

## **Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) Selection from “Cypresses” for string quartet (1887)**

In 1865 Dvořák was working as a viola player in the orchestra pit of the Prague Provisional Theatre, which had lured Smetana back from Göteborg to be its conductor. To help make ends meet Dvořák gave piano lessons, and fell in love with one of his pupils Josefína Čermáková. He composed 18 love songs for her, settings of poems by Gustav Pflieger-Moravský. She did not return his affection and so Dvořák, like Mozart, eventually married the younger sister. Dvořák retained an affection for Josefína; in 1894, news that she was dying inspired the slow movement of his cello concerto. Some 20 years after writing the songs, in 1887, Dvořák made an arrangement for string quartet of twelve of them.

The poet Moravský was a member of the *Májovci* ("May School"), a significant group of Czech writers, who, after the fall of the old order in the Revolution of 1848, reintroduced Czech as a literary language and promoted liberty, democracy and social justice. Moravský's Cypress poems, however, tell of unrequited love and of the attractiveness of death, given the circumstances. The cypress tree is rich in associations with death. Ovid tells how Cyparissus mistakenly killed his friend Apollo's pet deer, threw himself onto the ground in inconsolable grief and was metamorphosed into a Cypress tree with tears of sap on its trunk. All good stuff for a lovelorn young composer.