



The Cobbett Association's Chamber Music Journal

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Mendelssohn's String Symphonies

by Larius J. Ussi

Okay, maybe you've heard the 60 members of the Berlin Philharmonic string section banging out one of Mendelssohn's 13 string symphonies—but the evidence is that Felix never intended them for such a large group. Composed for and played by the Mendelssohn family as 'Hausmusik,' they typically were performed by 7 to 12 players.

The purpose of this short article is to make readers aware of these wonderful works rather than to present any kind of analysis of each string symphony. I would therefore emphasize, that these *are* chamber works.

Written between 1822-3 when Mendelssohn was but 13, these symphonies have long been regarded as exercises he wrote at the behest of his teacher. In these works, the composer sets out to emulate the music of Bach, Mozart and Haydn. The first six are each in three movements and relatively short. From Symphony VII on, they are in four movements.

The instrumentation, only for strings, (the exception to this is Symphony XI where he adds triangle, cimbals and kettle drum to give the work an 'alla Turca' atmosphere.) generally is for first and second violin, with parts sometimes requiring divisi, viola often with divisi writing, cello and bass. These pieces are full of marvelous fugues, ländler, minuets, scherzi and other effects such those which appear in Symphony IX, the so-called 'Swiss' Symphony so named because of the yodelling sounds in the third movement.

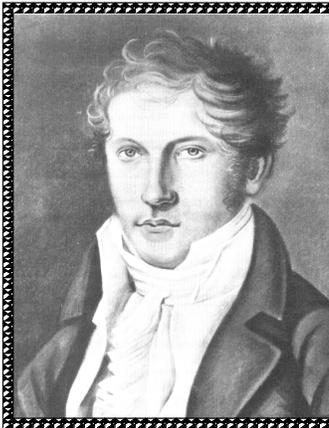
Happily the music to most of the string symphonies is in print from Kalmus or Luck's music. I strongly recommend that any string octet, nonet etc. explore this treasure trove of pleasing works.

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The Chamber Music of Ludwig Spohr Part I

By Dr. Bertrand Jacobs

No description of the chamber music of Ludwig Spohr (1784-1859) can be undertaken without recognizing his enormous important role in the evolution of violin playing and his fame as a composer of orchestral, choral and instrumental music. His career as performer, conductor and composer spanned from 1802 to 1858. Among some quartet groups, during this time, his



popularity rivaled, and even exceeded that of Beethoven. Many contemporary accounts describe his personal integrity and liberal political consciousness. At the same time his distinction as a violinist, starting at an early age, was such that his unique style of playing and noble, singing tone stirred audiences all over Europe. He left us a very informative and entertaining autobiography. In addition to his *Violin School* which was written for teachers, students and amateurs. he invented and made popular the chin rest, the baton and the use of rehearsal letters. We have a remarkable legacy with his chamber music because his own fingerings, bowings and dynamics appear in the early editions of his works and this helps us to interpret his style.

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The Philadelphia Trio—An Interview

Interviewed by R.H.R. Silvertrust

(The members of the Philadelphia Trio are Barbara Sonies, violin, Deborah Reeder, cello and Elizabeth Keller, piano. This interview took place in August of 1997 by telephone. Unfortunately, Ms. Keller could not be present. The Philadelphia Trio is a member of The Cobbett Association.)

RS: How did you initially meet?

DR: *Barbara and I were working in a group called the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia and formed the trio in 1971 with a very fine pianist Barbara knew from Juilliard, Joan Gilbert, to play a summer series of concerts in Europe. Because of the distance Joan lived from us, we knew we would have to find a different pianist after our European tour and I knew a fine pianist in the Philadelphia, Deidre Irons. Deidre was with us for about 18 months until she had a baby and moved to New Zealand. Through my work with the Amato String Quartet I knew of another excellent pianist, Elizabeth Keller and she's been with us since 1973.*

RS: I notice from your biographical sketch, Deborah, that you also play in a string

quartet, the Amato. Do you do as much quartet playing as trio playing and do Barbara and Elizabeth also play in other chamber groups.

DR: *Yes, I do a lot of string quartet work. Elizabeth sometimes performs sonatas with her husband John Zurfluh, a cellist.*

RS: Barbara, you're originally from Chicago, who did you begin studying violin with there?

BS: George Perlman.

RS (laughing): Everybody in Chicago studies with him sooner or later. He's been going on forever. He must be dead by now.

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R.H.R. Silvertrust, Editor

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The International Cobbett Association for chamber music research is dedicated to the preservation, dissemination, performance, publication and recording of non-standard, rare or unknown chamber music of merit. To this end, The Cobbett Association maintains a copying and lending library for its members. Contributions of rare or non-standard repertoire are warmly appreciated.

New Recordings Not Previously Noted

I write in response to your invitation to share my list of newly issued CDs of 'Cobbett' music that may be of interest to members:

Triebensee: Concertino for Piano, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Horns and 2 Bassoons coupled with his Quintet for Piano and winds on MGD 301 0626

Donizetti: String Quartet Nos.16-18 on a CPO 999 282 CD

Myslewicek: 6 Quintets and Sinfonia for 2 Violins, 2 Viola and Cello on Arta FL 0071

Pichl: Six Trios for Violin, Viola and Cello, Op.7 on Fermata 2Fer 20019

Kozeluch: 3 Partitas and Harmonie for Wind Octet coupled with **Myslewicek:** 3 Partitas for Wind Octet on Hungariton HCD 31676

Kozeluch: Trio Sonatas Op.12 Nos.1-3 for Piano, Violin & Cello on Hungariton HCD 31665

Mayr: Complerte Bagatelles for Flute Clarinet and Bassoon on Rainbow CD RW 9608

Beethoven & Triebensee: Trios for 2 Oboes and English Horn on ASV-QS 6192

Boccherini: 5 Quintets (G.437-9, 441-2) for Flute, Violin, Viola and 2 Cellos on Sony SK 62679

Quintets for Horn & Strings by **Reicha, Mozart, Kuffner, Hoffmeister, Hauff & K. Stamitz** on Pavane ADW 7363

d'Albert 2 String Quartets on Pan CD 510 097.

Field: Quintet for Piano and Strings on Chandos 9534

Paisiello: 3 Divertimenti for Strings on Opus 111 OPS 30-180

Salieri: Chamber music for Winds on Tactus TC 751 902

Berwald Septet, Serenade & Quartet

for Piano and Winds on Naxos 8.553714

Matiegka: Complete Trios for Guitar and Strings on Classico 154

Hoffmeister: Six Trios for 2 Flutes and Cello on Classico 119

Vanhal: Four String Quartets on Panton 811 431

Danzi: 2 Quintets for Flute and String Quartet, Quartet for Flute, Violin, Viola and Cello on Musicaphon M56825

Busoni: Clarinet Chamber Music on CPO 999-252

Quartets & Quintets for Oboe & Strings by **Garnier, Rava, Kretzer, Philidor & Toeschi** ib Koch-Schwann 3-64102

Gounod: String Quartet Nos.1-3 on Auvidis Valois V4798.

A quick comment on your fine piece on the Onslow quartets with regard to Anton Reicha and Beethoven. (See: the *Journal* Vol. VIII No.2 June/July 1997) You state, "During his considerable time spent in Vienna, Reicha became a close friend of both Haydn and Beethoven, the latter who on several occasions, highly praised Reicha's compositions." I would point out that Anton went to Bonn to live with his uncle, Josef, and played flute in the Elector's orchestra. Beethoven played viola in the same orchestra at the same time. They were friends from that time (Reicha was born in February, 1770 and Beethoven in December) and were almost exact contemporaries. I am looking forward to future installments of the Onslow series.

