# Pavel Haas Quartet

KIRSHBAUM ASSOCIATES INC.
307 SEVENTH AVENUE SUITE 506 NEW YORK NY 10001 (212) 222-4843 TEL (212) 222-7321 FAX WWW.KIRSHBAUMASSOCIATES.COM

**Pavel Haas Quartet**
**Veronika Jarůšková, violin; Marek Zwiebel, violin;**
**Simon Truszka, viola; Peter Jarůšek, cello**
**2026-2027 Biography**

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 regularly 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 graced the June 2022 cover of *The Strad* 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 2026-2027 season, Pavel Haas Quartet tours North America with concerts at Chamber Music Houston, Chamber Music in Napa Valley, Chamber Music concerts in Ashland, Oregon, Friends of Music Denver, Cleveland Chamber Music Society, Chamber Music Cincinnati, Vivo Performing Arts in Boston, Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, and in Montreal. In Europe they play London's Wigmore Hall and Norwich in the UK, as well as Germany, the Netherlands, and the Janáček Brno Festival in Czechia.

Renowned as the leading interpreter of Eastern European chamber music masterpieces, the Quartet was named as Ambassador for the Year of Czech Music in 2024. From 2025 until 2027, the Pavel Haas Quartet serves as Artist-in-Residence at Smetana's Litomyšl Festival, alongside the Czech Philharmonic.

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 selected as *Presto Classical*'s Recording of the Week. A previous

album of Shostakovich String Quartets was named Recording of the Year by Classic Prague Awards, and one of the 100 best records of 2019 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 2010 Diapason d'Or de l'Année 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 from 2007 to 2009 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.

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**Critical Acclaim**

"It's a cliché to say that time stands still during Schubert's great Adagio but, while the Pavel Haas played it, it seemed as if nobody in the Crail audience dared to breathe."

***The Times***

"They represent the best qualities of the Czech tradition – warmth, sonorousness, individuality, intensity; but what's striking here is their fearless risk-taking, their fervency and the absolute confidence with which they propel you through these two masterpieces."

***Gramophone***

"It's their lightness of touch that commands; the subtle nuances of colour, line and texture performed with almost spectral intensity."

***BBC Music Magazine***

"The Pavel Haas Quartet is one of the truly outstanding ensembles of our time. They combine a sensual sound quality with an innate sense for the chamber musical structure in the finest and most vital way."

***Süddeutsche Zeitung***

"The Pavel Haas Quartet at the Kammermusiksaal played its way into the highest echelon of string quartets... The four musicians play with an infectious and fearless passion and a technical brilliance that was breath-taking."

***General-Anzeiger, Bonn***

"It was, in the end, a performance that combined intellectual rigor with emotional immediacy — a searing, edge-of-the-seat account that turned familiar masterworks into something urgent and newly alive."

***Ear Relevant***

"What really grips me about these performances is the ensemble's ability to get under the skin of the music and their compellingly imaginative concept of texture,
instrumental balance and nuance."

***BBC Music Magazine***

GRAMOPHONE

October 7, 2026

# Gramophone's Chamber Award 2026: Thrilling Martinů string quartets

The Pavel Haas Quartet's idiomatic accounts set a new benchmark in these works

By David Fanning

These recordings could be – and at least deserve to be – a 'game-changer' (as David Gutman puts it in his review) so far as the place of Martinů's string quartets in the performed repertoire is concerned.

Martinů has occasionally drawn accusations of moving on to the next piece before getting the maximum juice out of the one he was on, but the quartets offer excellent rebuttals. There is much of the energy of Bartók or Janáček here, albeit without their fanatical edge, and more than a whiff of Parisian astringency in the Second and Third Quartets. But Martinů cannot go for too long without falling into a more sympathetic, lyrical tone, which in turn soon has to yield to something more intransigent. The synthesis is highly personal and for the most part instantly appealing (especially so in the predominantly sunny Seventh Quartet). The Fifth Quartet, longest of the four on this album, feels like the most ambitious and the most likely to reward repeated encounters.

In this idiom, as indebted to Stravinsky as to any of Martinů's French or central European contemporaries, rhythmical interweaving can be quite treacherous for performers. Not so for an ensemble as attuned as the Pavel Haas Quartet, of course. They attack the more extrovert movements with tremendous verve, and when Martinů keeps his cards close to his chest, as he generally does in his slow movements, they prove the most sympathetic of guides. Where virtuosity is called for, as in the first movement of the Second Quartet, they are more than equal to the task.

This is a deserved winner in a strong category this year.

EarRelevant™

March 27, 2026

# Pavel Haas Quartet shapes persuasive narrative arc in Schubert and Beethoven at Spivey Hall

By Mark Gresham

**The Pavel Haas Quartet** came to **Spivey Hall** on March 21 with a program that traced a striking arc. Drawn from the music of Franz Schubert and Ludwig van Beethoven, the concert balanced formal clarity with emotional extremity and was performed with uncommon focus and expressive depth.

The afternoon opened with Schubert's *Quartettsatz* in C minor, D. 703, a single-movement fragment that nonetheless feels complete in its dramatic scope. The Pavel Haas players leaned into its volatility, shaping the surging unisons and abrupt silences with a taut, almost orchestral sense of scale.

Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 16* in F major, Op. 135, brought a change of tone but not of intensity. Here, the quartet emphasized transparency and wit, allowing Beethoven's late style, by turns playful and questioning, to emerge with conversational ease. The famous final movement, with its insistent "Muss es sein?" motif, unfolded as a philosophical dialogue rather than a rhetorical statement. The ensemble's control of dynamics and articulation gave the music a sense of inevitability, even as it hovered between humor and existential inquiry.

After intermission, Schubert's *String Quartet No. 14* in D minor, D. 810, "Death and the Maiden," the program's emotional and structural centerpiece, followed. The Pavel Haas Quartet approached the work not as a display piece but as a narrative journey, drawing clear connections to the earlier Schubert fragment while expanding its expressive world. The first movement's driving rhythms were delivered with fierce precision, yet never at the expense of tonal richness. In the theme and variations second movement, the players sustained a long arc of tension, the famous song-derived theme unfolding with a stark, almost vocal inevitability.

The "Scherzo" crackled with energy, its "Trio" offering only the briefest respite before the tarantella-like "Finale" surged forward. Here, the quartet's technical command was matched by a visceral sense of risk, each phrase propelled toward an inexorable conclusion. Throughout, the ensemble maintained a remarkable balance: individual voices emerged with clarity, yet the overall sound remained unified and cohesive.

Taken together, the program suggested a through-line from Beethoven's late introspection to Schubert's more overtly dramatic engagement with mortality — the fragmentary *Quartettsatz* serving as a mediator between the two. The Pavel Haas Quartet illuminated these connections with intelligence and conviction, making the concert feel less like a sequence of works than a single, evolving statement.

It was, in the end, a performance that combined intellectual rigor with emotional immediacy — a searing, edge-of-the-seat account that turned familiar masterworks into something urgent and newly alive.

the Strad

November 21, 2025

# The Strad Recommends: Pavel Haas Quartet: Martinů

By Joann Talbot

What a quartet! Not only are the members of the Pavel Haas Quartet supreme recording artists but they are equally good live. Each strand of hair on the bow is carefully calculated to suit the shading of a phrase, and yet their delivery always remains startlingly spontaneous.

Such qualities are very much in evidence in this latest beautifully engineered recording featuring four of Martinů's quartets (composed between 1925 and 1947). The Second, written in Paris, following the composer's studies with Roussel and Novák, is a relatively positive work with energised idiomatic part-writing, illustrating that he was already a master of the genre.

The Third Quartet is defined by more experimental timbres, such as sul ponticello and col legno, alongside prominent use of pizzicatos – all of which lift the texture. Intricate rhythms and tightly charged dialogues feature in the virtuosic contrapuntal writing of the opening Allegro, so brilliantly etched by these players. Equally they are eloquent in the ensuing Andante, with its gently stretched tonality. Vibrato is astutely deployed so that the textures are lucid, and adroitly sculpted.

Darker hues percolate through the Fifth Quartet, the power of which really hits you in terms of the aggressive percussive quality of the opening Allegro. Rhythmically pungent and passionate, this is a rollercoaster of coiled tension. In contrast, the Pavel Haas Quartet musters a magical intimacy in the Andante of the Seventh Quartet. To sum up: this is absolutely fantastic quartet playing that brings these lesser-known works to the top table.

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

October 2025

# Martinů: String Quartets Nos. 2,3,5,7

While Martinů's quartets suffer less than total neglect, the present anthology could be a game-changer for a series which, the Seventh apart, gets fewer performances than it deserves. Supraphon last completed a Martinů cycle with the Panocha Quartet in the 1980s (reviewed 9/95) and the Pavel Haas bring more than commercial visibility and brighter recorded sound to the table. Their playing is tauter, usually to the music's advantage and with quite incendiary results in the Fifth, the masterpiece with which their selection begins.

Having languished in obscurity for reasons of biography and geopolitics, this score was lost for a time and reliable printed parts have only been available since 2005. The opening bars are marked with a single *f* as is most of the third-movement scherzo, a *perpetuum mobile* that will have you pinned to your seat. The year is 1938 and the composer has found his most compelling vein, mindful of Bartók yet instantly recognisable. Martinů enthusiasts will immediately think of the Double Concerto for two string orchestras, piano and timpani written later the same fateful year, the chamber work sustaining comparable levels of intensity over four movements. It is dedicated to the tragically short-lived Vítězslava Kaprálová, Martinů's pupil, lover and, as we are now discovering, an accomplished composer in her own right.

The Seventh Quartet (1947) is associated with Charlotte, the long-suffering, often semi-detached wife, celebrated in a more relaxed, conservative idiom. In some performances the melodious central *Andante* sounds almost indecently close to Dvořák. Those suspicious of Martinů's blither neoclassicism will appreciate the urgent, less ingratiating manner adopted by these players.

Of the remaining quartets, the Second (1925) was an important breakthrough for the Parisian iteration of this much-travelled composer, recently embarked on sporadic study with Albert Roussel. Its more astringent elements are attacked with relish. At the same time the invention reflects a new-found focus and objectivity. Unusually, the finale includes a big solo cadenza for the leader before hurtling to its close. The Third (1929) is a 13-minute composition incorporating what were then novel playing techniques without frightening the horses overmuch. Once again, the playing imparts edge and resonance to Martinů's shifting mix of motoric drive, extended tonality and surreal nostalgia.

Changes of personnel notwithstanding – first violinist Veronika Jarůšková and cellist Peter Jarůšek are still very much on board – the Pavel Haas Quartet have come up with yet another unmissable release.

CLASSICAL VOICE
Concerts · Artists · Critical Reviews

March 18, 2025

# At SF Performances, Pavel Haas Quartet Brightens Less Familiar Repertoire

By Rebecca Wishnia

Rare is the string quartet that suffers no change of personnel. But even a devoted fan can be left wondering what remains of an ensemble after an extended game of musical chairs.

Since its 2011 debut at **San Francisco Performances**, the **Pavel Haas Quartet** has returned here half a dozen times — with about as many different violists. Founded in 2002 by first violinist Veronika Jarůšková, the group has had an otherwise stable lineup in cellist Peter Jarůšek (Jarůšková's husband, who joined in 2004) and second violinist Marek Zwiebel (coming on board in 2012).

Fortunately, judging by its performance on Friday, March 14, at Herbst Theatre — the ensemble's first San Francisco appearance with violist Šimon Truszka — the characteristics that have made the Pavel Haas Quartet an in-demand group remain intact. The playing was as lively and rhythmically supple as ever. Jarůšková in particular has a way of tossing off the thorniest phrases. Above all, the musicians are adventurous. Other groups play more in tune, but the Pavel Haas Quartet plays with a boldness that both enlivens familiar works and elevates those scores that need a bit of help.

Although Tchaikovsky's string quartets aren't much performed today, they had an important early advocate in Ferdinand Laub, a prominent Moscow violinist whose ensemble premiered the first two the composer wrote. The elegy that throbs at the center of the third and final quartet is dedicated to Laub's memory and contains much of the work's power. This movement's melodies, from the wrenching opening unison through to the achingly sweet duets, were among the evening's many highlights. But it was the seemingly incidental transitional passages that stole the show, Zwiebel's chantlike droning transforming into a heaving heartbeat that faded as the glassy chords rose.

Two of the other movements are less ambitious, but in this performance, at least they were appealing. The scherzo, eschewing conventional dynamic contouring, sounded comically brutish, like a Roomba on a tear. And if Tchaikovsky's fortississimo climax and last-minute reminiscence at the end of the fourth movement can seem like a last-ditch effort to bring this music home, the Pavel Haas Quartet's pacing and charisma nonetheless carried it off.

This was the concert's grand finale, but in a program of substantial secondary works, Antonín Dvořák's String Quartet No. 11 in C Major — here in a finely formed interpretation — could easily have

shouldered the honor. Dvořák's finale had all the right rollicking feeling, but before that came gorgeous moments of fragility, particularly in the slow movement's loping romance. The violins, at first tentative, echoed each other in murmured reassurances. Yet at the height of the tension, the expression retreated as if masked. The figuration wandered until the very end, when it felt lucky to have landed in the home key.

Jarůšková's gleaming tone decorated the comparatively sanguine first movement, whose opening theme sounds like the first light of day — and like the first notes of Franz Schubert's famous Cello Quintet. If other composers' voices occasionally surface here, it's perhaps because Dvořák had an unusually difficult time writing the work, a major commission whose first performance, he was horrified to read in a Vienna newspaper, would take place scarcely more than a month later. Rushing to finish the score, he borrowed from his own melodic bank and (possibly in response to anti-Czech sentiment abroad) adopted an uncharacteristically classical style.

The Pavel Haas Quartet is more than equipped to handle Dvořák in his less familiar guises, however. The ensemble has performed all 14-plus of his quartets, the first third of which are virtually never played, and made award-winning recordings of works by other Czech composers.

While violist Truszka's characterizations didn't penetrate as deeply as those of his colleagues in this performance, that's understandable — he simply hasn't been around all that long. With time, he'll likely gain the self-assurance displayed by the group's veteran members, one of whom began the encore ("Nature Lies Peaceful in Slumber and Dreaming" from Dvořák's *Cypresses*) with a hugely wrong note, then a smile.

THE TIMES

June 29, 2025

# East Neuk Festival review — a showcase for Schubert and Beethoven

By Simon Thompson

...However, the greatest music of the whole festival came from the superstars of the Pavel Haas Quartet, who played Janacek and Schubert with fierce, majestic beauty. They brought highly wrought anguish to Janacek's *Kreutzer Sonata*, and playing of timeless beauty and crackling energy to Schubert's Quintet, for which they were joined by the cellist Ivan Vokac. It's a cliché to say that time stands still during Schubert's great Adagio but, while the Pavel Haas played it, it seemed as if nobody in the Crail audience dared to breathe.

theartsdesk.com

January 23, 2025

# Giltburg, Pavel Haas Quartet, Wigmore Hall review - into the labyrinth of a Martinů masterpiece

By David Nice

Serious realisation of the seven often thorny Martinů string quartets is a major undertaking. When I spoke to Veronika Jarůšková and Peter Jarůšek after an East Neuk Festival concert, they said they intended to do it slowly, with absolute commitment. Tuesday night's performance of the stupendous Fifth sealed the pledge. It held central place in a concert which only brought relief from Czech grittiness with the great cathartic melodies in Brahms's Third Piano Quartet.

Every performance by "the Pavel Haases" blends searing energy with supreme refinement, and this was no exception; with regular collaborator Boris Giltburg joining them for the Brahms, there could be no dynamic limits at either end of the scale. The ferocity they brought to parts of Schulhoff's Five Pieces for String Quartet transcended the fashionable dissonances of the 1920s, when he composed them, and seemed to more than hint at dances of death (Schulhoff died before he could meet the fate of Pavel Haas and others, gassed at Auschwitz, his life terminated by tuberculosis in Wülzburg's prison-fortress in 1942). Though the audience laughed at several witty movement endings, the "Alla Valse viennese", initiated by a striking viola solo from Šimon Truszka, was imbued with an acid sense of the macabre, and the "Alla Tango milonga" was poised on a knife edge, finishing with an ambiguous, chilling chord. In the final "Alla Tarantella," I was reminded most of the increasingly fraught treatment of the dance by Schubert in the massive finale of his C minor Sonata, D958.

Martinů's Fifth Quartet struck very much as an expression of his anguished feelings in 1938, when he had just returned from what would turn out to be his last visit to his native Czechia to witness the premiere of his operatic masterpiece *Juliette/Julietta*. He had also embarked on an affair with the brilliant young composer and conductor Vítězslava Kaprálová, dedicating the work to her but witholding publication until shortly before his death. Though it quotes a song of hers, the Fifth is not just about that relationship, contrary to current hunches, and it never settles to joy (the emanciipation of the "Julietta cadence" is nowhere to be found here, though Martinů used it so often in his works following the untimely death of Kaprálová, which haunted him for the rest of his life - something that could never be revealed in words owing to his marriage).

Jarůšková pushed high-lying expressivity to the limits, while harsh pizzicati and other effects from her colleagues undermined and impeded the Adagio's attempts at heartease. The finale has plenty of energy - astonishing at one point to see Jarůšek rocking his cello from side to side - but no release. Tonality

settles in chords, but minor ones. An uneasy masterpiece, standing in relation to Martinů's quartet series as Bartók's Fourth does to his.

