



The Cobbett Association for Chamber Music Research

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The Lark Quartet -- An Amazing Success Story



**Left to Right: Eva Gruesser, violin;
Robin Mayforth, violin; Anna Kruger,
viola; Astrid Schween, cello.**

The Lark Quartet has experienced a rapid rise to success in the five short years since it was founded. These four exceptionally talented young women are now internationally recognized and highly acclaimed.

The Cobbett Association is honored to have the Lark Quartet in its membership.

The group won the prestigious Naumburg Chamber Music Award in 1990 with the performance of a contemporary masterpiece by Aaron Kernis. His quartet, "musica celestis", was composed for the Lark and commissioned by the Naumburg Foundation.

Since its highly successful debut in NY in 1986, the Lark has won top prizes in three major international string quartet competitions. Its members served as the Juilliard Quartet's teaching assistants at the Juilliard School. In 1988 the quartet was awarded a grant from Chamber Music America to establish a residency at the Ordway Theatre in St. Paul, Minn., where it continues its own concert series.

Since its first season, the Lark Quartet has commissioned and premiered works by many of today's leading composers, including Peter Schickele, Jon Deak, Libby Larsen, and Aaron Kernis.

In the spring of 1988, the quartet toured the Far East, performing and teaching at major conservatories in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China.

Based in NYC, the Lark members have recently been appointed visiting professors at Florida State U., at Tallahassee, where they hold the Shelfer Eminent Scholar Chair in Music. The group is also the quartet in residence at the Grand Canyon Chamber Music Festival, and this year it will serve as the official quartet at the Gina Bachauer Intl. Piano Competition.

Chamber music enthusiasts in Sarasota, Fl., were treated to the Lark's marvelous performance of Kernis' quartet in the new Asolo Theatre last February. Several of our Association's members attended.

In a recent letter to the Cobbett Association, Eva Gruesser, first violinist of the quartet, expressed a strong interest in our research work and said, "We are impressed by your dedication and curiosity in the field of chamber music. . . I wish the year had 40 months to find the time to schedule many more pieces by unknown composers who never had a chance to come through to the public. It's exciting that you follow them up. . . . We are looking forward to your future newsletters."

GOOD NEWS!

Morris Sinclair, our member in Cartigny Switzerland, notified us that a late string quintet with two violas, composed by Max Bruch, is now published for the first time by Kunzelmann in Zurich.

Morris said this quintet was performed recently by a group for the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Remembering JAMES FRISKIN 1886-1967

James Friskin, Scottish piano teacher and composer, was successful in England before coming to New York in 1914. He taught at Juilliard for many years and was co-author of an important book, Music for the Piano, which is an indispensable manual for performers, teachers, and students.

In 1944 he married his former classmate at the Royal College, Rebecca Clarke, the famous English composer who had played chamber music with Casals, Rubinstein, Heifetz, Thibaud, Monteux, Schnable, Szell, and Percy Grainger.

Friskin was not a prolific composer, but he had a gift of melody and a great appreciation and talent for chamber music. His Opus 1 Piano Quintet was so brilliant and successful, Cobbett commissioned him to write a Phantasy for Piano Quintet.

His five chamber works are valuable additions to the repertory but suffer from neglect. They include a Phantasy for S.O. in D; Pf Quintet in C minor, Op.1; a Phantasy Pf Quintet; a Phantasy Trio in E minor; and a Sonata for VI & Pf in G, Op. 5.

STENHAMMAR'S Glorious Chamber Music

Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927) is highly regarded in Sweden as one of its most prominent composers. His songs and choral and piano pieces were very successful, and he devoted much of his talent to the string quartet. His six quartets are considered milestones in the late romantic literature, but are sadly neglected in America.

No. 1 in C, Op. 2 is very worthwhile but not as original as the later ones. Beethoven's influence is there. The last movement has Nordic elements to add interest.

No. 2 in C minor, Op. 14, begins in the German romantic style but changes in the 1st and last movements to a more emotional and temperamental expression with freer style.

No. 3 in F, Op. 18, has a Nordic idiom, is very melodious and ingenious. Some polka rhythms even crop up in one movement.

No. 4 in A minor, Op. 25, is a very important work in which his own style is created and the inspiration is even greater.

No. 5 in C, Op. 29, the "Serenade" quartet. Uses more counterpoint. First movement has a hectic tempo and suggests a Viennese classical style. A "country fiddler" type finale adds much zest to a lighter quartet.

No. 6 in D minor, Op. 35. He reaches a spiritual resolution in this highly developed work that has rubato indications. A moody adagio is followed by a very intensive finale.

It is fortunate that these quartets became available to listeners about 8 years ago on the Caprice label, CAP1201-03, a Swedish import of 3 LPs performed by three top professional quartets.

