

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
DUKE PERFORMANCES
THE CHAMBER ARTS SOCIETY OF DURHAM PRESENTS



PAVEL HAAS QUARTET

FRI, MAY 7
VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

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PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, **Ludwig van Beethoven**
op. 95 ("Serioso") (1770-1827)

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Allegretto ma non troppo
- III. Allegro assai vivace ma serio
- IV. Larghetto espressivo; Allegretto agitato; Allegro

String Quartet No. 7, H. 314, **Bohuslav Martinů**
Concerto de camera (1890-1959)

- I. Poco allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro vivo

Beethoven: String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, op. 95 (“Serioso”)

Written in 1810, Beethoven’s eleventh quartet occupies a special position in his output. Stylistically and historically, it forms a bridge between what would become known as his middle and late periods. Both were characterized by highly influential formal experiments, with the late works taking well-established conventions to new extremes. Beethoven himself was highly aware of this transition, perhaps explaining why he provided the “Serioso” subtitle, himself. In this piece, the composer’s approach foreshadows some of his more radical ideas, but it also confidently cements the fearless verve that built his reputation over the preceding decade.

With its explosive opening motto, the *Allegro con brio* announces itself as a work that means business. But, clear though the music’s resolve may be, it is also unstable. To use a spatial metaphor, Beethoven renders a carved-up landscape: patches of calm beauty immediately juxtapose with violent outcroppings. Holding the movement together, in spite of its volatility, is a relatively small network of melodic fragments. Each appears in unpredictable contexts, but their recognizability provides a path through this wildly diverse environment.

The *Allegretto, ma non troppo* begins with a naïve (or at least formulaic) line in the cello. Such simplicity is deceptive, however, as the movement turns out to be harmonically and structurally complex. Its form is more clearly delineated than that of the first movement, yet it retains a sense of harmonic insecurity. This fuels a tension between song-like outer sections and fugal central episodes. Exploring the synthesis of contrapuntal intrigue and piquant harmonies would become a hallmark of Beethoven’s late style; here it serves to bolster the directness of his melodic sensibilities.

Without pause, the quartet progresses into the *Allegro assai vivace ma serioso*. And serious it is, indeed! Aggressive dotted rhythms and dissonant chords characterize the movement’s three main sections, which contrast with more listless intervening passages. Formally, this relates to the first movement’s patchwork structure, but its more striking differences effect a palpable intentionality.

Compared to the other movements, most of the finale is quite traditional, and more overtly linear — gone are the abrupt

shifts and extreme contrasts. Instead, following a brief slow introduction, the music develops according to a familiar set of principles. Momentum is gained, tension built, and release is sought. But when it finally comes, its profile is wholly unexpected. The entire quartet was very sincere about its minoriness — this is undeniably a work of F Minor. That its final section should conclude boisterously and emphatically in F Major is therefore truly shocking, though not entirely surprising; unforeseen shifts are integral to the identity of this piece. To end on a “happy” note is therefore consistent in a deep way — one last enticingly strange contrast to keep the imagination spinning well after the last cadence.

Martinů: Concerto da Camera (String Quartet No. 7)

As World War II gained momentum, and expanded into his native Czechoslovakia, Martinů gradually reached the conclusion that he would need to flee. He had become a public defender of Czech opposition efforts, which resulted in his music being blacklisted by the Nazis. So, in 1941, he found himself in New York, where he would stay for about a decade. Life for him in the US was not easy — he was shy, did not know much English, and had difficulty adapting to the academic world that provided support. Nevertheless, he produced a number of works during this period, including his seventh and final quartet. Its official title, *Concerto da Camera*, alludes to its challenging and cooperative spirit. The work requires a remarkable *esprit de corps* from the ensemble: each part is virtuosic, as are the ways in which they interact and commingle. It also exemplifies some of Martinů's neo-classical tendencies, especially in its invocation of old forms and reliance on deep tonal elements.

Tracking the Poco Allegro's course can be a challenge. It contains a great many notes, themes, and textures, with hardly a single pause, minimal dynamic variations, and very few clear phrase endings. Coupled with almost non-stop sixteenth notes, the result is a motoric structure that demands quite a lot of the performers and audience; one would be right to marvel at the energy Martinů baked into the movement. Despite the overabundance of information, though, a clear underlying structure exists. The music heard at the start almost immediately triggers a process of transformation, through which its notes are prismatically rotated, disassembled, and altered. Often, this yields passages with unanticipated moods,

but which nevertheless arise organically. And, ultimately, the main theme makes a clear return to usher in a concluding section. Such a trajectory owes much to two historical practices: late 18th-century sonata form, and earlier Baroque concepts of thematic development. The former gives us the movement's overall shape, while the latter helps contextualize its mechanics. Though Martinů's harmonic and melodic vocabularies are thoroughly modern (for the time), his senses of dynamism, counterpoint, and motivic transformation are Bach-like in nature. As in Bach's instrumental music, this work proceeds with a momentum borne of its basic materials; it builds on the impulses contained in the opening phrase, and allows those impulses to govern large-scale growth. Of course, that doesn't necessarily make the music's logic easily graspable on a first (or second!) listen, but it suggests a robust continuity of both history and the immediate musical experience.