The relief we needed came some way in to the first movement of Brahms's Third PIano Quartet, much the least often heard of the three, in the shape of a radiant second subject, and later the pure song of the Andante, which starts like a cello sonata (violin and piano kick off the finale). But this is a more often turbulent early inspiration, parallel to the mighty First Piano Concerto, later recollected and reworked, but not in tranquillity. That Boris Giltburg was able to thunder explosions and double octaves was thanks only to the equal attack of the world's most febrile string quartet: what a perfect team they make. And what a final, decisive journey into light was the encore, the Scherzo-Furiant from Dvořák's Second Piano Quintet, with second violinist Marek Zwiebel joining the rest. Life-enhancing.

NUVO

December 22, 2024

# Pavel Haas Quartet brought drama through three autobiographical musical scores

By Rita Kohn

As part of the Ensemble Music Society season, the Pavel Haas Quartet delivered celebratory and introspective works at the Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana History Center on December 11, following their US opening programs at Carnegie Hall on December 7 and Houston on December 10.

Violinists Veronika Jaršková and Marek Zwiebel, violist Šimon Truszka, and cellist Peter Jaršek plumb history and public sentiment in celebration of Bedrich Smetana's two hundredth birthday.

Mozart's String Quartet in B-flat major, KV 589, establishes the historical shift from 18th-century royalty dominance to a social and political change one can aptly describe as 'we the people.' By the Spring of 1790, Mozart was recognizing a drift away from European royalty commissioning musical works for their personal playing. Nevertheless, in need of shoring up his finances, he endeavored to gain patronage from Frederick William II, King of Prussia (the second son of Frederick the Great), who was a skillful cellist and a generous patron of the arts. [Personal aside; in preparing to attend this program, I returned to a long-ago notebook I titled 'US presidents with musical proficiency,' and attached a sticky note—finish this].

Both violins and the viola open the work in quiet unison, with the cello hovering in the background, but not for long because the cello soon joins the conversation, and the four banter back and forth in duets and solos before this expansiveness seems to be floating us along new terrain and the Allegro shifts into Larghetto and the cello sets a dignified pace against the violins and viola who are commenting, and then stepping back as the cello offers an aria. All four reflect an aura of tenderness amidst a sense of vulnerability.

Even though the cello is soaring above the others in this second movement, singing in the upper register with grace, the cello steps back in the scherzo-like Minuet of the third movement. It was exciting to watch the Pavel Haas Quartet players build a new scene. The first violin initially dominates with a concerto-like facsimile, as the second violin and the viola add complexity; one has to watch closely for the handing off and switch-ups in pairs and solos playing an insistent rhythm at different speeds—same as in a jazz work.

Allegro Assai opens joyfully, picks up speed, and then turns serious with a spirited conversation between all four players. With the cello dominating, it's a dynamic flourish to a song-like slide into a lingering hush fadeout. A singularly dramatic close; Is there a private story here, with an echo of Haydn's Op. 33?

All four movements exude a sense of balance, a unified voice despite a nod to the royal patronage. Mozart is attuned to the winds of political activity that the Quartet's musical journey is taking us on, into a new order and along a physical landscape where Mozart did not travel.

Moving directly into Bohuslav Martinü's String Quartet No.7, composed in 1947, while living in the US, having escaped

WWII Europe, The Pavel Haas players shared with us the rhythmic energy and imagination flowing forward 150 years from Mozart's K. 589 and seventy years from Smetana's No. 1. Martinü draws from neoclassical vigor alongside a Czech-inspired melodic flavor to blend emotional depth with technical brilliance and innovative musical language. He merged folk melodies, jazz rhythms, and Czech musical tradition as a fusion of diverse musical idioms. The complexity, nevertheless, is easy to listen to; he bridged the gap between avant-garde experimentation and melodic expressiveness.

Nicholas Johnson, in his print program, notes, "The first movement is reminiscent of the baroque concerti grossi. The instruments push forward in a unified and driving Poco allegro." Hurry and linger before a race to the close. The violins, in unison, open the Andante as a slow flow into a moment for the second violin before all in unity drift off to conjure up a sprightly Allegro assai, with the first violin leading. It's a buzzy, busy interlude as the others jump in, but the first violin maintains her song before relinquishing a moment for the animated cello, followed by a percussive viola, and then everyone falls into unity as all race to a high flourish finish. I admit to a momentary flashback at the Indy 500. Martinu represents a happy fusion of traditional and modern across his lifetime, 1890-1959.

Each of Martinů's string quartets possesses its own distinct character, delving into the depths of human emotion, often imbued with a sense of nostalgia, longing, and a touch of defiance.

Bedřich Smetana's autobiographical String Quartet No. 1, "Of My Life," was composed in 1876 as an arc of his life. His deafness pushed a high-pitched E natural, mimicking the ringing in his ears, for which no medical reason could be explained. It was yet another hardship Smetana endured throughout his life, yet these hardships inspired him to write music and to become the leader to establish a singular Czech musical identity following the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire.

Even though his Quartet No. 1 was not overtly political, it grew from his Czech roots. Smetana described the first movement as a romantically driven sketch of his youth as an artist and as a dual forewarning of the future underscored by a longing for what in life is indefinable. Smetana described the second movement, Allegro moderato a la Polka, as his love of dance since the age of six. The viola takes leadership, joined by the cello and followed by the violins, in waves of slow and fast, stately and a bit raucous. He cited the Largo sostenuto third movement as a tribute to his first wife, Katharina, whom Smetana pronounced his "first love." The cello opens a lament, sustained by the others in depths of waves. And then the sadness is overridden.

Commenting on the closing's lively, brisk Vivace, Smetna wrote, "The fourth movement describes the discovery that I could treat national elements in music and my joy in following this path until it was checked by the catastrophe of the onset of my deafness, the outlook into the sad future, the tiny rays of hope of recovery, but remembering all the promise of my early career, a feeling of painful regret."

Smetana continued to apply his highly developed and apparently fully internalized ability to compose music in spite of his inability to "hear" it in the traditional sense.