A Heavenly Clarinet Quintet

Bernard Herrmann (b. 1911 in NYC; d. 1975), conductor and famous composer of film music in Hollywood's "Golden Age", composed a beautiful quintet for clarinet and string quartet and named it "Souvenir de Voyage". It was written in 1967 after he returned to abstract music following 25 years of devotion to movie music.

Herrmann, in this neo-romantic masterpiece, succeeds in expressing nostalgia and sentiment in his own way. It features an andante pastorale, an allegro, a dreamy berceuse and an andante tranquillo quasi barcarolla which suggests a Venetian flavor.

It was recorded in London, Jan., 1974, by Robert Hill, clarinet, and the Ariel Quartet. (Unicorn RHS332 LP).

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Historic Pasquier Trio Raised the Status of the String Trio

The Pasquier brothers of France, Jean, Pierre and Etienne, toured extensively in Europe and the U.S. during the '40s and '50s and left a legacy of flawless performances. They demonstrated a complete affinity of matched skills, and their concerts stimulated new interest in chamber works for violin, viola, and cello. In turn, this led numerous composers to dedicate new works to the famous group. The Trio was also noted for introducing new, rare, and contemporary works to audiences. This increased the respect and dignity of the string trio.

Concert goers who had the good fortune to hear this trio will never forget the sheer perfection of its performances. The only recording by the group that we know of is the Mozart Divertimento, K.563 on LP Mus. Heritage Soc. No.623, and it is regrettable that there aren't others available.

Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Dohnanyi wrote several very successful works for this combination, which are very well known. But there are many by other composers that are neglected. Listed here is a sampling of these, with their estimated level of difficulty and musical value. A more complete list will be published later on when evaluations are finished.

ANDRAE, Volkmar (1879-1962) Swiss. Trio D minor Op.29. Very enjoyable. Themes have romantic charm. Uses humor and some folk themes. Moderate - Very Good

BERKLEY, Lennox (1903-) English. Trio (1944) (Pub. Chester) Neo-classic with some astringent harmonies. Primacy of song evident in all 3 mvmts. A melodic first, short poignant adagio & a vigorous rondo. Moderate - Excellent.

CRAS, Jean, (1879-1932) French. Trio. Doesn't follow conventional rules and style is related to French impressionism. A wealth of intricate rhythm and some pungent harmony provide a challenge in this original work. Moderate - Excel.

FRANCAIX, Jean (1912-) French. Trio. (recorded by Heifetz, de Pasquale, and Piatigorsky) Light, neo-classic in his witty, carefree style. Short & effective with an allegro, scherzo, andante and rondo. Moderate - Very Good

FUCHS, Robert (1847-1927) Austrian. Trio Op.94 (1911) Classical form with late

romantic elements & humor. Has variations on Scottish folk song. Moderate - Excellent
GIARDINI, Felice (1736-1796) Italian. Famous violinist. Collection of 7 Trios (pub. Zanibon 3697) Beautiful melodies, divided parts, harmonious, and challenging, with cello & viola playing quite a bit in higher cleffs. Italian classical style. Moderate - Very Good

LENDVAI, Erwin (1882-1949) Hungarian. Pupil of Puccini. 3 trios - Op. 11, 14, & 16. Uses a linear style in a modified classic form with romantic expression. Limited use of folk song. Moderate to Difficult. Very Good.

MOERAN, E.J. (1894-1950) English. Trio (1931) Ded. to the Pasquier Trio The opening lyric mvmt. in 7/8 flows naturally. A brief adagio next with emotional impact, then a moto perpetuo, an andante & presto. His best work has melodic freshness and pungent harmonies. Mod.- Excel.

REGER, Max (1873-1916) German. Op. 77 B & 141 B. These two transparent works make a fine introduction to Reger's world of original sound. Late German romantic style. Mod. - Excel.

REINECKE, Carl (1824-1910) German. Trio Op. 249. Classical form, romantic spirit. Attractive & inventive with fine melodies. Moderate - Excellent

RONTGEN, Julius (1855-1932) Dutch. Trio Op. 76 (1924) Follows the German romantic school. Begins with Vivace giocoso, then a song-like andante, a scherzo "Alt-Hollandisch" and passified after Bach. Very good house music. Moderate - Very good.

VILLA-LOBOS, H. (1887-1959) Brazil. Trio (Edition - Eschig) In repertory of the Pasquier Trio. Was dedicated to Coolidge Foundation. In his original nationalistic style with pungent harmony and special rhythmic effects. Uses folk tunes. Difficult - Excellent

WEINER, Leo (1885-1960) Hungarian. Trio Op. 6 (1909) Important work in concise form. His style grew out of Central European tradition with some Hungarian flavor. Moderate - Excellent.