T. David Kuehn
Philadelphia, PA

Thanks for the listing of CDs we failed to note. Despite the fact that some might disagree, I did not include those which were duos or instrumental sonatas on our policy that chamber music begins with trios.

We welcome your letters and articles. Letters to the Editor and manuscripts should be addressed to us at 601 Timber Trail, Riverwoods, IL 60015, USA. Letters published may be edited for reasons of space, clarity and grammar.

At The Doublebar

The Board of Advisors of The Cobbett Association will be holding its first meeting on the weekend of November 7-9. Among the subjects to be discussed at the meeting are: The holding of a chamber music workshop, the publishing of out of print music, expansion of the copying and lending library, and the sponsoring of Cobbett Concerts and recordings. I expect to publish a report of the results of this meeting in the next issue of the *Journal*.

Those readers who impatiently await each new issue of their *Journal* are no doubt aware that this issue is also somewhat late. This delay, in part, was caused by your editor's recent travels abroad, including a very productive visit to **Broekmans en Van Poppel** in Amsterdam, quite possibly the music shop with the most complete stock of chamber music in the world. Broekmans not only sells chamber music, but under the enthusiastic hand of Mr. Jan Hollanders, they are begin to bring out new editions of long out of print works, a list of which will also appear in the next issue of the *Journal*. The owners of Broekmans have joined The Cobbett Association. But that's not all. Mr. Lee Newcomer, owner of the top-flight music shop, **Performers Music** in Chicago, has also joined. Performers Music always has a large stock of chamber music available and will order anything that is currently in print. I have spent many enjoyable hours there and have received prompt attention to my efforts to obtain music from Europe.

More exciting news, Herr Bernhard Päuler, editor and proprietor of the world-famous **Amadeus** editions, has written to me requesting information on how he can join The Cobbett Association. I am hopeful that he will soon be joining our ranks. Amadeus has access to some of the largest private collections of chamber music in the world and might be very interested to hear what members would like to see in print.

Over the past few years, several members have contributed superb articles to the *Journal*. Again I encourage all of you to put finger to keyboard and send us an article. We will publish it. Don't be shy, remember, no one knows more about this repertoire than the we do.

The Philadelphia Trio—An Interview—(con't.)

Is he still alive?

BS: *I think so, I'd have heard if he had died. I think he's 99. He was my teacher until I went to Eastman where I studied with Joe Knitzer and Millard Taylor. Afterwards, I studied with Ivan Galamian and Paul Mekanovitski (phonetic).*

RS: When you were in college, did you think of chamber music as a possible career?

BS: *I always wanted it to be a part of what I did, part of my activities, and enjoyed chamber music throughout school.*

DR: *It was something I always enjoyed very much.*

RS: You know that there are a lot less piano trios performing before the public than there are string quartets and certainly fewer are known and are recorded. Have you as the Philadelphia Trio found it easier, as a result, to get concert engagements and to make a reputation?

DR: *I would say it's much more difficult as a piano trio. I don't really understand it, but, of course, whatever series is having you has to have a good piano available. If they don't have one, they will have to rent one if they want a piano trio and that generally costs in the neighborhood of \$600 and, of course, that money is totally down the drain. I do most of the booking for us and I can tell you that say there is a concert series which has 12 concerts a year, for example, at the University of Michigan; out of those 12, probably one will be a piano trio and the odds are it will be the Beaux Arts or whoever has most recently won the Naumberg Prize. That leaves a group like us falling between the cracks. Ironically, there might be four quartets in that same series, and yet by the following year, maybe three of them have disbanded or have a different membership. By contrast, I think trios are more long-lived. Perhaps because in the piano trio, each instrumentalist still feels more like a soloist and more fulfilled. And while perhaps not as large as that for string quartet, the repertoire for piano trio is still pretty incredible.*

RS: Speaking of the repertoire, do you find those booking concert series reluctant to accept a new or little known piece, be it from the 19th or 20th Centuries?

BS: *I think it depends very much on the organization you are dealing with. More sophisticated groups are very aware of what's going on and supportive toward new music. But often when your dealing with a small town or small organization which has tradition bound audience, they want to hear something like Beethoven's Archduke trio, they don't want to hear something off the beaten track.*

RS: Let's say though that you wanted to perform something unusual—I notice you have one of Camille Chaminade's trio in your repertoire—would something like that or Scharwenka, from the 19th Century be an easier sell to a small town group or organization that say a 20th Century composer like Ellen Taaffe-Zwiliich? I mean, you could tell them, 'we've got this great French 19th Century composer...?'

BS: *Yes in many situations they might be responsive to that.*

RS: But do you find yourself having to do that in order to get a piece heard.

DR: *Actually, when we've performed Chaminade, its been as part of an all-women composer concert. Occasionally we are able to depart from that. We did the Amy Beach trio at the Philadelphia Free Library as part of a series about music in its Fleischer Collection.*

RS: Are you constantly looking for new pieces to bring into your repertoire?

DR: *Accessible pieces.*

BS: *One thing we are aware of in programing in our own series and elsewhere is that audiences who come to chamber music concerts are often turned off if they hear that something's going to be...even if they hear the name Schoenberg. Recently we programmed Verklarte Nacht (a tonal composition originally for string sextet—ed) for piano trio in an arrangement by Steuerman...it's a wonderful arrangement and the piece is just gorgeous. A lot of people were worried, but when they heard it, they just adored it. It did a lot for his reputation among those listeners, but, of course, its not a 12 tone piece. We are very conscious of what will appeal to an audience, what might draw them in.*

(Continued on page 4)

RS: Take someone like like Theodor Kirchner (1823-1903)—several of his works have recently been reprinted— or say Xaver or Phillip Scharwenka, I like their music very much and feel it deserves to be heard but like so many other late 19th Century composers, they were just totally over-shadowed by Brahms and brushed aside. Do you find that you get a pretty good audience turn out when program someone like that.

DR: *Well, actually, we only performed Scharwenka as part of a concert series sponsored by a Polish foundation on Polish composers.*

RS: How many concerts a year, roughly, do you do?

DR: *About a 120.*

RS: And how many are outside of Pennsylvania.

BS: *That varies from year to year. Most are in Pennsylvania, but we've done some touring. We've been to Europe 3 or 4 times and we've toured the East Coast. Mostly though we will just do a single concert at a time outside, for example, fly out to Ohio or Illinois or North Carolina.*

RS: I notice you have had some pieces commissioned for you. What do you look for in a composer when you ask for a piece to be commissioned? Do you consider the effect it might have on the audience?

DR & BS: *Absolutely! Sure. (Now BS) Without wanting to mention names, one piece we commissioned—you don't want to dictate, you don't want to tell a composer what to put in there—we said we'd like something that would be accessible to an unsophisticated audience but what we got was something that would only be accessible to a very sophisticated audience. But that was this particular composer's style and as far as he was concerned, it was an accessible work. But in other instances a composer's style was such that most anything he would have written would have been acceptable to the first type of audience.*

RS: I realize this whole question of what is acceptable is a little like treading on a mine field. On another subject, we often take my 15 year old daughter, who is a pretty advanced fiddle player, to chamber music concerts and she has looked around at the audience, shaking her head, and commented that, "in 5 years 40% of this audience is going to be dead—"

DR: *Well, we are aware of this, but you know, Ray, I've read a recent article in which the author has written that this phenomenon of older audiences has always been the case. It has to do with acquisition of leisure time by the audience and sufficient funds to attend concerts. And this isn't just true of*

chamber music but of orchestra concerts too.

RS What I was going to ask is, it seems like the jury's been out and now back for a long time, almost a century, with regard to those composers after Mahler who felt that everything that could be done melodically had been done and that path that had to be followed was 12 tone serialism or atonal music—I realize there were those who rebelled against this trend and who became so-called neo-classicist or neo-romantic composers—but in the main it has seemed that modern classical music had been severely wounded by all of these composers writing very academic type music for other academics, Do you feel this has been a problem?