Kai Christiansen, in his **sense** post, describes this work as spanning "a wide range of distinctive music featuring Bohemian dance in the polka of the second movement and a tender love song to his departed first wife in the third movement. But the two outer movements vividly express in music what Smetana could only hint at in his literary explanation. The Quartet opens with some of the most dramatic and unforgettable music found throughout the chamber literature: a devastating theme of tragic fate that dominates the first movement, goes dormant, and reappears in the coda of the finale. After the dance, the love song, and

the initial robust brightness of the fourth movement sonata, this autobiographical Quartet catches up to the reality of Smetana's contemporaneous life. Introduced by a pregnant silence, then a disturbing high-pitched harmonic in the first violin, the dark and inevitable theme of catastrophic fate returns to finish the narrative, not with a grand, conclusive cadence, but with a fadeout, the sound gradually disappearing from our ears just as it must have for Smetana himself."

Smetana understood his First Quartet to take on an unconventional form, with the viola throughout reinforcing a foreboding outcome and the violins and cellos counterbalancing with a richness that marks his legacy. The closing three pings are heart-stopping

Based in Prague, the Quartet studied with the late Milan Škampa, legendary violist of the Smetana Quartet. They take their 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.

The players gifted an encore of Antonin Dvorak's "Cypresses."

the Strad

August 16, 2024

# Concert review: Pavel Haas Quartet

By Tim Homfray

The Pavel Haas Quartet was firmly on home ground in this Sunday morning concert, with works by Smetana and Janáček. There was powerful rhetoric from violist Šimon Truszka at the opening of Smetana's E minor First Quartet 'From my life', before giving way to the melting E major theme, floating and delicate, drawing the listeners in. The development was compulsive, with a thrilling drive to the climax. The second-movement Allegro moderato alla polka was a joyous, energetic dance, with splendid (if not quite immaculate) quasi tromba playing from Truszka and second violinist Marek Zwiebel, and leader Veronika Jarušková sang sweetly in the meno mosso section. Cellist Peter Jarušek's rich and expressive opening solo in the Largo sostenuto was answered by gentle, delicate playing that built to a hot-blooded emotional climax. The final Vivace was rambunctious, with touches of rubato in some of the dances.

Janáček's Second Quartet 'Intimate Letters' is also autobiographical, based on correspondence to Kamila Stösslová, the woman he loved. There was theatrical colour and a powerful sense of narrative in the opening Andante. After eloquent playing at the start of the Adagio the musicians were ferocious in the 5/8 dance, and the opening of the Moderato was plaintive and understated, with thrilling, full-bodied playing to come. Parts of the final Allegro were positively smoochy before the restless conclusion.

bachtrack

February 13, 2024

# Intensity, virtuosity and life-affirming energy from the Pavel Haas Quartet's all-Czech evening

By Nick Boston

Now in their 22nd year, the Pavel Haas Quartet continue to impress with their sheer dedication and virtuosic intensity, and tonight was no exception. Their all-Czech programme at the Wigmore offered three quartets spanning 50 plus years of Czech composition, with the lesser known Vítězslava Kaprálová sitting alongside Martinů and Dvořák.

Bohuslav Martinů published seven string quartets, and the Third came at the end of a period of experimentation in his composition, strongly influenced by jazz, neoclassicism and Stravinsky, as well as Les Six. Jazzy rhythms abound in the opening movement, whilst the bluesy viola dominates the central slow movement. There are jazz elements in the finale, although it is spikier and highly virtuosic, building to a crazy wild dance conclusion. Peter Jarůšek's pizzicato cello against Šimon Truszka's *col legno* viola (bow wood hitting the strings) set up the ominous first movement well, Jarůšek's plucking motion developing into a full windmill as the movement built. The viola features prominently throughout, and Truszka gave a richly sensuous tone to the slow movement's bluesy solo, as well as driving the setup for the finale's dance.

Vitězslava Kaprálová, born in Brno in 1915, was a highly talented composer and conductor. She met Martinů in Prague in 1937 and he was immediately impressed,

encouraging her to more to Paris to continue her studies with him. After a brief return to Czechoslovakia, she went back to Paris just before the Nazis marched into Prague. Then, following the German invasion of France, and now seriously unwell, she left for Montpellier, where she sadly died, possibly of typhoid fever. Her many song, chamber and orchestral works included just the one string quartet. Heavily inspired by Moravian folk music, angular rhythmic energy combines with rich French harmonies, and there are beautifully lyrical moments too, especially for the first violin. Jarůšková gave these moments a delicate touch, whilst ensemble in the second movement particularly, with its frequent changes in tempo and rapid pizzicato passages, was effortlessly tight. And after a tender conclusion to the slow movement, the finale danced away, building to a joyful climax, the Haas players proving powerful advocates for this strikingly individual quartet.

Dvořák's *String Quartet no. 11 in C major* was composed somewhat in a hurry, as he discovered that the Hellmesberger Quartet were planning to premiere it sooner than he had expected at Vienna's Ringtheater in 1881. He set aside work on his opera *Dimitrij* to focus on the quartet, although in the event, fire destroyed the Ringtheater, so the premiere had to wait. Less overtly Czech influenced than its immediate predecessor, the folksy trio of the Scherzo and the energetic dancing finale nevertheless have strong folk vibes. The opening movement is perhaps more suited to Viennese audiences, but the thrumming viola lead up to the watery climax, and the final coda race are Dvořák at his most spirited. The players' flowing momentum, with some especially poised birdlike calls from Jarůšková, and their sheer enjoyment in the rousing lead into the recapitulation communicated perfect elegance and style, before subsiding into its quiet final chords. Then the delicately lilting slow movement gave the players the perfect opportunity to showcase their warmly rich ensemble tones, although without ignoring the darker elements here, such as the semitone oscillations from cello and viola, leading to darkly sliding chords from all, and the tolling second violin over the movement's final chords adding an edge of unease.

