



## Pavel Haas String Quartet

Tuesday 9 July 2019 20:00

Hindsgavl Festival

### Antonin Dvořák (1841-1903)

String Quartet No 14 in A flat major, opus 105  
(1896)

- I. *Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro appassionato*
- II. *Molto vivace - Trio*
- III. *Lento e molto cantabile*
- IV. *Finale. Allegro non tanto*

### Dmitrij Sjostakovitj (1906-1975)

String Quartet No 2 in A major, opus 68  
(1944)

- I. *Overture: Moderato con moto*
- II. *Recitative and Romance: Adagio*
- III. *Valse: Allegro*
- IV. *Theme with Variations: Adagio*

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### Dvořák: String Quartet No 14 in A flat major

Dvořák was Bohemian to the core. His early works are based on the folk music of his home country to such an extent, that all over the world his music was regarded as the epitome of the Bohemian national soul. At the end of

the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the USA, much energy was put into defining the sound of a similar national soul in the otherwise multi ethnic nation. That's the reason why Dvořák was invited to New York, where he lived from 1892-1895, and where he wrote music which was meant to unite the Americans as one nation. Dvořák's American compositions, especially *Symphony No 9 "From the New World"* and *String Quartet No 12 "The American"* are among his most famous works, because they contain reminiscences of a special American tone.

But Dvořák's stay in the USA was far from happy. In his last days in New York he drafted his *String Quartet No 14* which was to be his last chamber music composition, and which is full of homesickness and love for Bohemia.

The first movement begins with a dark introduction – like a picture of Dvořák's nostalgic state of mind in the USA. Disturbing dissonances freeze the music in sadness. But suddenly minor becomes major, and a joyful main theme in the Bohemian folk style is introduced. The impression is like a musical journey from the unsafe streets of New York to a pleasant stroll through Dvořák's beloved Prague.

The lively *Scherzo* again reflects the joy of returning home. The rhythm with strong accents comes from a Bohemian folk dance, and the milder middle section is pure national romanticism.

The slow third movement is a deeply felt hymn of thanksgiving. An atmosphere of religious consolation hovers over the music which gradually grows in emotional intensity until it reaches a roaring climax. After this the music again calms down in a dancing light theme with ingenious details in the accompanying instruments.

The finale reminds us of the first movement. The cello starts on its own with a dark and threatening melody. The viola and second violin at first support the cello. But with the entrance of the first violin, the music returns to domestic happiness. The ending is one big folk musical *accelerando*, finishing in a virtuoso Bohemian full stop. Dvořák is finally back where he belongs.

### **Sjostakovitj: String Quartet No 2 in A major**

With his biting, sarcastic musical language Sjostakovitj is known as a sharp critic of the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. But during WWII he regarded himself more as the artistic patriot of his home country. Together with a number of Russian artists he was sent into protection in the town of Ivanovo. In just 19 days he composed his String Quartet No 2 as a euphoric reaction to the fact that the Russian fortunes of war finally seemed to be turning. Hitler's troops on the eastern front were brought to their knees. The Russians began to sense the approaching freedom.

The String Quartet No 2 is the longest and most symphonic of Sjostakovitj's 15 string quartets. It's grand music with a consequent use of Russian folk music which undoubtedly is a loyal statement of support to the warfare of his country.

The first movement is a triumphant overture. The exuberant energy stems from the obvious imitation in the first violin of the folk music tradition. On our way through the movement, we meet both dissonant contrasts and cacophonous ferocity. But the folksy optimism has the final word, not least when the main theme is transformed into an uplifting waltz towards the end.

The second movement, Recitative and Romance, has an ethereal aura making one think of Beethoven's late string quartet. The long recitative, which both opens and closes the movement, is formed as a poignant monologue of creed by the first violin floating over the sparse harmonic movements in the other instruments. The Romance is full of beauty in sounds and melody with a distinct touch of melancholy.

The third movement is a mysterious waltz, quiet and ghostlike. The mystery continues in the dark and searching introduction to the Finale. But soon the viola presents a Russian folk tune which through the succeeding 13 variations unfolds a number of musical expressions and exudes Sjostakovitj's caustic patriotism in time of war.

*Text: Mathias Hammer*

*English translation: Susanne Lange*

### **Pavel Haas String Quartet**

What's a young woman to do when she is just out of the conservatory, unemployed and a violinist? Well, she starts her own business with just four employees, and in the first ten years receives five Gramophone Awards, including one Record of the Year. That has to be some kind of unofficial record.

This is at least one way of summing up the career of Veronika Jarušková and with that the career of the Pavel Haas Quartet. In order to do so much in so little time you have to get a flying start, and one day Veronika's husband Peter was sucked into the strong slipstream and joined the quartet. Until then he was the cellist in the leading Czech quartet, the Skampa Quartet, but grasped the chance of

playing together with his wife and help her with the audacious start-up.

The trying life with many competitions which is normal for a young quartet was soon over, because they won two important competitions *Prager Frühling* and *Premio Paolo Borciani* and thus were able to concentrate on playing “real” concerts – something which they needed to do very quickly. By winning the *Premio Paolo Borciani* they got to play 40 concerts in Europe, USA and Japan, 11 of those in Europe within the first two weeks. Then on to the USA where the quartet had to play a concert on their first evening in the country – jetlag and all!

For a very young quartet who until then only had played the occasional concert without getting paid, this was something of a change and a real trial by fire. They got through it all right, although they had to find a new second violinist afterwards. Their original player had started a family and soon realized how difficult that is in combination with “being in jail”.

This comparison between a string quartet and jail, the young quartet heard from their mentor, the great viola player in the legendary Smetana Quartet, Milan Škampa. He had such a passionate attitude to the life of a quartet that it was almost fanatical. One day, in the midst of passing on this passion, he announced that “the string quartet is the most beautiful prison imaginable”.

Luckily the most beautiful among them tend to be around for many years, in spite of the occasional change of players.

*Text: Ulrik Damgaard Andersen*  
*English translation: Susanne Lange*

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