GUNNAR JOHANSEN DIES

Gunnar Johansen, 85, noted pianist and composer died, May 25, in Wisconsin.

Johansen composed hundreds of piano pieces, sonatas, concertos, and choral works. He was also known for performing rare chamber works at the U. of Wis. where he was one of the first musicians to be an artist in residence at a U.S. university.

RARE AND WELL DONE PIANO QUINTETS

QUINTETS for piano and string quartet always bring to mind the popular ones by the great masters — Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Dvorak, and Franck. Because of their quality, they are played endlessly by amateurs and professionals alike.

But there are many other worth while and neglected quintets for those who dare to play anything but the standard fare. A few of these are listed here with the estimated level of difficulty and musical value rating. Later, as evaluation progresses, a more complete list will be offered.

ARENISKY, Anton (1861-1906) Russian.
Op. 51 in D. Somewhat orchestral but enjoyable for all. Good themes and the work has freshness. 2nd mvmt has variations on French folk song. Finale is a double fugue. Moderate - Very Good.

BAX, Arnold (1883-1853) English.
G minor. Late rom. with early modern tendencies. Quite long & complex. Uses cyclic form in 1st & 3rd. Modal harmony in 1st. Lyric Celtic melody in slow mvmt. Need top-notch pianist for this one. Difficult - Excellent.

BERGER, Wilhelm (1861-1911) German.
Op. 95 in F minor. Inspired by Brahms but doesn't always follow classic line. Successful in Germany. Good melody, some special effects, and unusual rhythms. Has big passacaglia in last mvmt. Diff. - V.G.

BRIDGE, Frank (1879-1941) English.
Quintet in D minor. (1905 Rev. 1912) Considered a masterwork by this post-romantic eclectic. 1st - bold, melodious & dramatic. 2nd - Inspired adagio w/scherzo section. Finale recalls themes of 1st mvmt. Difficult - Excellent.

ELGAR, Edgar (1857-1934) English.
Op. 84 in A minor. Impressive work being played more frequently these days. 1st has mysterious expression & a section with Spanish flavor. Slow mvmt full of rich expression featuring viola. Well divided parts without piano domination. Difficult - Excellent

FRISKIN, James (1886-1967) Scottish-American. A remarkable work for an Op. 1 at age 21. Was so successful, Cobbett commissioned him to write a Phantasy Quintet. A 4 mvmt large scale work with a

motto theme used in various ways in all mvmts. Uses a Scottish folk song in scherzo. Moderate - Excellent.

HUMMEL, J. N. (1778-1837) German.
Op. 87 Eb for Pf, Vl, Va, cello, & CB. A mature work & one of his masterpieces. Has strong, emotional and passionate themes, interesting modulations of harmony and good development. Moderate - Excellent

d'INDY, Vincent (1851-1931) French.
Op. 81 in G minor. Known for his abstract pure music, strong rhythms & expressive slow mvmts. Developed his own style of French romantic with a classical base. Partly in cyclic form. Difficult - V. G.

MARTIN, Frank (1890-1974) Swiss.
D minor (1922). He achieved international status. This has classical form with conservative harmony & shifting dissonances that avoid harshness. Has expressive melodies and a fugal finale in a folk-like mood. Moderate- Excellent

PIERRE, Gabriel (1863-1937) French.
Op. 41 in E minor. Not a modernist, but his tonality has much color & variety. Many moods w/difficult rhythms to conquer. 1st - very polyphonic with big climax. 2nd - a Basque dance in 5/8 and last recaps all the themes. Difficult - Very Good

SCHMITT, Florent (1870-1958) French.
Op. 51 in B minor. Ded. to Faure (1908). Follows no set rules so is difficult to classify. His best chamber work. Late romantic & early modern style. Original work with much contrasting harmonic and rhythmic ideas. 3 mvmts in cyclic form. Very Difficult - Excellent

SINDING, Christian (1856-1941) Norwegian. Op. 5 in E min. Composed in the Liszt tradition. A fusion of national melody & Wagnerian technique. Innovative use of parallel 5ths & 7ths. Diff. - V.G.

SUK, Josef (1874-1935) Czech.
Op. 8 in G minor (1893) Composed at age 18, (Rev. 1915). Shows Dvorak influence with youthful expression and zest. Mod. - V.G.

TANSLER, Serge (1856-1915) Russian.
Op. 30 in G. His best chamber work with piano. Has a deeply felt largo, a highly animated & imaginative scherzo and the finale recaps with themes of 1st mvmt. Continues classical tradition with his eclectic romanticism. Difficult - Excellent