The Pavel Haas Quartet performed throughout with such ease of command, never overstated yet full of life and commitment, making for a joyous celebration of these three fine works.

the Strad

May 18, 2022

# Pavel Haas Quartet at 20: Coming home

The energetic and eloquent musicians of the Pavel Haas Quartet are celebrating 20 years of music making with a new recording of Brahms quintets joined by some old friends, as they tell Tom Stewart

You get to meet a lot of string quartets in this job, and it goes without saying that each has its own unique dynamic; but generally, they fall into one of two categories: earnest and businesslike or chatty and excitable. I'm not sure I've ever encountered a group more conclusively in the latter camp than the Pavel Haas Quartet. Listening again to the recording of our interview, some words are difficult to make out as the players finish each other's sentences, interject with new ideas and, sometimes, begin entirely new conversations among themselves. After more than an hour of this, I put it to the group that they are almost startlingly friendly, and with none of the awkwardness that often accompanies this kind of interaction (I'm at home in the UK, they're backstage in Brussels, all gathered round a single iPad). 'I think what you're trying to say is that we don't take ourselves too seriously,' replies violist Luosha Fang, who became the group's newest member when she joined them in April 2021. 'But we can still be serious, of course,' counters founding first violinist Veronika Jarůšková. 'When we're on stage we would die for our music.'

Strikingly for a group so brimming with energy, this is the Pavel Haas Quartet's 20th-anniversary year. Perhaps some of their freshness stems from the sense of renewal that accompanies the arrival of a new member – and six line-up changes across two decades should be enough to keep anyone on their toes. Peter Jarůšek (Jarůšková's husband) replaced the group's first cellist soon after the quartet started life; Marek Zwiebel became its third second violinist in 2012 and Fang is the third violist to play with the group since its co-founder Pavel Nikl left in 2016. Nikl makes a return, however, on the group's new recording of Brahms's op.111 String Quintet – 'Like a big brother coming home!' Jarůšková says. For the coupling, the composer's op.34 Piano Quintet, they're joined by Israeli pianist Boris Giltburg, with whom they first played in 2014 – and who is with them on the call from Brussels. 'We just clicked,' he says, grinning. 'The way they lean into every note is the same approach I take in my solo

Violist Pavel Nikl returned to record Brahms with his former colleagues

playing. Very often you just have to find a way into how a quartet works and quickly put something together. With them it's different; I feel very much part of the group. They're just such warm and lovely people.' Giltburg's effusive praise is met with bashful laughter, but it's clear from their faces that the quartet players consider him one of their own.

'It was all very hippy-ish at the beginning,' Jarůšková says, gazing upwards as if recalling a simpler time. 'I just wanted to have a band, Beatles-style. Today, sometimes all the organising and logistics can make it feel like a real mission.' Jarůšek, too, is frank about the challenges of quartet life. 'For us, feelings are the most important things when it comes to the music, but this life isn't easy and it isn't for everyone,' he explains. 'Very honestly, sometimes I hate it. There have been many moments when I've said to myself, "No – this is over." Concert and travel schedules mean we have to plan our lives two years ahead, but you don't know what you'll want to eat in two years' time, let alone what music you'll want to play. That's just how it is, though – this isn't a job, it's a life.'

The Quartet performs at the 2021 Smetana's Litomyšl festival.

As Jarůšek recalls, the group's first big success – winning the Vittorio E. Rimbotti competition in Florence in 2004 – meant they had to adjust quickly to a faster pace. 'We wanted to go because we thought the weather would be nice in Italy at that time of year, and because it would be useful to hear what other groups our age were doing. Part of the top prize was a long and very busy concert tour; I remember Veronika saying how sorry she felt for whoever ended up winning.' They were the ones who won, of course, and they were soon playing more than 40 concerts over just five weeks, at venues across Europe and North America. 'We didn't have the repertoire ready for that kind of thing, though, so we were learning music on the road at the same time as figuring out how to survive as a quartet.'

Another big win followed, at the 2005 Prague Spring competition, after which they came to the attention of Supraphon, the Czech label they still record for today. Their first disc, fittingly, was a recording of music by Haas, the Czech composer who gives the group its name, and by his teacher Janáček. Haas was born in 1899 to a Jewish family in Brno, where Janáček established the city conservatoire in 1919 and became the younger composer's most significant mentor. Before his death at Auschwitz in 1944, Haas wrote music with the same arresting originality and emotional clarity as Janáček's, though he was never a prolific composer, and his work, according to Jarůšková, remains somewhat obscure even inside the Czech Republic. The quartet, which must rank among Haas's greatest champions, settled on the name after hearing a recording of his moving and ebullient Second String Quartet, 'From the Monkey Mountains', a work that, in typically idiosyncratic Moravian style, includes a part for percussion. Haas's music is bright, clear and energetic – a perfect match for the sound and personality of the quartet that now carries his name. Haas and Janáček (along with their ancestor Dvořák) remain important foundations of the quartet's repertoire on disc and in concert, but the players don't consider themselves Czech specialists. 'It made sense for us to start with these composers, but we also love Beethoven, Shostakovich, Haydn,

Schubert – the list goes on,' Jarůšek says. The Brahms on their latest disc comprises two milestones of the composer's chamber music: the fiery 1864 Piano Quintet in F minor from his early years in Vienna, and the String Quintet in G major, a touching and autumnal work composed 26 years later, in 1890. Both are big, complex scores that require stamina and – though presumably this presented no difficulties for these players – perfect balance of all five parts. 'There's something of a misconception among pianists that piano quintets of this era – Brahms, Schumann, Dvořák, Franck – are mini concertos,' says Giltburg. 'They're actually very well-integrated and balanced pieces, but they're often played as if this isn't the case.'

Brahms's first version of the piece that became the Piano Quintet didn't even include a piano part at all. He showed the music to his friends Clara Schumann and violinist Joseph Joachim while it was in its original form: a string quintet with two cellos. 'That was in 1862, when they told him the material needed something stronger to support it, so he rewrote it as a sonata for two pianos,' Giltburg explains. 'Then he brought back some of the colour and warmth of the strings – at the beginning of the second movement, for example, the piano has the lullaby melody and the interjections from the strings come like little caresses. You can't really do that with a second piano. The piano quintet version sounds so natural and obvious to us now – it's hard to imagine the music any other way.'