DR: *I think there is a change now, there is a neo-romantic trend.*



The Philadelphia Trio
Deborah Reeder, Cello, Elizabeth Keller, Piano, Barbara Sonies, Violin

Lets take a composer like Ellen Taaffe Zwillich, she is writing in a very eclectic way which I think is the current trend. There might be a few measures which are 12 tone or totally atonal, there might be several which are minimalist, others which are totally tonal. We've done one of the Rochberg trios. It was very accessible and audiences liked it very much. It was tonal, but certainly not tonal in say Beethoven's or Strauss's language.

RS: What about the tendency after WWII of so many composers writing pieces that were no longer in standard notation and had copious instructions to the performers as well as demands which almost seemed to be against the nature of the instrument itself?

DR: *Well, they used to say that about Brahms, about Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. They said they had written pieces which couldn't be played.*

RS: That's true, but I don't think those composers were asking say, for example, string players to beat their instrument as if it were a percussion instrument.

DR: *This brings up the whole subject about why there are not more works for contemporary piano trio. And I've discussed this with many composers and they feel that one of the weaknesses of the piano trio, as opposed to the string quartet, is the problem of balance and blend and that the piano tends to dominate and can totally swamp the other two instruments—the modern piano can hold its own against a whole orchestra—but the very fact that the instruments don't blend should be more attractive to the modern composer especially when you think of the type of instrumentation that a lot of modern composers like to use. They'll blend percussion with strings which you don't normally think of as a*

traditional combination, and with a piano trio you have a built in percussion-type instrument. But I'm surprised that composers don't take advantage of the ability of the cellist to tap on the back of the instrument—you can get some great sounds. On the other hand, I think the kind of thing you were hearing 20 years ago—I was in the Philadelphia Orchestra in the early 70's and composers like Penderecki were asking string players to bow on the other side of the bridge and on their tail pieces and wind players to merely blow on their mouthpieces without the rest of their instrument, I think that's become rather passe. Now, however, I do not think you find many composers asking orchestra players to do things like that anymore.

BS: And you know the audience of the Philadelphia Orchestra still walks out when they hear something that doesn't sound like a recognizable melody.

DR: Yes but that's not just the Philadelphia Orchestra, audiences everywhere do that. Besides audiences did that to Beethoven. Nothing has changed.

RS: As a performing piano trio, do you look for ways to make a name for yourself though the repertoire?

BS: We try to mix and match. Rather than trying to make a name for ourselves through the repertoire, we try to let it evolve based on the quality of our performances.

RS: Is it easier to bring out a CD featuring a 19th or early 20th Century composers who have written some good music but who have become forgotten like Chaminade, Louise Farrenc or George Onslow or someone like that—

BS: Easier than a standard composer?

RS: Yes, would it be easier to get a recording company to let you record say the Mendelssohn trios than the Chaminade or Farrenc?

BS: It would be easier to get them to record the lesser known. You probably know, the Classical Recording Industry is glutted with too many CDs and no sales. Smaller labels which will tend to record other than big name groups, in order to find a niche for themselves, they have to go with something which has not been recorded. They know there's already plenty of recordings of Beethoven's trios out there. The company we have recorded with, Centaur for example, they're interested in a program featuring complete composers whose works have not been recorded or at least not recorded much.

RS: So this might present an opportunity for The Cobbett Association to work with companies like that to bring out recordings of music we felt was deserving.

BS & DR: Yes it might be.

RS: Tell me with regard to the question of balance, while obviously the modern piano forte is more than a match for a violin and a cello, most players I know feel it is the composer's obligation to make sure that the writing is such that the piano part doesn't overwhelm the strings. Do you feel that some composers, such as say Schubert, make the balancing easier than others like Brahms?

BS: Keep in mind that Schubert had a very different piano to write for than did Brahms. Even the violin and cello were different. I don't think it's really fair to say that one has a lesser concept of balance than the other. And even Brahms did not have

as powerful an instrument to work with as today's modern concert piano.

DR: I think the tendency of modern writers is to group the instruments, that is, to give the violin and cello a duet by themselves and then the piano by itself and this avoids the problem, but it is being done so much that it becomes predictable, almost a cliché and in a way, even, boring. It's not really the answer because you're not really hearing three instruments.

RS: That's somewhat how Schumann handled the strings and piano his in quintet, grouping the strings together against the piano.

DR: Talk about balance problems, the Schumann trios are full of difficulties—we love his trios—but it's very hard for the strings to cut through the piano—

BS: Especially for the violin because of the register he is writing in, the dark middle register. It's beautiful stuff, but problematic.

DR: Despite this, we are very partial to the Schumann trios. If there is one thing we'd like to record it's them, but I don't think there's that much call for them. It doesn't help the size of our audience. If we program Beethoven's Archduke trio or Ghost trio or we have someone join us for Schubert's Trout Quintet, we find it always increases the turnout. It's a sort of a moniker.

RS: Do you team up more as a piano quartet or a piano quintet?

BS: Piano quartet. For piano quintets, ideally you really should have a set string quartet you are used to working with.

RS: Do you notice the additional string voice, the viola, helps with the balance problem, or as it sometimes seems to me, makes no difference at all?

BS: Maybe it helps to some extent, but again, it depends on the piece. The Schumann piano quartet is a gorgeous thing, but its got that same type of violin writing which makes it very difficult to balance it out. And sometimes when I listen to a recording of a quartet I am unfamiliar with, I don't really hear any difference from a trio. It's the nature of the viola sound, it sort of gets lost.

RS: Do you have any recommendations for Cobbett Association members who might like to wade into modern music or 20th Century music that would be accessible to good amateur players.

BS: Shostakovich, of course, is wonderful. There are two Piston Trios, the First is very good, we played it. There's a piece by Ross Lee Finney. There's music by Persichetti, a very short Serenade. There's also three nocturnes by Bloch.

DR: There's Frank Bridge's miniatures and a work by Bernhard Heiden and also the Zwillich piece is excellent and could be played by very good amateurs. It is demanding, but then this is something which is true of a lot of 20th Century music.

RS: Finally in closing, do you feel by being members of The Cobbett Association you've benefited at all?

DR: Sure. It's very interesting to see the literature that's available. Recently, for example, you talked about some Saint Säuens piano quartets. We really appreciate learning about that.

RS: Well, thank you very much for taking the time out to talk.

The Chamber Music of Ludwig Spohr

(Continued from page 1)

Unfortunately, much of his music has fallen into obscurity and as a result of this decline, relatively few of his string quartets, quintets, piano trios etc. are in print or available. Concert performances, except for wind chamber music, are unusual. I have never heard a public performance of any string quartet or quintet by Spohr. In order to help us to understand why so little of his chamber music appears in concert programs today we can start by examining the account of Spohr's chamber music in *Cobbett's Cyclopaedia*. Harvey Grace writes: "*The standard of writing string quartets, set once and for all by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, remains the most exacting in music. It is commonly said that Spohr's failure to hold his ground in this test is due to his tendency to look back to the earlier days of the form when a string quartet was little more than a violin solo with a slight string accompaniment.*"

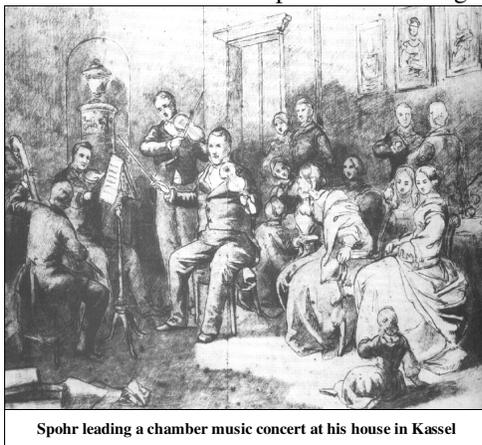
Having played all 36 string quartets, 7 string quintets (with 2 violas), 4 double quartets, string sextet and 14 duos for 2 violins, I find that this criticism is unduly harsh and, for the most part, totally inaccurate. Perhaps Mr. Grace, an editor of organ works and author of books about the organ and church music, was not the best choice for the entry on Spohr's chamber music. He was probably more familiar with Spohr's considerable output of church music. But Cobbett, in a footnote to Grace's entry, recommends the two early quartets of Op.4 as well as Op. 45 No. 2 and Op.74 Nos. 1-3 and describes the immense popularity of Lady Halle's performances of the Quatuor Brillant Op.93.