The Andante follows similar procedures, albeit at a slower tempo and with a simpler two-part form. Its simple main theme, which returns at the half-way point, draws attention to the intimacy of the ensemble. Martinů makes prominent use of the contrapuntal technique known as "voice crossing," where each part is permitted to extend its sound above or below that of its neighbors. For example, the viola is frequently called on to play in a higher range than the second violin, or a lower range than the cello. So pervasive is Martinů's use of the technique that the music acquires biological properties; there's a sense in which the identities of each individual musician are subsumed into a living whole. After the torrents of the first movement, this new feeling of active and purposeful unity warms the entire composition — a sensation amplified by the music's clearer harmonic language. Remarkable, fluid shifts in key still color the work, but we are provided with more stable ground, culminating in a radiant final cadence on B-flat Major.

Radiant triads also abound in the concluding Allegro vivo, but now cast as galloping arpeggios. These "broken chords" perhaps offer an early hint about the movement's unpredictable texture. Though the main theme provides unity by returning a few times (turning this movement in another 18th-century form, the Rondo), it does not participate in the more clearly organic processes of the other two movements. Instead, the music's internal sections are partitioned by sudden shifts in rhythm and mood. Doing so recalls the first movement's agita, yet also brings forth a new clarity. It is this

property that allows the music to fulfill its conclusory function, capping off the quartet with vim and vigor.

Pavel Haas Quartet

The **Pavel Haas Quartet** has been called “the world’s most exciting string quartet” (Gramophone) and is revered across the globe for its richness of timbre, infectious passion and intuitive rapport. Performing at the world’s most prestigious concert halls and having won five Gramophone and numerous other awards for their recordings, the Quartet is firmly established as one of the world’s foremost chamber ensembles.

In the 2019/20 season the Quartet will return to major venues including Tonhalle Zürich, Wigmore Hall London, Philharmonie Luxembourg, Stockholm Konserthuset, Società del Quartetto di Milano and festivals such as the Schubertiade. They will return to Amsterdam Muziekgebouw to perform three concerts at the String Quartet Biennale in January 2020 and will embark on their first tour to Israel with performances in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. Further tours will be to the U.S. and Canada as well as to Asia, where they will return to NCPA Beijing and give their debuts in Hong Kong and Singapore.

The Pavel Haas Quartet records exclusively for Supraphon and their next recording of Shostakovich String Quartets Nos. 2, 7, and 8 will be released in October 2019. For their latest disc of Dvořák’s Piano Quintet No. 2 and String Quintet No. 3 with Boris Giltburg and their former member, Pavel Nikl, they were awarded their fifth Gramophone Chamber Music Award in 2018. Diapason d’Or chose the disc as Album of the Month and commented: “It is difficult to overestimate their expressive intensity and opulent sound production.” The Quartet received further Gramophone Chamber Music Awards for their recordings of Smetana’s String Quartets, Schubert’s String Quartet ‘Death and the Maiden’ and the String Quintet with Danjulo Ishizaka, Janáček’s Quartet No.2 ‘Intimate Letters’ and Haas’s Quartet No.2 ‘From the Monkey Mountains’, as well as Dvořák’s String Quartets No.12 ‘American’ and No.13, for which the Quartet was also awarded the most coveted prize, 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 their recording of Prokofiev String Quartets Nos 1 & 2.

In spring 2005, the Quartet won the Paolo Borciani competition in Italy. Further highlights early on in their career were the nomination as ECHO Rising Stars in 2007, the participation in the BBC New Generation Artists scheme between 2007-2009 and the Special Ensemble Scholarship the Borletti-Buitoni Trust awarded them in 2010.

The Quartet is based in Prague and studied with the late Milan Skampa, the legendary violist of the Smetana Quartet. They take their name from the Czech 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.



Alsarah talking to students at Durham School of the Arts.

Last season, **Duke Performances** held over 100 residency events with visiting artists, reaching over 2,000 Duke students and 2,000 members of the Durham community through class visits, public conversations, master classes, workshops, and pop-up concerts, as well as K-12 engagement with Durham Public Schools.

For 2020/21, this work continues in virtual form, through free online series such as 'In Conversation' and special engagements for students and teachers throughout the district.

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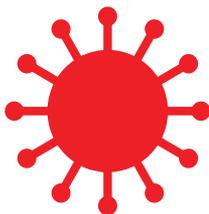
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