazioni. Allegretto grazioso, quasi andantino*

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Haas's String Quartet No. 3 began life as a spin-off from his opera *Šarlatán* (The Charlatan), the work whose highly successful première in Brno in April 1938 earned him wide critical and public acclaim. In the early 1920s, Haas had been one of Janáček's star pupils at the Brno Conservatory, but it wasn't until after his marriage to Soňa Jakobsonová – a respected medical doctor whose earnings allowed her to support her husband – in 1935 that he was finally able to devote all his energies to composition.

Soon after completing the scoring of *Šarlatán* in the summer of 1937, Haas embarked on his Third String Quartet. In the first movement he drew heavily on the melodic material of the opera, evidently feeling that its themes still had the potential for further development. The inclusion of a fragment from the St Wenceslas Chorale (a theme traditionally associated with times of peril for the Czech nation) provides a hint of the dark clouds that were already by then gathering on the horizon. During this period, the expansionist policies of Nazi Germany increasingly posed a threat to Czechoslovakia's very existence – a threat that Czech Jewish citizens such as Haas had even more reason to fear than their non-Jewish compatriots.

The second movement begins with a sombre viola solo that bears a distinct resemblance to the *Agnus Dei* theme from Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* and goes on to make further references to the St Wenceslas Chorale. The finale is a set of variations on a march-like theme, rounded off with an energetic fugue. This movement was inspired by the Sokol gymnastics festival held in Prague in July 1938, which turned into a defiant display of Czech national pride and unity in the face of increasing German aggression.

Haas completed the Quartet in August 1938, weeks before the Munich Agreement forced Czechoslovakia to hand over the Sudetenland border region to Hitler. From then on his fate was sealed, and within a few years, he – together with most of his fellow citizens from Jewish backgrounds – was temporarily interned in the transit camp of Terezín (Theresienstadt), before being despatched to his death in Auschwitz in October 1944.

From music written in the shadow of tyrannical oppression we move on to the first quartet by Haas's teacher **Janáček** – a work inspired by a tale of domestic tyranny and destructive rage. A committed Slavophile, who was convinced that Czech culture had far more in common with that of other Slavonic nations than with the Central European Germanic culture imposed on it as a subject nation of the Habsburg monarchy, Janáček found inspiration in several works of Russian literature. One such work was Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), the story of a man who murders his wife in a fit of jealousy after hearing her play Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 9 (the 'Kreutzer') with a man he suspects of being her lover. Only a few years before embarking on the Quartet, Janáček had explored a similar theme – the suffering of a woman trapped in a loveless marriage, who succumbs to an illicit passion and then dies in tragic circumstances – in his opera *Káťa Kabanová* (1921), also inspired by a work of Russian literature.

Another source of inspiration for the Quartet was undoubtedly the composer's relationship with Kamila Stösslová – a married woman 37 years his junior, who was his muse for the last decade or so of his life and for whom he nursed an overwhelming but seemingly unrequited passion. From *Káťa Kabanová* onwards, several of the main female characters in Janáček's operas are thinly disguised portraits of Kamila, and it's highly likely that the composer's response to Tolstoy's story was governed by his feelings for Kamila and his conviction that passion should not be caged out of respect for social conventions. In fact, he appears to have reached a very different conclusion to Tolstoy: while the Russian author intended his novella as a warning that listening to passionate music could lead those receptive to it astray, for Janáček, to be carried away by the power of music was no bad thing, and he was inspired by the story to produce a work of searing power and beauty.

There can hardly be a greater contrast than that between the anguish and foreboding that pervade the Haas and Janáček quartets featured in this evening's programme and the sunniness that is the predominant mood of **Dvořák**'s String Sextet. The work belongs firmly to what might be termed the composer's most Slavonic period, when he was consciously seeking to incorporate the essential characteristics of Slavonic folk music into his own musical style. (The Sextet came hard on the heels of the *Slavonic Rhapsody* No. 1, and its composition period overlapped with that of the first set of *Slavonic Dances*.) The titles of the middle two movements openly declare their sources of inspiration: the second movement (the only one to succumb to a more elegiac mood) is a *Dumka*, a term originally coined to describe a Ukrainian epic ballad, while the third is a *Furiant*, an energetic Czech folk dance. The tunefulness, vivacious rhythms and rich colouring of the Sextet ensured the universality of its appeal: it was the first of Dvořák's works to be premièred outside his homeland and was championed enthusiastically by the eminent violinist Joseph Joachim, who gave the first performance. Within a few months of the Berlin première in 1879, it had also been performed in several other German cities as well as in London and New York. The reaction of the Czech conductor Václav Talich when he first heard the Sextet is a typical one: 'Oh my word! This is so beautiful!' he is said to have exclaimed.

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