

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Stephen Hough & Viano Quartet

Thursday 9 October 2025, 7.30pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

We are proud to be a place where people come together to discover and connect with the wonder of classical music. Throughout the year, we provide unrivalled opportunities to encounter, live in person, the full range of music, and a variety of different ways for you to experience it.

Some of the world's most exciting artists, including our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists, join us to shine a light on this incredible art form. Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2025/26.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Mozart String Quartet in B flat, K.458 (Hunt)	26'
Stephen Hough Piano Quintet (Les noces rouges)	25'
<i>Interval</i>	
Dvořák Piano Quintet No.2 in A, Op.81	40'

Performers

Viano Quartet
Stephen Hough *piano*

This performance lasts approximately 2 hours and 5 minutes, including a 20-minute interval.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

String Quartet in B flat, K.458 (Hunt) (1784)

- i. *Allegro vivace assai*
- ii. *Menuetto. Moderato*
- iii. *Adagio*
- iv. *Allegro assai*

The exact date of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Joseph Haydn's first meeting is unknown, but it was probably around 1781, after Mozart moved to Vienna. They became firm friends, and Mozart's admiration for the older composer is evident in his imitations of him – as ever, the sincerest form of flattery.

Haydn's groundbreaking quartet writing in his Op.33 set (which he described as 'written in an entirely new manner') led Mozart to transform his own approach – whether in the conversational exchanges between instruments, the equal weight accorded to all four, or the folksy, whirling finales. He began the group of six known as his *Haydn* Quartets in 1782, completing them over the following three years. He and Haydn would probably have played them together, with Mozart on the viola and Haydn as first violin.

Mozart presented a heartfelt tribute in the dedication:

To my dear friend Haydn:

A father who had decided to send his children into the world at large thought it best to entrust them to the protection and guidance of that famous man who fortunately happened to be his best friend as well. Behold here, famous man and dearest friend, my six children ... You yourself ... have shown me your approval of them during your last sojourn [in Vienna]. Your praise, above all ... makes me hope that they shall not be entirely unworthy of your good will...
– W.A. Mozart

As for reciprocity, Mozart's father, Leopold, reported: 'Herr Haydn said to me: "I tell you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer I know, either personally or by reputation: he has taste and moreover the greatest possible knowledge of the science of composition."'

The *Hunt* is the fourth of the six quartets. Its nickname (not Mozart's idea) comes from the first movement's joyous opening theme, which resembles a hunting horn in a vigorous cantering rhythm. In the second subject, the four instruments toss a light, trilling motif to one another.

The stately minuet uses the Haydnesque device of dividing an eight-bar phrase into three plus five rather than the regular four plus four. Its dance-like central trio places the first violin (perhaps Haydn himself) centre stage.

Third, the deeply expressive adagio is unusual in Mozart's quartets; its concentrated intensity recalls Haydn's slow movements and almost anticipates those of Beethoven, probing beneath supposedly simple ideas through close-knit exchanges and tender harmonic manipulations. The quartet ends with an exuberant rondo which, with its rustic Hungarian style and humorous twists, could be mistaken for the work of Haydn himself.

Stephen Hough (b. 1961)

Piano Quintet (*Les noces rouges*) (2024)

- i. *Introduction and Wedding Feast*
- ii. *The Sleigh Ride and the Attack*
- iii. *Arrival and Aftermath*

Long established as one of Britain's greatest musicians, Sir Stephen Hough is also a confirmed polymath, a multi-talented creator who has turned his skills to writing, painting and composing.

He has often commented in interviews that he enjoys writing music while on tour, making the most of undistracted moments away from home between concerts – which is exactly how he set about writing the extraordinarily demanding finale of his Piano Quintet *Les noces rouges* in a hotel room in Singapore. The work was commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New York, and was premiered there in November 2024 by Hough and the Viano Quartet.

