

**Brighton  
Festival**

# **Nash Ensemble**

**Theresienstadt/  
Terezín 1941-5**



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# Theresienstadt/Terezín

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**Smetana** From the Home Country

**Klein** String Trio

**Haas** Suite for solo piano

**Krása** Tanec for string trio

INTERVAL

**Dvořák** Piano Quartet no. 2 in E flat

## Nash Ensemble

**Ian Brown** *piano*

**Marianne Thorsen** *violin*

**Philip Dukes** *viola*

**Richard Lester** *cello*





## Theresienstadt/Terezín 1941–5

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From 1941 the notorious concentration camp at Theresienstadt (now known as Terezín), originally an old Austro-Hungarian garrison town 60km north of Prague, became a ghetto for some 60,000 Jewish Czech internees — men, women, and many children — and one of the principal staging-posts for such death camps as Auschwitz. The inmates were held in appalling conditions, crammed together in a small space, and used for forced labour; disease and malnutrition were rife. Although Terezín had a Nazi commandant, the Nazis also formed a 'Council of Elders' from among the prisoners, who were thus allowed a certain measure of self-rule, though the council reported back directly to the SS.

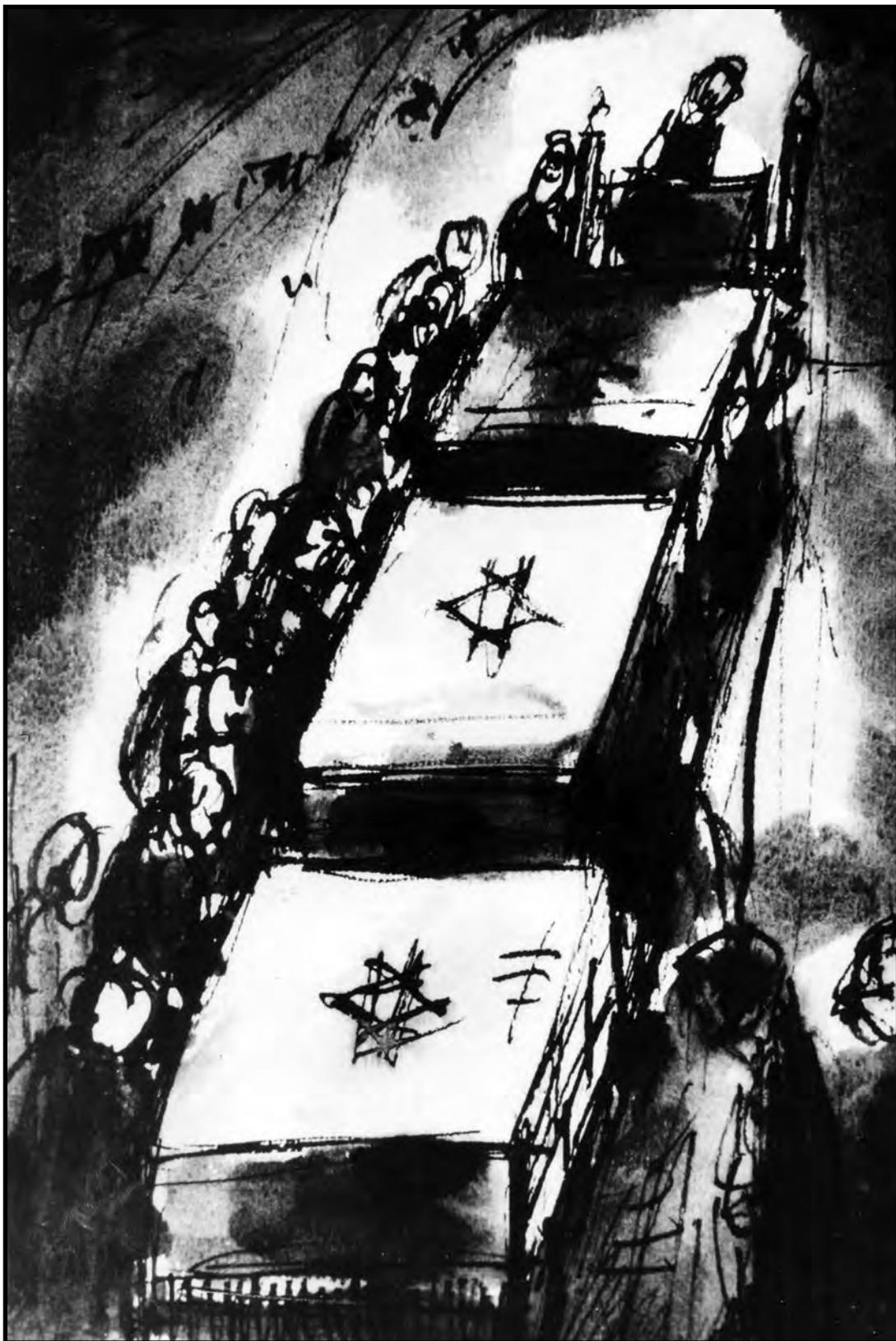
Terezín's population included practically the entire Jewish cultural elite of pre-war Czechoslovakia. Here, where so many gifted performers and creative artists were congregated together, the Nazis at first forbade any artistic activity on pain of death; but performances took place anyway, and soon the Nazis began actively encouraging performances of plays, concerts, cabaret and even opera, both because it raised morale generally and for its propaganda value while the inmates awaited transportation to Auschwitz.

The composers who spent their last months in Terezín included the most gifted members of the post-Janáček generation, and such major figures as Viktor Ullmann, who had been both a pupil of Schoenberg and a follower of Rudolf Steiner. Though most of them perished, a few major figures of post-war Czech music survived, including the conductor Karel Ančerl and the singer and composer Karel Berman. Many of the works they composed in the camp were preserved by the survivors, so we can see that Terezín was in fact a kind of defiant hothouse of Czech music, with works of the highest artistic standards — and often remarkably positive in tone — being written on the very brink of the abyss.

In 1944 the Nazis remodelled Theresienstadt just before a visit from the Red Cross, and a propaganda film, *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* ('The Führer Gives the Jews a City'), was made by the director Kurt Gerron, himself one of the inmates, under the supervision of the camp commandant, Karl Rahm. In the film, children are seen singing Hans Krása's opera *Brundibar* and Pavel Haas can be seen taking a bow after a performance of one of his works. When the propaganda project was over, the Nazis transferred 18,000 prisoners, including Klein, Haas, Krása and the children who had sung in *Brundibar*, to Auschwitz, where they were mostly murdered in the gas chambers.

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A funeral procession: drawing by Bedřich Fritta (1906–44), a Czech Jewish artist who spent time in Terezín before being deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered

## Bedřich Smetana (1824–84)



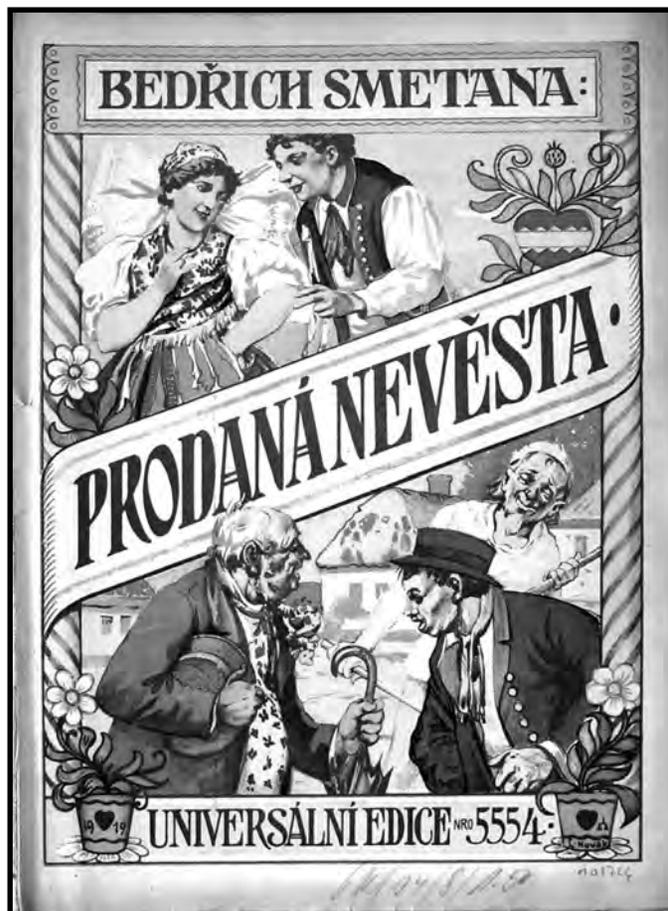
Bedřich Smetana

### From the Home Country

*Moderato*

*Andantino — Moderato*

Smetana is celebrated, along with his younger compatriot Antonín Dvořák, as one of the two great nationalist composers of Czechoslovakia. Yet he attained this position by gradual stages, in a life beset by crippling personal misfortunes. After many years of struggle it was only in 1866, with the Prague premiere of his second opera, *The Bartered Bride*, that he finally found himself acknowledged as Bohemia's leading composer. The opera was hailed as a turning-point in Czech history: not only was it acclaimed at home as founding a novel yet genuine Czech musical style but it became the first Czech work to enter the international repertory.





Smetana's season of triumph was short-lived. In July 1874, while on a duck-shooting expedition, he felt dizzy and hard of hearing in his right ear. By the following morning he was entirely deaf. The affliction — a savage symptom of syphilis, which he had contracted years earlier — tortured him for years with a constant roaring and dissonance in his head, while he could hear no real sound from outside himself. For his remaining decade he fought against encroaching ill-health and depression. In 1876 he depicted his ordeal in the finale of his autobiographical String Quartet, sub-titled 'From My Life'. Indomitably, he continued to compose and to attend concerts, familiarizing himself with the music from scores and making critiques of the performances by close observation. Fêted as a national hero, yet continually attacked by critics who attributed to his deafness features they disliked about his music, Smetana gave piano recitals, conducted and completed three more operas, as well as sketches for a fourth, in addition to his great cycle of symphonic poems, *Má Vlast*, which was his principal musical testament to his native land. Ultimately he would become so deranged that in April 1884 he had to be confined in Prague's lunatic asylum, where he died only a month later.

The two pieces for violin and piano that make up *Z domoviny* ('From the Home Country') were probably composed in 1880 shortly after Smetana had completed work on *Má Vlast*. He described them as 'written in a simple style, with a view to performance at home rather than in concert. They are genuinely national in character, but with my own melodies'. The first piece, in A major, is in the tradition of Moravian folk melodies that shift constantly between major and minor, and its principal theme is remarkably similar to the horn theme from Smetana's tone-poem *From Bohemia's Woods and Fields* (which is part of *Má Vlast*). The predominant tone is one of yearning; in the central section (for this is a piece in ternary form) there is a brief dramatic outburst before the return of the nostalgic main tune.

The G minor second piece is more complex — Smetana sub-titled it 'Bohemian Fantasia' — and alternates assertive sections with more gentle episodes. After a melancholic recitative that climbs to a grand rhetorical climax, there is a further song of yearning before the music accelerates into an exuberant folk-dance of the type called *skoëná*. This lively dance measure pervades the rest of the movement, with quieter episodes (one of them, in canon between the two instruments, reminiscent of a passage in *Blaník*, another of the *Má Vlast* tone-poems).



## Gideon Klein (1919–45)

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Gideon Klein

### String Trio

*Allegro*

*Lento* (Variations on a Moravian Folk Song Theme)

*Molto vivace*

Gideon Klein was born into a Moravian Jewish family in Přerov, Czechoslovakia. In the 1930s he studied composition with Alois Hába at the Prague Conservatory and also philosophy at the Charles University in Prague. With the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia he was unable to continue his studies, to complete the book he had begun on Mozart's string-quartet style or to take up an offered scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Nor was he allowed to seek employment as a musician, though he performed as a pianist under several pseudonyms. In December 1941 he was deported to Terezín. Klein, who was already well known to Czech musical cognoscenti as a figure of outstanding talent, was very active in the ghetto's musical life as composer, conductor, pianist and all-round energizer. On 16 October 1944 he was transferred to Auschwitz, but was judged young and fit enough to be put to work. He is generally said to have died, aged 25, at Fürstengrube sub-camp, in January 1945, but it appears he may in fact have been shot dead while on a forced march of workers from Auschwitz to Fürstengrube. (These almost pointless forced marches in the depth of winter by starving concentration-camp inmates were one of the dreadful phenomena of the dying months of Hitler's Reich.)

Klein is generally considered as potentially one of the most gifted of all the 'Terezín composers'. Though he was clearly still in process of self-orientation, all the evidence shows he was a creative artist of considerable promise. Despite Klein's studies with Hába, which awakened an interest in microtonal inflection, he had clearly absorbed the Second Viennese School, and his ambitious String Quartet op. 2, composed in pre-Terezín days, seems to have been composed under the heady influence of Alban Berg's op. 3.

However, Klein's last work, the vigorously affirmative String Trio for violin, viola and cello that he completed on 7 October 1944, nine days before his deportation to Auschwitz, shows a radical change of orientation. Two pithy motoric Allegros surround an inventive central set of variations, the idiom and techniques more reminiscent of Janáček, or of Bartók's middle string quartets. All three movements display elements of folk music, though these are often offset by an individual, even quirky, sense of harmony. The first movement,

remarkably, manages to alternate between writing in the Lydian mode and a kind of free atonality, which also defines its two main themes.

The nostalgic, yet majestic recollection of a Moravian folksong — the tune in question is *Ta knezdubská veža* ('That Tower of Knezdub') — provides the basis for the slow movement and is split up into small motivic and rhythmic units that are separately explored in seven richly contrasted variations. The finale, with its turbulent rhythmic asymmetry and evocations of folk-fiddling, emanates no sense of tragedy, but rather a fierce, at times almost grimly determined, will to rejoice. This remarkable work is among the finest string trios of the 20th century.



Drawing by Bedřich Fritta

## Pavel Haas (1899–1944)

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Pavel Haas

### Suite for solo piano

*Praeludium*

*Con molta espressione*

*Danza*

*Pastorale*

*Postludium*

Haas was born in Brno into a Jewish family, the son of a shoemaker and brother of Hugo Haas, a popular actor in pre-war Czechoslovakia. He studied composition at the Brno Conservatory from 1919 to 1921, followed by two years in Janáček's masterclass. He soon gained a reputation as an avant-gardist — his string quartet *From the Monkey Mountains* includes, for the first time in the genre, a part for percussion. In the 1930s he became one of the most prominent Moravian composers: his opera *Šarlatán* ('The Charlatan'), given its premiere in Brno in 1938, was a considerable success and earned him the Smetana Foundation Award. Haas was deported to Terezín in 1941 and was at first so depressed he was unable to compose, but under the encouragement of Gideon Klein he eventually wrote several works, though his large-scale Symphony remained unfinished. He was gassed in Auschwitz on 17 October 1944.

The Suite for piano (op. 13) was one of Haas's most often performed works in his lifetime. It is an optimistic work dating from late 1935, while he was working on his opera and at about the time he got married, written for his pianist friend Bernard Kaff (who would also go through Terezín and die in Auschwitz). Kaff gave the premiere under the auspices of the Club of Moravian Composers on 10 February 1936, and it was soon taken up by such other pianists as Rudolf Firkušný. While Haas's Suite has some affinities with the Baroque keyboard suite of J.S. Bach's time, this is mainly to be sensed in the motoric, toccata-like style of the outer movements and the rhythmic liveliness of the central 'Danza'. The high level of dissonance, though, resembles that to be found in Bartók and Prokofiev. In the 'Con molta espressione' and 'Pastorale' a more romantic impulse makes itself felt, but throughout this is a work of great confidence, requiring a virtuoso player.

## Hans Krása (1895–1944)

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Hans Krása

### **Tanec for string trio**

Born in Prague, the son of a Czech father and a German mother who fostered and encouraged his musical development, Hans Krása became a composition pupil of Alexander Zemlinsky at the newly established Deutsche Akademie für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Prague in 1920 (Zemlinsky considered him his most gifted student). He later studied with Roussel in Paris. Krása's early orchestral, chamber and stage works were well received in Europe and the USA; some were published, and his first opera *Verlobung im Traum* won a Czech State Prize and was given its premiere in Prague under Georg Szell. Subsequently the children's opera *Brundibar* (1938), first performed in a Jewish orphanage, was a great success.

In 1942 Krása was arrested and sent to Terezín, where in 1943, encouraged by Gideon Klein, he began to compose again and made a new arrangement of *Brundibar* from a copy of the piano score. Thus it was performed by children in Terezín over 50 times. He also composed chamber music and songs. On 16 October 1944 Krása was transported to Auschwitz with the composers Viktor Ullmann and Pavel Haas, his fellow inmates. They were gassed the following day.

The brief *Tanec* ('Dance') cleverly blends jazz rhythms with the accents of Czech folk music and mixes them with something of the pawky, earthy humour of Janáček.

# Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)



Antonín Dvořák

## Piano Quartet no. 2 in E flat

*Allegro con fuoco*

*Lento*

*Allegro moderato, grazioso*

*Finale: Allegro ma non troppo*

One of the most significant influences on Dvořák's musical development and his professional career was his friendship with Johannes Brahms, which began when Brahms first started championing his music in the early 1870s, before the two men had met. When they became personally acquainted, in 1877, Brahms immediately advised his own publisher, Simrock, to start publishing Dvořák's works — which soon gave the Bohemian master's music an international currency it might not otherwise have had. Dvořák's Piano Quartet came about as a result of a suggestion that Simrock made in 1885, but Dvořák (who had written a previous work in the genre back in 1875) pondered the matter for four years before he actually produced the requested work: it was composed in July and August 1889 just before he began work on his Eighth Symphony, and had its premiere in Prague's Rudolfinum Hall on 23 November the following year. 'As expected, it came out easily and the melodies just surged upon me, thank God!', he wrote to a friend.

Two years earlier, in 1887, Dvořák had composed his Piano Quintet in A major, and in a sense the Piano Quartet (for which he made preliminary sketches at the time) is a companion-piece to that work, though it has never been quite as popular, perhaps because it is considerably darker in tone. While E flat major is generally considered a heroic, assertive key, E flat minor is traditionally one of the most lugubrious of tonalities — and Dvořák makes plenty of use of it throughout the work. No sooner has the first, challenging opening phrase been heard in the strings than the music turns towards the minor in the piano's response. These two ideas are the real basis of the movement, but Dvořák produces a less than textbook sonata form with them. Once the exposition has run its course, the opening music recurs as if the exposition is to be repeated, but in fact this turns out to be the beginning of the development, as the music goes off in new directions. The first idea is omitted from the recapitulation, which starts with the more romantic second subject, but reappears like a ghost of itself in a shadowy tremolo in the coda.

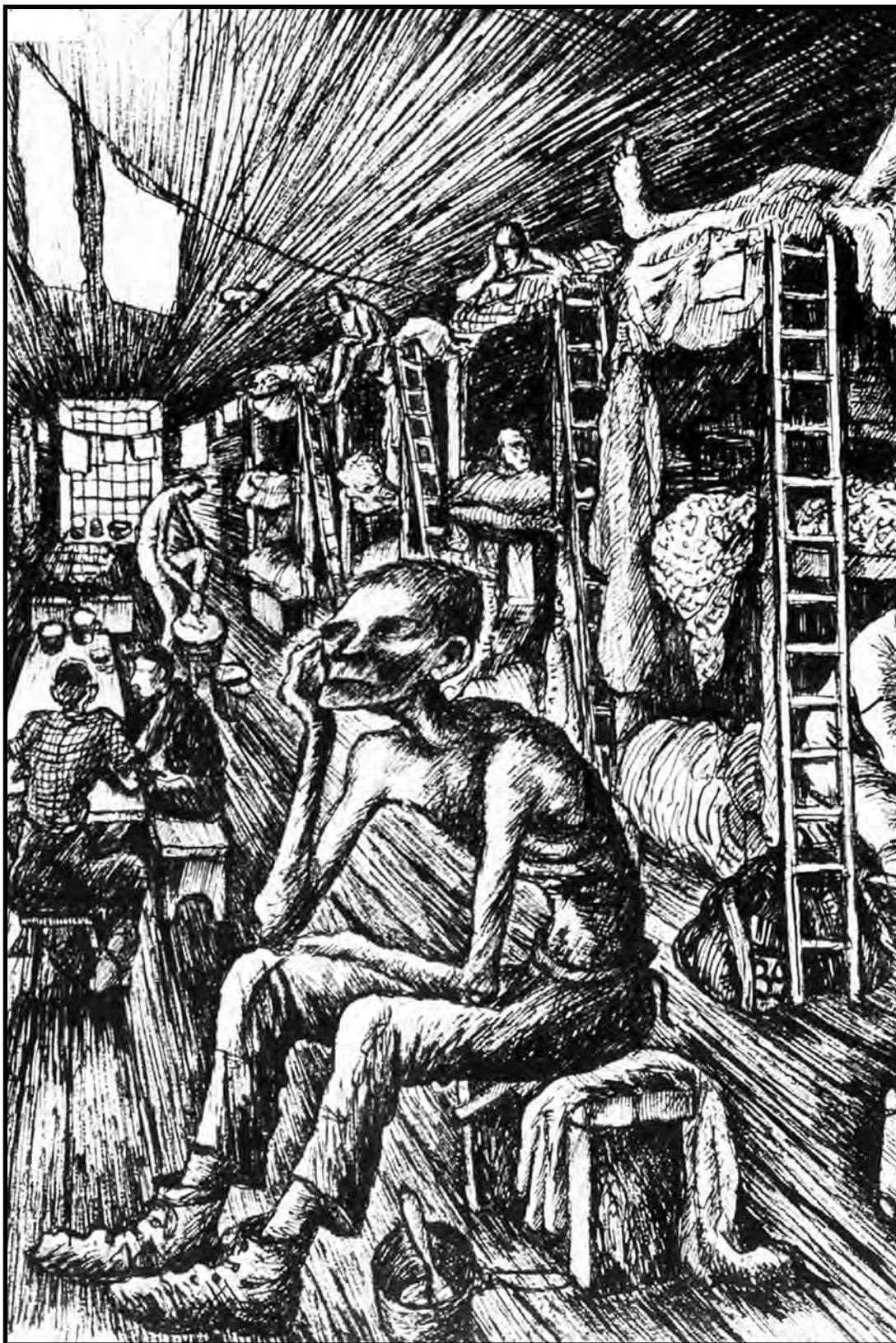


The slow movement presents, twice, a parade of five contrasting themes, each featuring a different instrument (or the whole ensemble) and passing through a wide range of emotions. The cello has the first theme — a justly celebrated solo for the instrument — and the violin the second, while the peaceful third theme, which alternates in piano and strings, leads to a stormy minor-key outburst that subsides to allow the piano to introduce the final theme of the parade, full of pathos with its sighing accompaniment in the strings. The scherzo is cast in the moderate waltz-time of an Austrian *Ländler*, but its mazurka-like second theme appears at first in the minor, only later returning in a genial major-key form. The trio seems to have echoes of the cimbalom, the eastern European hammered dulcimer, in the writing for piano. Unusually, Dvořák writes almost the whole of the sonata-form finale in the minor, making obsessive use of a four-note motif, modulating adventurously in the development section, and only turning to the major for the closing pages. Yet it is fundamentally good-natured, and also highly exciting — full of dash and brilliance with a few contrasting passages of sweetness and calm.

**Programme notes © Calum MacDonald**

Calum MacDonald is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster, and editor of *Tempo* (the international quarterly review of modern music, published by Cambridge University Press); his many books include the 'Master Musicians' volumes on Brahms and Schoenberg





Drawing by Bedřich Fritta

# Biography

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Ian Brown



Marianne Thorsen



Philip Dukes



Richard Lester

## Nash Ensemble

Ian Brown *piano*  
 Marianne Thorsen *violin*  
 Philip Dukes *viola*  
 Richard Lester *cello*

Founded by its Artistic Director Amelia Freedman in 1964, the Nash Ensemble performs a varied repertory ranging from Haydn to the avant-garde, and is a major contributor towards the recognition and promotion of contemporary composers: by the end of the current season the group will have given the premieres of over 270 new works, of which 170 were specially commissioned. Its full complement of 12 players performs in combinations of various sizes, making it one of the most versatile ensembles in the UK.

The Nash Ensemble tours throughout Europe and the USA. Its recent notable international engagements include three concerts as part of the *Will to Create, Will to Live Terezín* project at the 92nd Street Y, New York; appearances at the Berlin Konzerthaus, the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, the Vienna Konzerthaus, the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh International Festival; and residencies at the Toronto Festival and the Lofoten Festival, Norway. It has also presented the Terezín project as part of a weekend of concerts, masterclasses and films at the Prague Conservatory. Earlier this season it presented a series at the Wigmore Hall, *Dreamers of Dreams*, which focused on the works of British composers from the first half of the 20th century. Next season the Nash Ensemble will present an American series at the Wigmore Hall, featuring works by Barber, Copland, Gershwin, Cole Porter, John Adams and Elliott Carter. The most recent of its numerous recordings is Harrison Birtwistle's *Moth Requiem*, recorded in January this year.

The Nash Ensemble's numerous awards include the Edinburgh Festival Critics Award and two Royal Philharmonic Society Awards.

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