The view that Spohr's virtuosity as a violinist influenced his quartet writing is perpetuated, of course, by the format of the Quatuor Brillant. There are six of these and the first violin does predominate in some of the other quartets. There is a history to the Quatuor Brillant that goes back to violinist-composers before Spohr, e.g. Rode. Spohr's use for this format is described by Clive Brown who has written a very sensitive and historically well-grounded biography of Spohr (see bibliography at the end of part two of this article). Spohr played the quartets of his contemporaries at private parties and in public. He is known to have championed Beethoven's Op. 18 (as well as the Ninth Symphony) although he had reservations about the late quartets. J.F. Rochlitz (1769-1842), one of the foremost music critics and editors at that time, wrote "*He is altogether a different person when he is playing for example Beethoven, (his darling whom he handles exquisitely) or Mozart, (his ideal) or Rode, whose grandiosity he knows so well how to assume...or when he plays Viotti and galant composers. He is a different person because they are different persons.*" This characteristic is, arguably, rare in today's world of violin playing. Since Spohr was thoroughly familiar with the music of his contemporaries and their quartets, we should pay closer attention to his own chamber music. His astonishingly versatile creative output shows that he was hardly a prisoner of his violin virtuosity, unlike many other virtuosi composers of the 19th century. I would like to make several other comments from my personal experience playing the

chamber music of this imposing figure, who by the way, was well over six feet tall! Harvey Grace writes "*there are many beautiful movements scattered about among his numerous compositions*" but there are at least ten quartets, four quintets, the sextet and the four double quartets which are inspired from beginning to end.

I had never heard these works and first came to know them by playing them. This experience reminded me of the days when some quartets of Haydn were rarely played in homes and never heard in performances or recordings. At that time I systematically went through them all in a chronologically ordered edition, which was an amazing year of discovery. Spohr on the other hand had various publishers for his quartets and unlike the case of Haydn there is no complete edition by one publisher. In Part I of this article, I shall confine myself to a discussion of Spohr's String Quartets.

Op.4 Nos.1&2 These quartets, his first, written in 1807 at age 23, were published by Kuhnle, himself a quartet player, who kept them although Spohr was dissatisfied soon after he completed them. In spite of that they were published by various other publishers and underwent many transcriptions as was so common with all of his chamber music as his fame spread. One can detect the influence of Beethoven Op. 18 (published 1801) e.g. in the Adagio of No. 1 (sopra una corda) or the Rondo vivace of No. 2. It is hard to see evidence of his individuality in these works.



Spohr leading a chamber music concert at his house in Kassel

Op. 11 the, first Quatuor Brillant, appeared not too long after, '*in the style of Rode*', and immediately showed (at least to amateurs) the faults of this

format. The 1st violin part compares in virtuosity to the Concerto No.4 (Op. 10). Even the Adagio would be too formidable for house playing by amateurs and the other parts are uninteresting.

Op 15 Nos.1&2. We come here to the first set to appear in modern edition (Barenreiter). The style is still not fully developed but all parts are eminently readable. The final movement of Op.15 No. 2 presents an exciting fugue. Very well balanced as quartets.

Op. 27 was composed some 4 years later and very characteristic Spohr. Dedicated to the famous Count Rasoumoffsky whom Spohr had met in Vienna through his friendship with Beethoven's violinist Schuppanzigh. A type of 'Solo Quartet' with less participation by the other three instruments. Most memorable is the minuet movement with its gracious trio, harmonics, leisurely pace and wide range of dynamics. Spohr's "Rasoumoffsky Quartet" is very melodic but with a difficult first violin part in the first movement but very rewarding to play.

Op. 29 Nos. 1-3. In this set, dedicated to his friend the famous cellist Bernhard Romberg, the classical quartet form is finally fully developed. The cello parts tend to be more prominent than

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previously. The first quartet appears in a modern edition (Barenreiter). These works and others commissioned by Johann Tost (cf. Haydn's "Tost Quartets") were lauded by contemporary critics. One of them, Frohlich, felt that Spohr had "rediscovered the trail of Mozart's genius" and that the second quartet was "one of the most significant works that music has in this format." The first quartet shows harmonic advances (e.g., 1st movement, bars 92-120) ahead of their time and there is a charming theme and variations for the Andante. The scherzo has a trio which is replete with Spohr's now famous upbow staccato. The second quartet shows the first appearance of a very moving and typical "Spohr Adagio" and the third has an even more florid Adagio with a very colorful scherzo reminiscent of a peasant dance.

We now come to **Op. 30** where one senses an entrance into a different world, more programmatic and romantic. A strongly optimistic tone comes to the fore immediately in the first movement. Although the first violin has a facile display the others players are integrated into the narrative flow. The effect, when all the players follow the designated dynamics scrupulously, is superb. The Adagio is truly sublime, with ornate embellishments from the first violin, finally ending in an elegiac and resigned mood. The dramatic minuet contains a trio which evokes the sounds of a duo of hunting horns and in fact this leads into a truly remarkable last movement Vivace. The preamble of the "horns" assembling the riders in the distance is followed by what sounds for all the world like galloping horses. I have taken to calling this piece Spohr's "Hunt" quartet. The imagery is further enhanced by Spohr himself calling it his "*Paradepferd*" (parade horse) because he was asked to play this quartet so often at private parties.

Next follows **Op. 43**, a quatuor brilliant, perhaps not so difficult to read as some of the other 'brillants'. The cheerful mood may reflect his trip to Rome where it was written. The quartet for the first time uses metronome markings with a method which is no longer in use. This work might be one recommended for reading with the usual provisos of the 'brillant' genre because of its melodic content, particularly in the last movement.

Opus 45 Nos.1-3 were actually conceived with amateurs in mind Spohr wrote this to a publisher, and in fact they achieved wide popularity, especially the second. In the Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung of January 1819, (as extracted by Clive Brown) was a report that should catch the attention of readers. "*Spohr played quartets by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Spohr, Fesca and Onslow in the weekly quartet meetings. Three new magnificent quartets by Spohr received great applause. They shall soon be published by Peters of Leipzig.*" The first has an Andante reminiscent of Schubert and a last movement of 'alpine' nature, a characteristic that appears occasionally in some later chamber works. Op.45 No.2 is a more typical Spohr quartet, interesting and inspired throughout. The first movement immediately launches into an assertive and engaging melody and the second subject is even more endearing. The Larghetto that follows, somber as it is, reminds one of a plaintive dirge in stately 2/4 time, soon joined with an interesting accompanying theme in 12/16. The interplay between the voices is fascinating and has an unforgettable effect, particularly if dynamics are followed carefully. A courtly minuet with complementary trio follows. Then a sudden forte chord introduces a dance-like Finale with exciting forward movement and development, the different

instruments answering each other and again employing the celebrated Spohr staccato. Op.45 No.3 is not so successful and suffers in comparison to the first two. An interesting piece of history as described in Spohr's autobiography is his story of Cherubini asking to hear the first two quartets three times over and declaring the first movement of Op.45 No.2 "the most beautiful of all that he had heard." He was also taken with the fugal last movement of Op.45 No.1.

