

# Ravel and Dvorak Quartets from Memory

## Vision Quartet

Pittville Pump Rooms

Monday 7 July

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<b>Anton Webern (1883-1945)</b>	Langsamer Satz in E flat major, M78
<b>Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)</b>	Quartet in F major, Op.35
Interval	
<b>Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)</b>	String Quartet No.13 in G major, Op. 106

## About the Programme

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**Anton Webern (1883-1945)** Langsamer Satz in E flat major, M78

The *Langsamer Satz* may come as a surprise to those who know Webern as an *avant-garde* composer of sometimes baffling difficulty; for this early work, written in 1905 when he was twenty-one, gives us a romantic quarter-of-an-hour. Webern was studying music at Vienna University and enjoying the rich life of the capital in literary, art and musical circles. Significantly, he had opted out of some courses to study independently under Schoenberg, joined by two or three forward-looking young composers including Alban Berg. At this time the innovative composers who inspired them all, including Schoenberg, were the late Romantics – Liszt, Wagner and Mahler.

Webern came from Carinthia, and in the spring of 1905 he went on a walking tour with his young cousin Wilhelmine in Lower Austria. Five blissful days recorded in his diary in truly lyrical style. Not only does he evoke the countryside and Nature in all her moods, but a growing sense of personal rapture in his relationship with Wilhelmine. All this he seems to have expressed in his own medium of music, when he composed the *Langsamer Satz* the following June. He did indeed marry Wilhelmine some six years later.

The *Langsamer Satz* is a luscious work, yet economically written without embellishments, its changing moods from serene happiness to passionate ecstasy achieved through the interplay of a minimal number of core motifs. The most notable are an ever-rising but lilting figure, opening with a dominant-tonic fourth complementary descending sequence; and a short four-note phrase – three descending notes and a rising fifth. All four instruments are fully exploited in fascinating ebb-and-flow relationships.

**Maurice Ravel (1875 -1937)** Quartet in F major, Op.35  
*i. Allegro moderato*    *ii. Assez vif*    *iii. Très lent*    *iv. Vif et agité*

Ravel's only string quartet was written in 1903 when he was completing his studies at the Paris Conservatory. Written ten years after Debussy's quartet it does bear some superficial similarities of musical language (in its use of modalities, open fifths, flexible rhythms and musical colour), but Ravel combined these features with classical ideas of form, proportion and symmetry. The influence of César Franck may also be apparent in the work's cyclic structure in which musical material first heard in the opening movement, or echoes thereof, reappear throughout.

The melodic first movement is in sonata form with two themes, the second of which is derived from the first. The second movement features rhythmic complexity and pizzicato with a contrasting slow middle section before a shortened reprise of the opening section. The slow third movement also uses melodic material from the first

movement and displays Ravel's gift for achieving a remarkably wide range of tone colours from the four stringed instruments. The finale is also interesting rhythmically, containing passages in quintuple time.

Although Ravel was highly self-critical, seeking technical mastery and perfection above all else, he regarded this early work warmly, and expressed the thought late in his life that perhaps he had sacrificed what was best in this early work, its boldness and spontaneity, for the technical brilliance of his later work.

**Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)**

String Quartet No.13 in G major, Op. 106

*i. Allegro moderato*    *ii. Adagio ma non troppo*

*iii. Molto vivace*    *iv. Finale: Andante sostenuto – Allegro con fuoco*

This quartet and its companion in A flat, Op. 105, appeared in the latter part of 1895. The spring of that year had seen the end of Dvořák's generally unrewarding duties at Mrs. Thurber's National Conservatoire of Music in New York (though the money was good when he got it). His transatlantic exile had begun in the autumn of 1892 and latterly he had developed an intense nostalgia for his country home at Vysoká, his family, his pigeons and, no doubt, the locomotives of the Bohemian Region of Austro-Hungarian Rail. These quartets were his last chamber works and were in the nature of a thanksgiving for his return home.

The first movement opens with a cascade of sound like birdsong and breathes the air of the countryside. It behaves fairly loosely in the framework of sonata form; the second subject appears in simulated 6/8 time in the unusual key of B flat. The glorious *Adagio ma non troppo* is a deep expression of contentment; it uses two related themes, one of them minor and the other major. It opens like a solemn hymn, with a tinge of sadness. The tension grows until a tremendous climax in C major is reached, after which the music moves in a quiet progression to the end, with one of the loveliest melodies Dvořák ever wrote. The third movement is a rustic comedy of a scherzo with a contrasting trio that is smooth and quiet. The Finale is an irregular rondo, prefaced by a short, slow opening. Then the movement springs into joyous life. A central episode recalls themes from the first movement in a slow, thoughtful mood, and then the music takes off again, to end on a triumphantly exultant conclusion.

## Artist Biographies

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### Vision String Quartet

Florian Willeitner *violin*

Daniel Stoll *violin*

Leonard Disselhorst *cello*

Sander Stuart *viola*

Founded in 2012, the Vision String Quartet has already established itself as one of the finest young string quartets of its generation. With a unique versatility that focuses on the classical string quartet repertoire alongside their own compositions of other disparate genres such as folk, pop, rock, funk and minimalist music. The four young musicians from Berlin who identify as much as a 'band' as a 'string quartet' are on a mission to re-address, with integrity, how classical music is presented and perceived by both new and traditional audiences.

The quartet experiments with concert formats that challenge perceived expectations whilst being true to their vision of the music. Performances have included Schubert Death and the Maiden Quartet performed in complete darkness, Beethoven Quartet in A minor Op 132 from memory, and experimenting with lighting designers to give further creative dimensions to their performances. Breaking new ground, they have brought these ideas to leading classical concert halls such as the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Berlin Philharmonic, Gewandhaus Leipzig, Oji Hall Tokyo, Philharmonie Luxembourg and London's Wigmore Hall. Festival appearances include the Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Rheingau Music Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, Trondheim Chamber Music Festival and the Lucerne Festival.

The Quartet completed their chamber music studies with the Artemis Quartet at the University of the Arts in Berlin and with Günter Pichler of the Alban Berg Quartet at the Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía.