

**20 December 2015 Bennewitz Quartet**  
**Programme notes by Chris Darwin**

**Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760-1812) String Quartet Op 60 No 3 in E flat (1806)**

*Allegro espressivo*

*Adagio non tanto*

*Menuetto: Scherzo con moto assai – Trio dolcissimo e sempre sotto voce*

*Finale: Allegro moderato*

'As has been frequently observed, much of Dussek's music resembles that of other composers. Most often, however, these composers are later than Dussek, and such resemblances show him to have been very much ahead of his time in the development of a Romantic piano style.' (Howard Crow, cataloguer of Dussek's work). Indeed, specific passages from Schubert, Beethoven, Weber, Rossini, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Schumann are all anticipated by Dussek, whose general style also presages that of Liszt, Smetana, Dvořák and Brahms. Dussek is now remembered mainly for his piano music (his father was a pianist and organist) and his harp music (both his mother and his wife Sophia Corri were harpists), but his works are rarely played in the concert hall. His influence remains not only in the music of his more distinguished successors but also in such innovations as Broadwood's enlarging of the piano, and the now universal habit of pianists sitting sideways to the audience (Dussek's profile was apparently particularly fine).

Born into a musical family in Bohemia, he led a varied and well-travelled life as a virtuoso pianist, composer and teacher. His fans included the aristocracy of much of Europe. A favourite of Catherine the Great, at whose court he mastered the glass harmonica, he fled Russia for fear of being arrested on suspicion of being involved in a plot to assassinate her. During his subsequent stay at Prince Radziwiłł's castle near Minsk, he had an affair with the younger brother's wife the Princess Sophie Friederike von Thurn und Taxis. The couple fled to Hamburg, where Sophie had second thoughts and returned to her husband. Dussek continued to Paris where he became a favourite of Marie Antoinette, but fled again just ahead of the Revolution for London. Here he stayed for 10 years, adored for his piano playing and earning large sums as a teacher. A misguided music publishing venture with his newly acquired father-in-law and later with Mozart's librettist Da Ponte bankrupted them all; his wife Sophia Corri was confined to Newgate and Dussek himself bolted back to Paris where, despite his previous associations with Marie Antoinette, he was employed by Talleyrand. He drank heavily, ran to seed and died in 1812.

His little-known three Op 60 quartets were written after his time in London, where he had won the admiration of Haydn. They show well his melodic and dramatic gifts; there are powerful individual episodes with unexpected and touching modulations. Why then are they not performed more often? Share your thoughts on the Strings Attached blog:

[Dussek's chamber music.](#)

**Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No.1 (Kreutzer Sonata) (1923)**

*Adagio - Con moto*

*Con moto*

*Con moto - Vivo - Andante*

*Con moto - (Adagio) - Più mosso*

George Bridgetower was a Polish-African violinist, a friend of Beethoven and the original dedicatee of his tempestuous A major violin sonata '*Sonata per un mulattico lunatico*'.

Shortly after the first performance in 1803, Bridgetower insulted a woman-friend of Beethoven, who then changed the sonata's dedication to Rodolphe Kreutzer. Kreutzer didn't much care for Beethoven's music and never played the 'outrageously unintelligible' sonata. This 'Kreutzer' Sonata inspired a novella (1889) by Leon Tolstoy in which a husband's jealousy is inflamed by his wife playing the sonata with an attentive male violinist. Arriving home unexpectedly one night, the husband finds the pair together in the music room and stabs his wife to death. The violinist escapes (undignified to chase him in one's socks); the distraught, guilt-ridden husband, acquitted of murder, rides the trains seeking the forgiveness of strangers.

In 1907-9 Janáček had been inspired both by Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and by his *Kreutzer Sonata*. Unfortunately, not only his sketches from *Anna Karenina* but also the complete three-movement Piano Trio inspired by the *Kreutzer Sonata* have been lost. Much later in 1923, Janáček returned to the topic of the *Kreutzer Sonata* producing his first string quartet. We have Janáček's word, corroborated by Pavel Dědeček the violinist at the first performance of the lost piano trio, that some of the ideas from the piano trio gave rise to the quartet. The quartet was written in just a fortnight in October 1923 in Janáček's characteristic fragmentary, episodic, mature style; it swings the listener violently across a huge range of emotions. By then the 69-year old Janáček was having a musically productive but one-sidedly passionate and obsessive (730 letters) relationship with Kamila Stösslová, a married woman 38 years his junior. He wrote to her: 'I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down, just like the one... Tolstoy describes in his *Kreutzer Sonata*'.

The opening contains two elements: a slow (*Adagio*), anguished, rising and falling motif on the violin and viola, followed immediately by a faster (*Con moto*), busy motif on the cello. These two elements dominate the first movement, taking on a variety of forms, and recur throughout the work.

The image shows musical notation for the opening of the first movement. The top staff is in 2/4 time, starting with a slow *Adagio* section (marked *mf*) and a faster *Con moto* section (marked *mf*). The bottom staff is in 2/4 time, starting with a *Presto* section (marked *sf p*).

It is perhaps not too fanciful to see their link with the opening *Presto* of Beethoven's original 'Kreutzer' violin sonata (also illustrated). Tolstoy's jealous husband was particularly wary of its power: '...how can that first *Presto* be played in a drawing-room among ladies wearing low-necked dresses? ... [it leads to] an awakening of energy and feeling unsuited both to the time and the place.'

The second movement, in the remote 7-flats of Ab minor, starts with a speeded version of the earlier falling motif and soon leads us into a frighteningly icy world of *tremolo* played *sul ponticello* – close to the bridge. The ice melts into the 5 sharps of B major with faster relentless triplets. The *Con moto* opening of the third movement echoes the second subject of Beethoven's opening *Presto* (illustrated); its timidity is interrupted by more of Janáček's scary *sul ponticello*. The final movement starts calmly with the rising motif of the work's opening, but the energy rises relentlessly with fast accompanying figures that become a manic gallop to the exhausted end.

The image shows musical notation for the opening of the third movement. The top staff is in 4/4 time, starting with a *Con moto* section (marked *mf*) and a *Presto* section (marked *mf leggiero, timidamente*). The bottom staff is in 4/4 time, starting with a *(Presto)* section (marked *p dolce*).

## Franz Schubert (1797-1828) String Quartet in D minor, D.810 (Death and the Maiden) (1824)

*Allegro*

*Andante con moto*

*Scherzo: Allegro molto*

*Presto*

At the age of eight, Schubert started to learn the violin from his father; six years later he was composing for the family string quartet: brothers Ignaz and Ferdinand on violin, Franz on viola and his father on cello. However, the eleven or so quartets that Schubert wrote between the ages of 14 and 20 are now, like Mozart's early quartets, rarely played. The exuberant "Trout" piano quintet of 1819 and the surviving first movement of a C minor quartet ("Quartettsatz") written in 1820 set the scene for the great chamber works of his later years: in 1824 the Octet, the A minor "Rosamunde" quartet and today's D minor "Death and the Maiden"; in 1826 the G major quartet; in 1827 his two piano trios; and in his last year, 1828, the incomparable C major two-cello quintet.

*The opening four bars of the D minor quartet set it in a different world from the understated charms of the "Rosamunde" quartet. The*

*hammered out fortissimo triplet figure demands our serious attention, but is immediately transformed into an almost apologetically tender pianissimo*

*phrase. After a pause, the tension mounts, driven by the triplets, to a reinforced version of the opening. This emotional roller-coaster continues throughout the movement. The triplets*

*sometimes give way to the dotted rhythm of a yearning tune that Jack Westrup attributes to Schubert's admiration for Rossini; this theme in turn*

*gets transformed into more serious matter against running semiquavers. The emotional intensity and tightness of construction of the movement recall the later Beethoven but it*

*was written the year before the first of Beethoven's late quartets. The repeated notes of the opening bars and their rhythm are echoed in the themes of the other three movements.*

*The theme for the variations of the G minor Andante comes from Death's contribution to a short Schubert song of 1817, inviting a terrified young girl to sleep safely in his arms. The quartet version is altogether lighter: a fourth higher, more transparently scored and con moto. Resignation*

*has replaced the sinister threat of the song. The calm of the first two variations is shattered by the brutal dactyls (-v v) of the third, a more rapid version of the rhythm of the theme; calm returns only to be broken again by the long crescendo of the repeat of the fifth variation to yet more terrifying dactyls. The terror subsides to a serene end and a Schubert hallmark switch to the major.*

*The fiercely syncopated energy of the Scherzo and its tranquil Trio, lead to the tarantella-form finale. The tarantella folk-dance hails from Taranto in southern Italy: a courting couple dance encircled by others as the music gets faster and faster. Taranto independently gave its name to the tarantula spider, the effects of whose allegedly serious bite could, it was thought, be ameliorated by wild dancing. Pepys records tales of itinerant fiddlers cashing in on this belief especially during the harvest when bites were more frequent. It is quite possible that Schubert intends the allusion to cheating death, but either way this energetic dance with its prestissimo ending provides a rousing climax to the quartet.*