Zwiebel also detects hints of other, larger forms at work. 'I think the piece shows him preparing for the First Symphony, which doesn't come along for another 14 years,' he says, noting that Brahms's First String Quartet also did not see publication until eight years after the Piano Quintet. 'Symphonies, string quartets – these were a big responsibility for a composer, particularly coming so soon after Beethoven.' Although Brahms was born six years after Beethoven's death, he described the older composer as 'that giant whose steps I always hear behind me'.

It seems reasonable that he might well have been intimidated by the huge successes of Beethoven's orchestral music, finding smaller-scale outlets for landscapes conceived in orchestral terms. 'I don't just hear strings and piano when we play this piece,' Zwiebel continues. 'There's a richness that makes me imagine winds and brass in there, too. It makes sense – composers have always used chamber music as a way to explore possibilities and test ideas on a smaller scale.'

At the Brahms recording sessions, from left: Boris Giltburg, Supraphon producer Matouš Vlčinský, Marek Zwiebel, Veronika Jarůšková, recording engineer Karel Soukeník and Peter Jarůšek.

In December 1890, Brahms sent a sketch for a string quintet to his publisher with a note that read, 'With this scrap bid farewell to notes of mine – because it really is time to stop.' The composer was just 57 at the time, and he didn't complete his final work, a set of chorale preludes for organ, until 1896, but the four movements for string quartet with an added viola that make up op.111 do represent his final work for strings alone. Brahms is often thought of as a composer who worked within existing parameters, becoming a master of Classical forms and techniques instead of forging out into the unknown. The extent to which this is true is subject to debate, but for Giltburg, there is an assuredness to this string quintet that

suggests a composer at the height of his powers. 'The form becomes so plastic in his hands – he's in total control, just like Shakespeare is with language,' he says.

'You can feel the years of life experience he's accumulated in the years since the Piano Quintet,' Fang adds. 'I think it's important to be aware of this – I try not to focus just on the intellectual side of the music, because, at the end of the day, it's emotions that we're trying to express.' From a technical perspective, she suggests, the later work is more challenging on account of its more complex texture. 'The Piano Quintet is comparatively transparent; you know what each of the voices is doing and which you're supposed to be paying attention to at any one time. In the String Quintet, every single line is unique and important, but in constantly shifting ways.' The challenge, she says, is in making each voice shine without overpowering the others – not that this is something new to her: 'Of course, we violists are diplomats. From the very beginning we're trained in how to support others.'

On the question of Brahms's supposed conservatism, Giltburg has an interesting pianistic perspective. 'His three piano sonatas, which were written in 1852–3, are fiery and completely fearless. It's as if they were written by a different Brahms – one who wasn't thinking much at all about Classical structures and style.' So what became of this young revolutionary? 'He never really reappears. We know the sonatas were well received, but it's obvious that Brahms loved looking back, too. Maybe he realised this was how he was going to find the greatest means of expression.' Rather than knocking down walls, in other words, Brahms got to the heart of their foundations and built new work around them. But, as Fang is quick to point out, none of this is to say that the composer's music is merely working over old ground. 'I think you can hear the revolutionary Brahms in the Scherzo of the Piano Quintet,' she says, referring to the movement's merciless forward march. 'I remember learning it when I was a teenager and just thinking it was so exciting, so full of energy and drive.'

As the minutes tick by and lunchtime beckons in Belgium, thoughts turn to what the future holds for the Pavel Haas players. They're learning music by Martinů and Korngold, but have no plans for a cycle of Beethoven or Shostakovich quartets: 'Other groups have already done that. We don't want to turn this great music into work, when really it should be for pleasure,' Jarůšek says. Jarůšková adds: 'We're like marathon runners: we need to stay in the best shape we can, mentally as well as physically – and all without losing curiosity or passion for new things.' Jarůšek is more sanguine: 'We're not at the centre of the universe,' he says. 'Nothing would change if we were to quit tomorrow, so we should just enjoy the moment while we can. Your life is getting shorter every day – that's a fact.' Jarůšková smiles and shakes her head. 'I think Peter is hungry!'

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

May 3, 2022

# Top 10 String Quartets

It's almost impossible to come up with a credible 'top 10' list for the best string quartets, so this is more of a newcomer's starter-pack. It incorporates great recordings of some of the most-performed masterpieces. Of course, one person's idea of something obvious will be another's off-the-beaten-track, but the 10 below, we can be fairly sure, will have a special place in the hearts of most classical music collectors.

## **Schubert** String Quartet No 14, 'Death and the Maiden'

**Pavel Haas Quartet**

'The crazed tarantella that closes the quartet is a tour de force, raw, visceral and with an emotional immediacy that is almost unbearable. Such is the intensity of the playing that by the end of the disc you, too, are quite exhausted. But that's perhaps how it should be.'

the Strad

April 26, 2023

# Pavel Haas Quartet, Boris Giltburg

By Tim Homfray

The Pavel Haas began its concert with Martinů's Seventh Quartet, the players producing a bustling energy in the first movement, with cellist Peter Jarůšek growling effectively underneath, along with moments of slinky legato, all imbued with dramatic impetus. After the flowing lyricism of the Andante, with its gently lapping arpeggios, there was a nice exuberance to the rhythmically sparkling Allegro vivo, complete with pointed syncopations.

The opening Allegro of Bartók's Fourth Quartet was fierce but never harsh toned, switching splendidly between dynamic and dramatic extremes. The players scurried through the Prestissimo, weightless and driving. Jarůšek's opening soliloquy in the Non troppo lento was strong and spacious, and at the end he and leader Veronika Jarůšková offered a tender duet. The Allegro pizzicato was fingerboard-slapping fun, and the quartet brought tremendous rhythmic élan to the motoric writing in the final Allegro molto, given with crystalline clarity of texture.

Pianist Boris Giltburg joined the Pavel Haas for Dvořák's Second Quintet, at the beginning of which Jarůšek was again in the spotlight, playing the opening melody with full-toned beauty, after which there were strong contrasts of major and minor passages and telling use of rubato. The musicians brought out the many facets of the Andante Dumka: floating easy charm, profundity and the quiet intensity of violist Dana Zemtsov's lament. The Scherzo was effervescent and the finale light, with great lyrical shaping.

the Strad

October 17, 2022

# Edinburgh International Festival 2022: Pavel Haas Quartet

By David Kettle

...By the time the **Pavel Haas Quartet** took to the Queen's Hall stage on 23 August, a packed house suggested that audience confidence had returned. And the foursome delivered a scorching performance, bristling with energy and enthusiasm, though gratifyingly measured in Schubert's monumental G major Quartet D887, whose restless wavering between major and minor felt less like the composer's private conflicts between joy and despair, more like mighty collisions between elemental forces. The PHQ players opened with a bold, confident Haydn op.76 no.1, but their account of Martinů's Seventh Quartet, Concerto da camera, was the concert's real revelation. It dashed past you with muscular verve and a slightly manic quality, its neo-classical clarity sharply etched, its imitative lines teased apart, and with cellist Peter Jarůšek providing a gloriously rich, passionate, keening solo in the slow movement.

prestomusic

May 13, 2022

# Brahms Quintets from the Pavel Haas Quartet and friends

By James Longstaffe

They say that all good things come to those who wait. Testing this theory to its limits must surely be the members of the Pavel Haas Quartet, who tend to release an album only once every two years or so, and indeed who have not appeared on disc since their recording of three Shostakovich string quartets way back in 2019. Well, the wait is now over, and I'm extremely pleased to say that, with this latest account of two works by Brahms, the aphorism still holds true. As in their earlier offering of quintets by Dvořák, the regular members of the quartet are joined by special guests Boris Giltburg for the Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34, and violist (and former quartet member) Pavel Nikl for the String Quintet in G, Op. 111.

I try hard not to repeat myself too much in these reviews, and yet looking back at my previous musings on their albums of Smetana and Dvořák, I notice several common themes, all of which apply equally to these Brahms performances. Firstly, I always find it extraordinary that a small group can produce such a huge sound, full of raw power and magnificent enormity. Of course, I'm not suggesting they are the only string quartet in existence capable of making a loud noise, but there's something about the Pavel Haas Quartet that makes them stand out in this regard, not just in terms of actual volume but also the presence and vitality of their tone. A notable example of this is in Op. 34, where, aided by Giltburg's lavishly sonorous contribution, they provide a sumptuous conclusion to the first movement that conjures the resonance of a much larger ensemble.

Another constant thread running through all their recordings is the range and variety of timbres that they deliver, and the ease with which they switch between them, such as in the last movement of Op. 111 with its multiple sudden shifts of dynamics from one extreme to the other, or the first movement of the same piece, where after a gloriously radiant opening (including a delightfully exuberant solo from cellist Peter Jarůšek in the first few bars), the players bring about a complete change of mood for the pianissimo start of the development section that is breathtakingly done, with the entire team altering their colour in the twinkling of an eye. As before, additional violist Pavel Nikl blends in seamlessly, reinforcing greatly the richness of texture that Brahms creates by his use of two violas.

The second movement of Op. 34 demonstrates this even further, with the somewhat hesitant, delicate string motif in the first few bars yielding to a glowing central E major section which allows second violin and viola to bloom with their unison theme. When the hesitant motif reappears first in the piano and then in the viola it's an enchanting moment, setting the stage perfectly for the subsequent steady

crescendo: as the melody for first violin and cello gradually adds a third and eventually a fourth string voice, the interplay between the parts makes this a truly sublime performance, with each player being permitted to assert their own material without ever standing in the way of the greater good.

So, as I mentioned at the outset, it has been a long wait to be able to listen to the Pavel Haas Quartet on disc once more, but with these splendid accounts of both quintets they have most certainly not disappointed.

THE TIMES

April 23, 2019

# Review: The Pavel Haas Quartet at Wigmore Hall, WI

## A superbly considered and immaculately executed Radio 3 lunchtime recital of two of Shostakovich's string quartets

By Richard Morrison

It was only a matter of time before the passionate, purposeful Czechs of the Pavel Haas Quartet turned their attention to Shostakovich's 15 string quartets, which they are starting to record. For a group so adept at bringing out the neuroses and tensions even in seemingly restrained music, the anguished chamber music of Shostakovich - into which he poured his darkest and sometimes most unresolved feelings - is obvious repertoire. I'm just surprised they resisted it for so long.

In this superbly considered and immaculately executed Radio 3 lunchtime recital (available on the BBC iPlayer) they tackled the epic Second Quartet, written in 1944 with the war still raging, preceded by the Seventh Quartet from 1960, which, although miniature in scale, is enormous in intensity. Shostakovich dedicated it to the memory of his first wife, but the way the Pavel Haas play it - bleakness giving way to a finale hurled out with terrifying fervour at a blistering pace before collapsing into deep melancholy - it could just as easily be a reflection of a world that seemed to be hurtling towards nuclear annihilation.

The Second has its frenetic moments too, particularly when the finale is whipped up into a nightmarish passage that sounds as if the quartet is trapped on an out-of-control fairground ride.The heart of this work, however, is the astonishing Recitative and Romance second movement, where the first violin soars - partly in rhapsody, more often in elegy - over held chords. I have never heard it played with as much subtle nuance or richness of timbre as Veronika Jaruskova did here. A packed audience scarcely dared breathe.

Quibbles? Only that the players fell a little short of making this quartet's strangely perfunctory ending sound convincing as a final destination for such charged music. Perhaps that is more Shostakovich's fault. It's almost as if, in this early piece, he has lifted the lid on something that will take another six or seven quartets for him to resolve.