

T'ANG QUARTET
PRESENTS

THE CZECH AFFAIR

Josef Suk
Meditation on the Old Czech
Chorale "St Wenceslas" Op.35a

Antonin Dvořák
String Quartet No.12
Op.96 "American"

INTERMISSION

Pavel Haas
String Quartet No.2 Op.7
"From the Monkey Mountains"

Featuring
K.Gun Mongkolprapa
on drums in the 4th movement

October 4 2022, Tuesday
Victoria Concert Hall
7.30pm





From left: Ng Yu-Ying (1st Violin), Ang Chek Meng (2nd Violin), Wang Zihao (Cello), Han Oh (Violist)

THE CZECH AFFAIR

Dear Esteemed Donors, Friends & Partners,

We're excited to present the third edition of the T'ang Quartet's 30th Anniversary Season on Oct 4. The upcoming show at Victoria Concert Hall harks back to our Czech connection, and the ensemble has assembled a programme devoted to Czech music of the 19th and 20th-century – a refreshing detour from the old world classics, representing a part of their illustrious 30-year musical journey.

First violinist Ng Yu-Ying and second violinist Ang Chek Meng were mentored by former Singapore Symphony Orchestra violist Jiri Heger from Czech Republic. He taught them during our formative years as musicians. Jiri, who played an instrumental role in the T'ang Quartet's development, went on to help the Quartet record its debut 2005 album, *The Art of War*, as well as the 2006 *Made in America* album (featuring Jiri), in Prague.

On Oct 4, classical music fans will be treated to quartet masterpieces by three Czech composers – Josef Suk, Antonin Dvořák and Pavel Haas.

The programme speaks a common language of the rhythms, harmonies and lyrical melodies from Eastern European traditions. The evening begins with Suk's nationalistic Czech piece, *Meditation on the Old Czech Chorale "Saint Wenceslas" Op.35a*.

Suk, who studied under Antonin Dvořák, is one of the leading composers in Czech Modernism. Stunning,

contemplative as well as emotional and nostalgic, the four-part polyphonic work was written in 1914 in World War I in a time when the Czechs were hoping to gain independence from the Austrian Empire. The composer wanted to ignite the Czech nationalist movement, while the old Bohemian chorale on which it is based on honours Svatý Vaclav (Saint Wenceslas), the patron Saint of Bohemia.

The second piece, *The String Quartet in F Major, Op.96 "American"*, by composer Antonin Dvořák is a well-loved one. It was inspired and written in 1893 (in the US) when he spent the summer in Iowa's Bohemian colony. It's one of the most popular works in the string quartet repertory.

Post intermission, the Quartet will turn its attention to Pavel Haas' *String Quartet No. 2 "From the Monkey Mountains"*. We hope you'll enjoy the programme. Thank you so much for your support!

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JOSEF SUK [1874-1935]

*Meditation on the Old Czech
Chorale "Saint Wenceslas"*
Op.35a

Josef Suk wrote this piece to ignite Czech nationalistic pride. Tensions between Protestants and the ruling Habsburgs led to a failed Protestant revolt in the 17th century, and Bohemia came under Austrian rule.

Suk, who was Antonin Dvořák's composition student and son-in-law, was second violinist in the Bohemian Quartet. The quartet was forced to play the Austrian national anthem at the opening of each concert from 1914. In response, Suk wrote this single-movement piece that very year and based it on a hymn to St Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia, intending for it to resonate with the Czech nationalist spirit.

The hymn on which the Meditation is based is known as the Svaty Václave (St Wenceslas). It was written as early as the 12th century and it remains popular today. Dvořák references it in his Hussite Overture of 1883 while Suk's Meditation was written nearly three decades later, less than two months after World War I.

Two days after the work was finished, it premiered on Sept 27, 1914 – on the eve of the Feast of St Wenceslas. The Slovaks, who are closely related to the Czechs, also opposed Habsburg rule, and at the end of World War I in 1918, Czechs and Slovaks combined to form the Republic of Czechoslovakia, of which Bohemia was a part.



ANTONIN DVOŘÁK [1841-1904]

*The String Quartet in F Major,
Op.96 "American"*

I. Allegro ma non troppo

II. Lento

III. Molto vivace

IV. Finale: vivace ma non troppo

Dvořák's 12th string quartet got its nickname, "American", possibly because of a comment that it was his "second composition written in America" after his Ninth Symphony "From the New World". However, the only thing vaguely American about this piece is Dvořák's use of the pentatonic scale, which is common in American folk music. It is not exclusive to that genre, though, and is evident in ethnic music worldwide.

Dvořák himself had employed this scale in compositions that predated his time in the United States, and it probably came from his familiarity with Slavonic music. The American Quartet was where Dvořák's chamber music work finally took off, having battled for decades between gushing melodic beauty and structure. While the pentatonic scale gives it an open and simple nature, the composer defended it, saying, "When I wrote this quartet in the Czech community of Spillville in 1893, I wanted to write something for once that was very melodious and straightforward, and dear Papa Haydn kept appearing before my eyes, and that is why it all turned out so simply. And it's good that it did." Dvořák wrote the outline of the piece in three days and completed it 13 days later. It remains one of the most loved chamber works ever written.



PAVEL HAAS [1899-1944]

String Quartet No 2

Op.7 "From the Monkey Mountains"

I. Landscape – Andante

II. Coach, Coachman and Horse – Andante

III. The Moon and I... – Largo e misterioso

IV. Wild Night – Vivace e con fuoco

Haas, who was among Leos Janacek's most accomplished students, wrote this piece in 1925 in Brno. The piece is written as a programmatic music suite (as opposed to a classical quartet) in memory of a summer holiday spent in the Czecho-Moravian Highlands, and it is from these hills that the piece derives its subtitle, "From the Monkey Mountains", as this was how youngsters of Haas' time living in Brno referred to the area.


The piece combines Janacek's exquisite compositional techniques with jazz, and was written three years after Haas completed his studies with his master. The work also marks the first high point of Haas' stature as a composer.


The titles of the movements of this piece are what the atmospheric music depicts – the piece opens gently before rising into an opulent "Landscape", a postcard to set the mood; the second movement, "Coach, Coachman and Horse", will make you feel you're riding in a rickety horse-drawn coach; the third, "The Moon and I...", is deeply introspective and mysterious; and the finale. "Wild Night" is a celebration of a mash-up of folk melodies and elements of jazz music – possibly evocative of an evening of dancing and partying, with a tender love encounter emerging towards the end of the movement.



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can be entertained while busy parents can have their hair looked after. The T'ang Quartet's founding members, first violinist Ng Yu-Ying and second violinist Ang Chek Meng are two regulars there, always making a trip to the salon before each performance.

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