Op 58 Nos.1-3 appeared several years later when Spohr, now in Dresden, was in closer association with Weber where he had very successful chamber music parties regularly at his home. Op.58 No.1 appears in modern edition (Hans Schneider). Spohr's original indications have not always been followed exactly. The gracious first movement is followed by an Adagio which has a religious aura somewhat reminiscent of Handel. The scherzo is intriguing in its architecture with a lovely slower trio, and the final Rondo has a bracing interplay between all four instruments. Op.58 No.2 is perhaps the most consistently successful of the three. The opening theme of the Moderato first movement, of typical Spohr elegance, is taken over by the cello, leading to the second theme, one of surpassing beauty. The Andante con Variasionen presents a theme in 4/4 which is reworked in a very clever way in the next movement, a Scherzo Vivace in 3/4 time. The last movement, Rondo All'Espagnol never fails to excite both players and listeners because of its exotic rhythms (think of a bolero with castanets!). A Gypsy-style phrase high up on the G string punctuates the sections. This marvelous quartet has high interest for all players. Op. 58 No.3 is not as spectacular. It is interesting how once more it is the second theme of the first movement that is hauntingly beautiful, anticipating the 'nightingale' theme of the first movement of Op.93. The minuet in 3/4 time has occasional 2/4 bars interwoven, a device increasingly used by Spohr alone during this period.

A Solo Quartet **Op. 61** and a Brilliant Quartet **Op.68** give occasion to compare the two formats and leave one preferring the latter because of somewhat greater prominence of the other 3 parts. Another advantage of Op. 68 is its Larghetto with "Sopra una Corda" which reminds one of a Scottish Ballad. The Rondo is spectacular, if the 1st fiddle part can be mastered! It is like a panorama of ongoing scenes described by a country fiddler. Among the Brilliant quartets this one is highly recommended.

Op. 74 Nos.1-3, each in its entirety, is Spohr at his best. Both Altmann and W.W. Cobbett agree. Nos. 2 & 3 appear in modern edition (Hans Schneider). Spohr was finally established in Kassel, the city which now houses his archives. Already in the dramatic opening chords of Op. 74 No.1, the cello and viola announce new prominence. The drama and architecture of this movement has orchestral proportions. After the Larghetto, a Scherzo of exceptional dramatic quality, ranges in a propulsive way between *pp* and *ff*. The trio flows along in pianissimo punctuated by cello pizzicato. The final Rondo is less inspired and overdeveloped but again comes to life if Spohr's dynamics are followed. Op.74 No.2 is from beginning to end a masterpiece. The first movement is charming. The famous Larghetto is pensive and resigned and leading into a more affirmative middle section and then a return to resignation. An Allegretto con Variazioni is put together in a strikingly clever way and the Finale races along with the various voices playing tag with each other.

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With Op.74 No.3, we have an equally great masterpiece, The Allegro, all in 3/2 time, consists of sweeping themes. The Adagio is very dramatic. The Scherzo, in 3/4 time races along also in high drama but in a relaxed Trio the beat is extended to 6/4. The Finale, Presto, is of exceptional interest. It reaches a level of contrapuntal complexity, rare in the classical quartet This never fails to thrill the players and listeners. One wonders if Spohr was inspired by the unusual 2nd movement allegro of Haydn's Op.55 No.2. If so he extended the drama even further, using a theme like a Rossini aria with operatic touches. The movement ends in quiet murmurs. Once played, you will never forget it.

Ten years later the three quartets of **Op. 82** appeared, the best of these being Op.82 No.3. The first quartet, Op.82 No.1, seems to lack inspiration in the outer movements. However the Andantino is quite touching with its very effective pastorale quality. Again, strict attention to Spohr's designated dynamics is essential to create the proper effect. The reply to the theme is played higher on the string with interesting parts for the other strings. The scherzo and its trio have the familiar Spohr elan. Op.82 No.2 boasts a beautiful adagio and a third movement, Alla Polacca, a form that Spohr was favoring. The cello part in these is prominent. Op. 82 No.3 has a stately first movement which is followed by a really unusual Andante. In this there are 3/8 and 4/8 bars which alternate in somewhat unpredictable ways and not necessarily simultaneously with all four instruments. This seems an unprecedented invention of varied rhythm and meter which is otherwise in a totally classical form. The players usually find this a delight, but it is rare that all four play it through without some confusion! The scherzo that follows moves lightly and gracefully, the cello supplying impressive support. The last movement is perhaps less striking but the work remains in one's memory because of the unique and intriguing rhythms of the Andante and an impressive Scherzo, particularly if one observes pp's and fp's designated by Spohr in the Scherzo.

The Quatuor Brillant **Op. 83** (1830) requires much facility for the solo violin, (many passages in thirds and tenths) and the other parts simply accompany, totally unlike the traditional quartet. However if all can get past the first movement, a highly embellished Adagio and Alla Polacca await. It was around this time that Spohr wrote one of his successful operas, *The Alchemist* (1830) which featured exotic passages scored with castanets and tambourines, lending Spanish and even Gypsy coloring. Also at this time his widely utilized and famous *Violin Schule* appeared in print. In it, he makes recommendations on the execution of a 'regular' quartet; that it should display the ideas of the composer rather than the talent of the violinist.

About this time **Op. 84 Nos.1-3** were written and again with No.3 we come to a work that attains a new level of success. Op.84 No.1 contains a contemplative Larghetto with a superb cello part. OP.84 No.2 does not have a highly inspired first movement but the Adagio and Scherzo are successful and the Rondo shows an engaging and extended complexity requiring a skillful first violin and contributions from the other instruments as an integral part of the composition. I personally found Op.84 No.3 a very distinguished quartet. It starts with considerable drama and a beautifully constructed first movement. The Minuet is a unique production which uses natural harmonics in a lilting way. The trio provides brilliant runs and extensive stretches of Spohr's up bow staccato. The Adagio, the crowning glory of the

quartet, declaims a somber theme in ensemble with the others. This then develops into a very expressive 2nd theme with chromatic runs and double stops, resulting in a slow movement of unforgettable beauty. The Finale is a rollicking and elegant Allegretto, to be played not too fast and again employing natural harmonics.

At this point we come to **Op. 93** Quatuor Brillant and are reminded of Cobbett's anecdotal comments appended to Harvey Grace's entry on Spohr in *Cobbett's Cyclopaedia*. Cobbett describes Lady Halle leading this solo quartet a dozen times at the Popular Concerts in London, obviously a very successful work and prompts one to try this Quatuor Brillant before doing the others. The other parts are not entirely without interest and also use Spohr staccato. An Andante introduction leads into a highly lyrical and cheerful theme with first violin passages that are of relatively moderate difficulty. The 2nd theme is an interesting comparison to the first, more intense and earnest and yet still as lyrical as a nightingale's song. The Larghetto and Rondo can be read without much difficulty.

The next quartet **Op.132** had the honor of being played in Mendelssohn's house (1846) with Wagner present. It was Spohr's only meeting with Wagner. The Adagio and Scherzo are notable; the Trio of the Scherzo being especially charming.

Op. 141 is superior to Opus 132. A very well-written first movement goes to an inspired Larghetto. The scherzo shows the Spanish bolero type rhythm with great success and the Presto finale moves along with all parts well developed. This quartet, as successful as it is, is surpassed by the next Op. 146.