Many of Hough's pieces have featured his own instrument, including several magnificent sonatas and a concerto entitled *The World of Yesterday*, after the book by Stefan Zweig. A literary inspiration underpins this quintet as well, this time an episode in the American author Willa Cather's 1918 novel *My Ántonia*.

The book is set among the settlers of the western United States in the late 19th century, tracing the hardships, joys and traumas of the orphaned Jim Burden and his close friend Ántonia Shimerda, from a family of Bohemian immigrants. The brief episode of *Les noces rouges* (The Red Wedding) is a vignette told by a Russian immigrant, Pavel, on his deathbed. It concerns an inebriated wedding party during winter in the old country, in which six sleighs were attacked by a pack of wolves. Two ruthless drivers had thrown the bride and groom to the animals. Pavel and his friend Peter, the only survivors, afterwards had been viewed everywhere as pariahs.

Hough's quintet, in three movements, is unashamedly narrative. It opens with the evocation of a Russian Orthodox hymn, then moves to the drunken wedding party and its intoxicated dances, and finishes with the nightmarish sleigh ride and its horrific tragedy. Here the music careers into terrifying effects, with glissando shrieks on the strings and great crunching clusters in the bass of the piano, punched out with the flat of the hand. As the composer told the Manhattan audience at the world premiere: 'It does not have a happy ending.'

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

Piano Quintet No.2 in A, Op.81 (1887)

- i. *Allegro, ma non tanto*
- ii. *Dumka: Andante con moto*
- iii. *Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace*
- iv. *Finale: Allegro*

Dvořák's Second Piano Quintet completely eclipsed his problematic first attempt at the genre in his youth. The A major work is one of his sunniest and most successful chamber pieces, dating from 1887.

By then Dvořák was in his prime and celebrated internationally. He was able to work on it at leisure at his country retreat, Vysoká, have it published by Simrock, and enjoy its premiere in January 1888 at the Rudolfinum, Prague's most famous concert hall, given by an ensemble of the country's leading musicians. The process appears to have been gloriously smooth, sullied only by a minor dispute between the composer and his publisher over whether to print its titles in Czech as well as German.

This happy birth is matched by the music's unceasing flow of inspiration. It demonstrates the way Dvořák could blend, seemingly effortlessly, Bohemian folk style with sophisticated art music in near-perfect balance. Irresistible dance rhythms and bittersweet melodies meet imaginative textures that are always light of touch and translucent, making the most of each instrument's most characterful qualities.

The first movement opens with the cello unfurling a songlike theme over rippling piano accompaniment. The mood rapidly shifts, however, into turbulent waters and wild contrasts, their potential plumbed as the music progresses. The second movement is a *Dumka*, a folk dance inspired by a melancholy form of Slavic poetry, in which slow sections alternate with livelier ones. Here the biggest contrast ensues when the piano's recurring figuration becomes the basis for a quick dash through a scherzo-like section that reaches a peak of energy before vanishing as abruptly as it appeared.

The third movement is a *furiant*, a vigorous dance full of cross-rhythms and off-beat accents, with a rising and falling second theme that modulates in startlingly beautiful ways. The finale unfolds with enormous energy, bustling through delicious harmonic transformations and a dramatic fugal build-up. Eventually the music seems to calm – but the coda restores all the vitality, bounding up to the work's triumphant close.

Programme notes © Jessica Duchon, 2025

Find out more

- ▶ Stephen Hough
- ▶ Viano Quartet
- ▶ southbankcentre.co.uk

You might also like...

Alisa Weilerstein & Friends

Saturday 30 November 2025, 6pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

Three magnificent musicians celebrate the 150th anniversary of Maurice Ravel, plus Rachmaninov's emotional heights and Beethoven's most famous piano trio.

ZRI: Schubert at the Red Hedgehog Tavern (Double Bill)

Friday 5 December 2025, 9pm | Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

Quintet ZRI reimagine Franz Schubert's String Quintet in C to sound as radical as when it was first written.