

Programme Note by Chris Darwin: please use freely for non-commercial purposes

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No.2 (*Intimate Letters*) (1928)

Andante - Con moto - Allegro

Adagio - Vivace

Moderato - Andante - Adagio

Allegro - Andante - Adagio

The 27 year-old Janáček married his not yet 16 year-old pupil Zdenka in 1881. But his fervent patriotism did not sit well with her staid German background and the couple separated shortly after the birth of Olga their first child in the autumn of 1882. Two years later they reunited, and a son Vladimír was born in 1888, but died of meningitis in 1890. Their relationship was further strained by the death of Olga in 1903 and by Janáček's interest in other women. In 1916 he fell passionately for the assertive Gabriela Horvátová, who sang the part of the Kostelnička in the successful Prague production of *Jenůfa*. He took a holiday with her at the spa town of Luhačovice; his wife Zdenka attempted suicide and they went through a form of divorce. Around this time, Janáček also met at Luhačovice the art-dealer David Stössel and his 27 year-old wife Kamila Stösslová. Janáček fell for the strikingly beautiful Kamila, whom Zdenka saw as a useful ally against Horvátová; the couples visited each other and Zdenka corresponded extensively with Kamila. Janáček's affections for Horvátová waned, Kamila kept Janáček at a distance despite his obsessively persistent correspondence to her (in all he wrote her over 700 letters), and his relationship with Zdenka improved. Kamila stimulated a burst of creative energy in Janáček: she is identified by him with the heroines in the song cycle *The diary of one who disappeared*, and the operas *Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *The Macropoulos Affair*. His reputation soared.

In Easter 1927 Zdenka encouraged Janáček to visit the Stössels for a few days – she wanted him out of the house while it was redecorated – and during this visit his relationship with Kamila changed. Although their first kiss was not for another year, Kamila seems to have accepted his love and his letters now fantasize about her marrying him and bearing his child. It is this changed relationship which is the basis for his second String Quartet "*Intimate Letters*". He writes to her that it was written "in fire" rather than the "hot ash" of previous compositions, and:

"Today at my place they (the Moravian Quartet) played our quartet *Intimate Letters*... I listen. Did I write that? Those cries of joy, but what a strange thing, also cries of terror after a lullaby. Exaltation, a warm declaration of love, imploring; untamed longing. Resolution, relentlessly to fight with the world over you. Moaning, confiding, fearing. Crushing everything beneath me if it resisted. Standing in wonder before you at our first meeting. Amazement at your appearance; as if it had fallen to the bottom of a well and from that very moment I drank the water of that well. Confusion and high-pitched song of victory: 'You've found a woman who was destined for you.' Just my speech and just your amazed silence. Oh, it's a work as if carved out of living flesh. I think that I won't write a more profound and a truer one." *John Tyrrell (trans & ed) "Intimate Letters" Faber & Faber 1994.*

Their new relationship was short-lived. The next year, on an expedition together from a holiday cottage, the 74 year-old Janáček caught a chill which rapidly turned to a lethal pneumonia.

The viola part, at times representing Kamila, was originally written for the *viola d'amore*, but Janáček reassigned it to the viola to improve the texture of the quartet.