I consider **Op.146** the best of the 'late' quartets, a category which of course is not to be compared to the Beethoven classification. The most impressive of the movements here is the Adagio molto. The theme is written for the violin G string and it is a most notable Spohr adagio. There is sudden dramatic punctuation with double stops in tenths. The very light scherzo in presto is a welcome foil. The last movement also shows no weakness.

Op. 152 is entertaining throughout. Interesting parts for all instruments including 2nd violin and viola but in general not as successful as Opus 146.

The last two quartets **Op.155 and 157** remain in manuscript, which has been microfilmed and photocopied. The former is certainly worthy of playing. It has a Romanza Andantino and the Minuetto and last movement are clearly better than Opus 157. The last quartet, Opus 157 seems to lack inspiration, although the Larghetto is very nice.

In the next installment I will describe the string quintets, sextet, double quartets, piano trios and piano quintets. I will also specify a detailed Spohr bibliography. There will be information about the Spohr Society of Great Britain and the recordings of Spohr's music. Last but not least I hope to give the schedule of the new Spohr's express train planned by German Railways!

The String Quartets of George Onslow-Part III

by R.H.R. Silvertrust

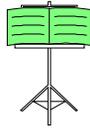
(The first two parts of this article covered the composer's life from his birth in 1784 through 1814. The first six quartets, Op.4 Nos.1-3 and Op.8 Nos.1-3 were presented and analyzed)

Readers will recall that Onslow's first three quartets were composed in 1806-7 before he had the benefit of any formal composition lessons. After studying with Antonin Reicha, he did not, with the exception of a few slight piano works, begin to compose again for nearly five years. Finally in 1813, he once more set about writing string quartets. Whether he wrote Op.10 Nos.1-3 (generally referred to as Qt. Nos.10-12) before Op.8 Nos.1-3 (i.e. Qt. Nos. 4-6) is the subject of some debate, but for all practical purposes, it is probably not of great significance considering the fact that the Op.10 and Op.8 quartets were separated by less than two years. Additionally, one cannot, from the writing itself, glean any great advance in one set over the other. Further, Onslow himself made sure that these quartets were published almost immediately after completion and had nearly 40 years to correct any mistake had he chosen to do so. In any event, there is no debate that the second set of quartets Onslow wrote after his lessons with Reicha was the Op.9 Nos.1-3 (i.e. Qt. Nos.7-9). These are sometimes referred to as the 'Lord Onslow Quartets' in recognition of the fact that the dedicatee was the composer's recently deceased grandfather, after whom he was named. As noted in the first part of this article, Lord George had stood by his son Edward (the composer's father) after his flight from England and had continued to support him financially throughout the difficult period of the French Revolution finally settling a large sum of money on Edward so that he could marry and raise a family. There is considerable evidence that the composer was quite fond of his grandfather and that this affection was reciprocated. There had been several extended visits by George to England and by Lord George to France, despite the fact that the two countries had been at war off and on since 1789 when George was barely five right up until his grandfather's death in 1814.

The Op.9 quartets were begun immediately after Onslow had received the news of his grandfather's death. **Op.9 No.1 in g minor, Quartet No.7**, subtitled *God Save the King*, opens with an explosive *Allegro*, the first theme of which begins with rising eights in the cello followed by falling eights in the first violin. The second theme is based upon an ever ascending triplet rhythm. Though explosive, it is not particularly stormy or minor-sounding music. It is the second movement, *Andante*, a theme and set of four variations on the national anthem of his grandfather from which the Quartet takes its name. Onslow could quote the English national anthem without fear of censorship given the fact that in 1814, Napoleon had just been defeated by the Allies, most prominent of whom were the English and through whose efforts the Bourbons were returning to France from England. There can be little question that Onslow took the second movement of Haydn's *Kaiserquartett*, Op.76 No.3, a similar set of variations on the then Austrian national anthem (*Gott erhalte den Kaiser*) as his model. This movement is astounding, in everyway the equal, if not actually superior, to Haydn's right down to the emotionally somber and organ-like setting of the theme: (see above)

In the first variation the theme is given to the lower three voices while the first violin delicately weaves a silken web high above. In the second variation, the viola and cello belt out the theme against the showily virtuosic rapid-fire 64ths in the first violin. The next variation slices the theme into sets of four slurred eights. Each voice is given a section of the theme to complete. The last and most masterful variation begins with a fugue that has some very advanced tonalities for the year 1814. This fugue begins *pp* but gradually rises to a crescendo of emotion before quietly breaking apart into a bridge section which returns to a powerful restatement of the theme. The third movement is a brilliantly haunting syncopated *Menuetto* in g minor, played in one. The contrasting trio, in major, is played at least as fast as the menuetto, if not faster. The finale, *Agitato*, begins with an off-beat drum-like snarl, complete with slinkily downward plunging chromatic passages and sudden and unanticipated accents. The part writing is superb throughout. This quartet should not be missed by either amateur or professional; it certainly belongs in the repertoire and in the concert hall, and stands in stark contrast to anything being composed at this time. Without doubt, a masterpiece of its kind.

The *Allegro vivace assai* to **Op. 9 No.2 in a minor, Quartet No.8** begins with a syncopated solo in the second violin. After two measures, the cello enters with a slowly rising, then falling chromatic theme in its lowest register. The music then takes off in a great rush, virtually tripping over itself with off-beat accents. This is vintage Onslow from his early period. It leaves nothing to be desired! A *Minuetto presto* is placed second. Though in 3/4, it features a canonic theme beginning on beat 2 but giving the feeling that it is beat one. The music which moves along at quite a clip (its marked 108 to the dotted half note) does not really have a contrasting trio but the listener is hardly aware of this. An *Andante non troppo lento* comes next. In 6/8 and c minor, a doleful French folksong breaks forth. Several powerfully poignant duets between the first violin and cello follow before the fetchingly chromatic denouement. The finale, *Scherzo, Allegro*, though certainly effective, strangely enough might have made a better first movement and the first movement a better finale. The first violin part is pretty demanding and has too much of the thematic material for my taste. Though not as strong as Op.9 No.1, this quartet should be of interest to both amateur and professional alike.



New Recordings



A listing of recently recorded non standard chamber music on CD by category.

String Quartets

Samuel ADLER (1928-) Nos.4,5 & 8, Gasparo GSCD-307 / Manuel BLANCAFORT (1897-1987) Quartet de Pedralbes, Qt. in C, Moraleda 6461 / Peter Maxwell DAVIES (1934-) Qt, Mode 59 / Wen DEQUING (1958-) Qt. No.1, Stradivarius STR 33471 / Guido FANO (1875-1961) Qt. in A, Phoenix 96202 / Charles GOUNOD (1818-93) Nos.1-3, Auvidis Valois V4798 Karl Amadeus HARTMANN (1905-63) Qt. No.2, Fonit Cetra 2033 / Vagn HOLMBOE (1909-1996) Nos.7-9, Marco Polo 8.224073 / Darius MIHAUD (1892-1974) Qt. Nos.3-4, 9 & 12, Auvidis Valois V4781 / E.J. MOERAN (1894-1950) Nos.1-2, Naxos 8.554079 / Dexter MORRILL (1938-) No.2, Capstone, CPS 8642 / Malcolm PEYTON Str. Qt. (1993), Centaur CRC 2327 / Hans-Henrik NORDSTRØM (1947-) Nos.1-2, Classico 166 / Hans PFITZNER (1869-1949) Qt in d & Op.36 in c#, CPO 999 536 / George ROCHBERG (1918-) No.1, CRI 768 / Franz SCHMIDT (1874-1939) Nos.1-2, Opus 91 2601-2 131 / Joseph SERVAIS (1850-85) Str. Qt., Rene Gailly 99003 / Johann SVENDSEN (1840-1911) Qt. in A, BIS 753 / Antonin VRANICKY (WRANITZKY) (1761-

