

Programme Notes by Chris Darwin. Use freely for non-commercial purposes.

**Josef Suk (1874–1935) *Elegie* for piano, violin and cello Op. 23
(Under the influence of Zeyer's *Vyšehrad*) (1902)**

Josef Suk's father, who was the village schoolmaster and choirmaster, taught him piano, violin and organ. Aged 11 Josef entered the Prague Conservatoire where he studied chamber music under Wihan and composition with Dvořák. Together with Wihan he founded the Czech Quartet which flourished internationally until Wihan retired in 1933. Suk was Dvořák's favourite pupil and in 1898 married his daughter Otilka. His compositions found favour with Brahms and he was regarded as the leading composer of the modern Czech school. As professor of composition at the Prague Conservatoire Suk trained many composers including Martinů.

His *Elegie* dates from a happy time of his life, around the birth of his son – a happiness that was shattered two years later by the death first of his father-in-law Dvořák and the following year of Otilka, his wife. The *Elegie's* single *Adagio* movement was written originally for violin, cello, string quartet, harmonium and harp to mark the first anniversary of the death of the writer, dramatist and poet Julius Zeyer (1841–1901). It is inspired by Zeyer's epic poem *Vyšehrad* - the large fortress that overlooks Prague from a bluff above the Vltava River. The poem nostalgically recalls the better times of yesteryear, comparing them unfavourably to the dismal present. Topical stuff.