Dynamics of the critical phonon modes in quantum paraelectric SrTiO$_3$

S. Deng$^1$, C.R.S. Haines$^{1,2}$, D.M. Jarvis$^{1,3}$, M.J. Coak$^{1,4,5}$, A. Ivanov$^3$, A. Piovano$^3$, A. Wildes$^3$, and S. S. Saxena$^{1,*}$

$^1$Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge, J. J. Thomson Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 0HE, United Kingdom

$^2$School of Physics, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, United Kingdom

$^3$Institut Laue-Langevin, 71 Avenue des Martyrs, 38000 Grenoble, France

$^4$London Centre for Nanotechnology, University College London, Gower St, London WC1E 6BT, UK

$^5$Department of Physics, University of Warwick, Gibbet Hill Road, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

We report our recently performed triple-axis inelastic neutron scattering experiments on single-crystal SrTiO$_3$ at 37 mK. These are the first measurements deep into the enigmatic quantum polar acoustic state in the vicinity of the ferroelectric QCP. Measurements are taken at and around $q = 0$ in multiple directions in reciprocal space. In addition, we explore how the pressure affects the phonon mode in SrTiO$_3$ up to 5.0 kbar around 2 K. Our observations shed light on the coupling of the soft optical mode with the acoustic phonons, and its response to external pressure [1]. We believe this could help us understand the importance of anharmonic lattice dynamics and unusual thermal transport in SrTiO$_3$.

The proximity of SrTiO$_3$ to a quantum critical point [2] and the evolution of the underlying modes when being tuned with even modest applied pressure has become a promising new branch of the study of quantum critical phenomena. The critical point here is associated with a soft optical phonon mode responsible for the ferroelectric instability through a continuous displacive transition. Our recent dielectric measurements under pressure [1,3] expose the formation of a ‘quantum polar-acoustic state’ below 2 K.

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