1820) Six Qts Concertante, Matous, MK 38 & 39 / Jacob ter VELDHUIS (1951-) No.3, Emergo 3937

Strings Only-Not Quartets

Joseph-Ermend BONNAL (1880-1944) String Trio, Pavane 7389 / Hans KRASA (1899-1944) Passacaglia and Fugue for String Trio, Fonit Cenra 2033 / Ernest MOERAN (1894-1950) String Trio, Naxos 8.554079 / Adrien SERVAIS (1807-66) *Souvenir d' Spa*, Quintet for Cello & String Qt. Johann SVENDSEN (1840-1911) String Quintet & Octet, BIS 753

Piano Trios

William Sterndale BENNETT (1816-1875) Op.26 in A, LJD 002 / Giorgia GHEDINI (1892-1965) Setti Ricerari, Stradivarius STR 33395 Alexander GRETCHANINOV (1864-1956) Piano Trio Nos.1-2, Chandos Chan 9461 / Karl GOLDMARK (1830-1915) Op.4 in Bb & Op.33 in e, Hungaroton HCD 31709 / Ferdinand PÄER (1771-1839) 3 Grandi Sonate, Bongiovanni GB 5538

Piano Quartets & Quintets

Guido Alberto FANO (1875-1961) Piano Quintet in C, Phoenix 96202 / Gian Francesco MALIPIERO (1882-1973) Prelude, Aria & Danza Funebre for Piano & String Qt., Fonit Cetra 2033

Winds & Strings

Paul BEN-HAIM (1897-1984) Serenade for Flute & String Trio, MII CD 20 / John BAVICCHI (1922-) Clarinet Quintet, SNE 614 / Arthur BLISS (1891-1975) Clarinet Quintet, Redcliffe RR 010 / Ami MAAYANI (1936-) Poem for Flute Quartet, MII CD 20 / Oedoen PARTOS (1907-77) Maqamat for Flute and String Quartet, MII CD 20 / Alan RAWSTHORNE (1905-1971) Clarinet Quintet, Redcliff 010 / Francis ROUTH (1927-) Clarinet Quintet, Redcliff 010 / Menachem ZUR (1942-) Quartet for Flute & Strings, MII CD 20

Winds, Strings & Piano

Nino ROTA (1911-79) Trio for Flute, Violin & Piano, BIS CD 870

Piano & Winds-none

Winds Only

Nevett BARTOW (1939-73) Divertimento for Wind Quintet / Ingolf DAHL (1912-70) Allegro & Arioso for Wind Quintet / Irving FINE (1914-62) Partita for Wind Quintet / Bernhard HEIDEN (1910-) Sinfonia for Wind Quintet / Robert MUCZYNSKI (1929-) Wind Quintet, Op.45, all of above on Centaur CRC 2337

(Continued from page 9)

The third quartet of this set, **Op.9 No.3 in f minor, Quartet No.9**, begins with a melodramatic *Moderato* which immediately reminds one of Mendelssohn (who was five at the time this music was composed). The second theme, however, is pure Onslow. While the first violin is often more than *primus inter pares*, it is not solo and one is, in any event, unaware of it. The second movement is a haunting *Menuetto*. The opening theme introduced by the solo viola and quickly taken up by the others (see example to right) is clearly a hunt motif. It is the sound of horns in the distance. Dr. Franks believed that it was meant to recall the many fox hunts Onslow had

enjoyed on his grandfather's estates in England during his youth.

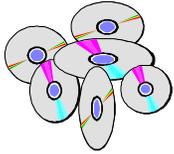
The charming elf-like and very effective trio section is again played quicker than minuet itself. For its sort, you simply will not find anything better. This is followed by an *Andante*, a theme introduced by the cello and set of lovely variations. The finale is a

veritable powerhouse, taking the listener's breath away from the very first measure and never letting go! Again, another masterpiece. Originally published by Pleyel, the Lord Onslow Quartets remained popular throughout the 19th Century being republished by Kistner (& edited by Jockisch) as late as 1904. Op.9 Nos. 1 & 3 are available on a CPO CD 999 060.

This series will continue in the next issue with a discussion of String Quartet Nos. 10-12

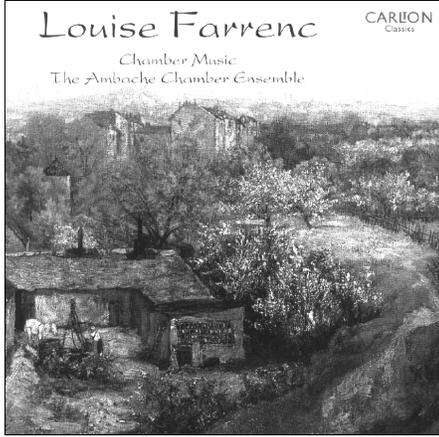
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Diskology: Louise Farrenc: Sextour for Winds & Piano, Nonet & Trio Also Music by Tomás Bretón, Wenzel Pichl & Xaver Schwarzenka

The music of **Louise Farrenc** (néé Dumont, 1804-75) is little known outside her native France, where it must be confessed, she is hardly a “household word” even among classical music lovers.



This is too bad, because she is an absolutely first rate composer whose music can stand comparison to that of any of her contemporaries. This Carlton Classics CD 30366 00302, which presents three of her chamber works (admirably performed by the Ambache Chamber Ensemble), clearly demonstrates why.

Farrenc’s musical talent was recognized early on by her family and she studied piano with a famous Clementi student before attending the Paris Conservatory in 1819 where she studied composition with Antonin Reicha, the foremost teacher of composition in France during the first quarter of the 19th Century, and the teacher of both Berlioz and Onslow. A concert pianist of the first rank, the merits of both her performance and compositional talents were acknowledged by her peers. Abroad in Germany and Austria, Schumann and Hummel held her music in high regard. In France she was made professor of piano at the Paris Conservatory in 1842, the only woman to hold such a high position at that august institution throughout the entire 19th Century.

Farrenc’s music shows the influence of Hummel, whom she knew personally, as well as that of both Weber and Schumann, without in anyway sounding imitative. At a time when France and Paris were totally enamored of the opera and with little patience for instrumental music, she and Onslow were virtually the only French composers writing chamber music. This predilection attuned her, as it did Onslow, more to the music of the Viennese Classics and to her contemporaries in Germany rather than to those in France.

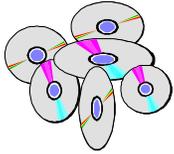
The first piece on this disk is a **Sextour, Op. 40 in c minor**. It is for piano and wind quintet. (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon & Horn). Farrenc’s Sextour, dating from 1851, is the first known work for this combination. From the opening measures of the *Allegro* one is immediately taken with how good the writing for winds is, something which must be said in each of these pieces. The excellence of the her writing for winds surely must in part be due to her study with Reicha, the man, who almost single-handedly, made the wind quintet the art form it became. The blend here is extraordinarily good, with the piano writing seamlessly woven into the musical fabric to make an integral whole. A beautiful and dream-like *Andante sostenuto* comes next and leads to a rousing *Allegro vivace* which concludes this fine

work. In this finale, the composer takes up the mantle of Hummel as she demonstrates her facility for thematic development interspersed with pianistic brilliance while at the same time showing a fondness for the horn whom she favors with a magical episode moments before the work’s end. What a marvelous evening a wind quintet and pianist would have with this piece along with that of Poulenc!

Farrenc’s **Nonet for Strings & Winds, Op.38 in E flat** is only one of a handful of such works for this grouping. (Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn). Joseph Joachim, the famous violinist, took part in the Nonet’s 1850 premiere. From the start it was a success and in time became her most often performed work. The Spohr Nonet, Op.31, the most popular work ever penned for nonet, almost certainly served as her model and there are several long passages, particularly in the last movement, which attest to this. (See Vol. VI, No.3, of the *Journal*, Sept. 1995 for John Wilcox’s excellent and more detailed discussion of this fine piece)

The last work, dating from 1862, is a **Trio for Piano, Flute & Cello, Op.45 in e minor**. Not wishing to limit the dissemination of this piece because of its fairly unusual combination, Farrenc also wrote an alternative violin part as replacement for the flute. Here, the composer is at her most original and perhaps most lyrical. In the opening *Allegro deciso*, a powerful affair which is at once energetic and flowing, the music is no longer tinged with the influence of her mentors and idols. A lovely pastoral *Andante* leads to a superb, racing *Scherzo* filled with pyrotechnics. The finale, a *Presto*, while perhaps not quite as inspired as the magical *Scherzo*, nonetheless is a very satisfying movement in which her marvelous understanding for the flute is on display.

Tomás Bretón (1850-1923) was totally unknown to me until I chanced upon this Marco Polo CD 8.223745 featuring his **Piano Trio in E** and **String Quartet in D** performed here by members of the New Budapest Quartet and György Oravecz.. Bretón is yet another example of that famous old chestnut, “talent will out.” The son of a poor baker from Salamanca who died when he was but two, Bretón learned the violin entirely by chance from a friend of his brother. By age 8, he was a student at the local conservatory. At 10 he was eaking out a living in a theater orchestra. At 16, he entered the Madrid Conservatory studying violin and composition while continuing to make a living as a restaurant violinist. After graduating with honors and taking a first prize in composition, he began a his career as a conductor and composer of *Zarzuelas*. The Zarzuela is the Spanish counterpart to the French Opera Comique or the Viennese Operetta. In 1880, Bretón won a scholarship which allowed him to study in Rome and subsequently Vienna where he learned German in order to familiarize himself with the operas of Wagner. In due course, while in Vienna, he composed an opera along Wagnerian lines, which predicably was trashed by the pro-Brahmsian music critic, Eduard Hanslick. After this debacle, Bretón returned to Madrid where he composed more than a dozen *Zarzuelas*, upon which, it is said, his reputation rests. Ironically,



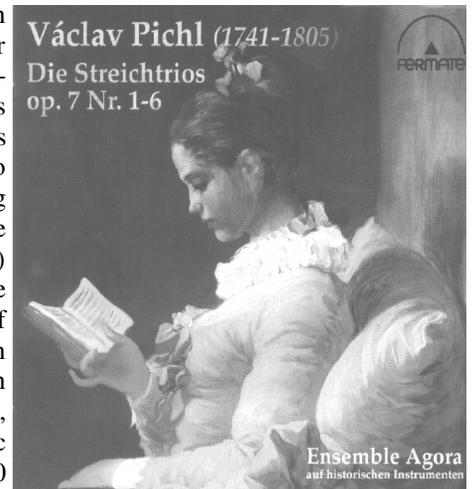
Bretón: String Quartet & Piano Trio; Wenzel Pichl: Six String Trios Scharwenka: A Piano Trio & Piano Quartet

Bretón did not wish to be known or remembered as a composer of light opera. Besides his compositional career for theater, he also conducted the most prominent symphony orchestra in Madrid for more than a decade and eventually taught at and became the director of the Madrid Conservatory. Though remembered today in Spain as one of the foremost composers of Zarzuelas, Bretón did not limit himself to this genre. He also composed a symphony while in Vienna, a violin concerto which was premiered by Sarasate in London, three symphonic poems, three string quartets, a piano trio, a piano quintet and a sextet for winds and piano.

Unhappily for him, his music was consistently attacked by contemporaneous Spanish music critics as not being Spanish enough, a ridiculous criticism as anyone who has heard the *Scherzo* to his **String Quartet in D Major** (1910) can attest. Unfortunately, the jacket notes do not indicate which number quartet this is, although judging from its composition date, it is unlikely that it was his first. A late romantic *Allegro moderato non tanto* opens with each instrument sequentially being given a dramatic cadenza as an introduction. Though the writing is unquestionably melodic, Bretón shows that he is familiar with post Brahmsian developments. A somber *Andante* gives way to what is perhaps the finest movement of the Quartet, a very Spanish-sounding *Scherzo* complete with contrasting trio also of Spanish flavor. The finale, *Grava-Fuga-Moderato-Allegro* sounds like what Haydn might have composed for his Op. 20 Quartets were he writing at the start of the 20th Century. The second work on disk, the **Piano Trio in E** dates from 1891. Tonally, it is a combination of late Viennese romanticism and the French Romantic movement as typified by Benjamin Goddard. A massive *Allegro commodo* full of passion leads to an a lyrical *Andante*. Next is a brilliant scherzo, *Allegro molto*, perhaps showing some affinity to the chamber music of Saint Sæens. The work concludes with an animated *Allegro energetico*. I certainly would like to hear more of this composer's music.

The first work on this Collins Classics CD 14192 is the **Piano Quartet in F, Op.37** which was composed around 1876 and was immediately performed by Scharwenka in the musical capitals of Europe. It is a massive work, some 40 minutes in duration, opening with an expansive and floridly heroic *Allegro moderato* and is followed by an expressive elgiac *Andante* which is clearly the quartet's center of gravity. A flashy scherzo *Allegro vivace* with a contrasting Brahmsian trio and a very finely wrought *Allegro con fuoco* bring this satisfying work to a close. The **Piano Trio in a minor, Op.45** dates from around 1878-80 and in format resembles the Piano Quartet. This, too, is a very big work which opens with a brooding *Allegro non troppo* followed by doleful *Adagio*. Again there is a fiery scherzo, *Molto allegro*, with a slower trio showing traces of Brahms. The finale also marked *Allegro con fuoco* is an effective, wild and thrusting affair, very well wrought. Both of these works are typical of and in no way inferior to the major representatives of German Romanticism writing at the time.

The Austrian composer, Vaclav or Wenzel Pichl (1741-1807), as he was known throughout his lifetime, was a virtuoso violinist who along with Dittersdorf and the Wranitzky (Vranicky) brothers, founded the Viennese School of violin playing. On personal terms with Mozart and Haydn, Pichl was a prolific composer of over 900 works, most of which



were at one time published but, with the exception of a handful of pieces, remain out of print. Chamber music was one of Pichl's abiding interests and he is known to have composed some 18 string quartets and 45 string trios. The **Six String Trios, Op.7** for violin, viola and cello on this Fermata CD Fer 20019 were published in Berlin in 1783. They were intended to be part of an integrated cycle as the choice and sequence of keys indicates: C, F, Bb, Eb, A & D.

These are charming works, lovingly played by the Ensemble Agora. The writing is concertante in style with each instrument getting its innings although the first violin does tend to dominate. While the first-time listener may not notice anything strikingly original about these genial compositions, on rehearing one is aware that these trios are in advance of Haydn's Op.53 or any of Mozart's save the wonderful K.563.

A performing musician to the bitter end, Pichl is said to have died "with his boots on" in that he collapsed and died on stage while performing a concerto at the Vienna Palais of Prince Lobkowitz.



Xaver Scharwenka (1850-1924) was born in Poznan, then in East Prussia. In Berlin, he studied piano with Kullak and composition with Wuerst, a student of Mendelssohn's. For many years a travelling virtuoso, he opened his own music academies in both Berlin and New York. Scharwenka regarded his four piano concerti as his most

important compositions, and if he is remembered at all, it is for these works or his performing career. However, his chamber music is surprisingly good for a piano virtuoso, showing an excellent understanding of string technique and tone.