

The Chamber Music of Alexander Borodin Part III

by Larius J. Ussi

In the first two parts of this article, the author discussed Borodin's chamber music composed up to and including the mid 1860's, including his string trios, his quartet for flute, oboe, viola and cello, his string quintet (2 vc), his string sextet, his piano trio and his piano quintet.

In 1862, Borodin returned to Russia from his European studies in Germany and Italy. Though he had composed a string quintet, a string sextet, a piano trio and a piano quintet while abroad, Borodin attached no particular significance to these works and never tried to submit them to a publisher. Professionally, he considered himself a scientist whose hobby was music composition. Upon arriving in St. Petersburg, Borodin immediately took up a teaching position and threw himself eagerly into his scientific work. He did not show these earlier musical efforts to any of his friends. But when he met Mili Balakirev, he began taking composition lessons. Years later, Balakirev wrote, "*Borodin had ascribed no importance to the impulse that drove him to compose. I was the first to tell him that musical composition was his real calling. This encouragement led him to eagerly start work on his First Symphony.*" Work went slowly to say the least. It took him 5 years to complete it, and this under Balakirev's constant supervision and help. Still its premiere in 1869 under his teacher's baton was a great success and encouraged him to continue. He began work on both his Second Symphony and *Prince Igor*. During the 1870's and especially after his appointment as Professor of Chemistry at the Academy, Borodin had even less time than before to concentrate on music. His frustration led him to jump from project to project without completing anything. (He worked on *Prince Igor* in spurts for 17 years and it was still unfinished in 1887 at his death).

At some point in the mid 1870's it dawned on him that the larger works

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Frank Bridge's Mellow Miniatures for Piano Trio

by Renz Opolis



The article on Frank Bridge (1879-1941) which appeared in the October 1993 issue of the *Journal* failed to even mention, let alone discuss, the nine miniatures for piano trio which Bridge composed during the first decade of the 20th Century. Because these works were written for one of his violin students, Betty Hanbury, and her sister Rachel who studied the cello, these works have been written-off as 'student works.' (See, for example, Cobbett who dismissively adds an ad-

dendum to the article on Bridge in the *Cyclopedia*) But there is a difference between works written for students and student works and it can be said with certainty that the *Miniatures* are not the latter. While no one is likely to argue that these are extraordinary masterworks, on the other hand, they ought not to be dismissed as inconsequential student works suitable for neither amateur nor professional. To the contrary, any one of these tonally diverse and brilliantly written cameos would serve as a superb encore for a professional piano trio while amateurs will spend many a happy hour with these delightful works.

As Cobbett wrote, "*When Frank Bridge's chamber music first appeared, it was a revelation to amateurs as well as professional players...*" Interestingly, the revival

(Continued on page 3)

Phylloscopus-A Publishing Bird of Another Feather

by
Michael Bryant

Phylloscopus¹ publishes chamber music primarily, but not solely, for wind players, many of whom are amateurs. Only Musica Rara, (recently purchased by Breitkopf und Härtel, Wiesbaden), has provided such a specialist service before them. Phylloscopus was founded in 1989 by Dr. Rachel Malloch, an oboe player, with the help of Chris and Frances Nex (bassoon and flute). Rachel manages the business, while the Chris and Frances are primarily responsible for repertoire, research and setting editions.

Their catalogue has grown remarkably vigorously and now contains over 325 works, across a wide spectrum, from some rare trifles to previously neglected masterpieces. It is a most valuable resource and contains some first editions and new editions of works that would probably have remained out of print, had it not been for their efforts. Phylloscopus is still expanding and it is good to see so many worthwhile chamber works being newly released each year.

The catalogue is organised according to ensemble with sections devoted to music primarily for flute, oboe, bassoon, followed by chamber music with piano or other keyboard instruments, mixed wind ensembles, double reed ensembles, string music, vocal music with chamber ensemble accompaniment and music for wind and strings. It is only possible here to consider a small sample:

Works for Winds and Strings.

One of the categories of music that has benefited considerably is the large ensemble for wind and strings. Those who have

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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.



The Sounding Board-Letters to the Editor



Purchasing Music On Line

I have enjoyed your articles in the *Journal* about shops where the music you write about can be obtained. But what about the internet. Are any of the shops on-line?

Michael Halliday
Boston, Massachusetts

This would be a good subject for an article. I have not made any systematic study or search of this (perhaps some of our readers have), but it is definitely possible to obtain music on-line. Amazon.com has hooked up with several music publishers and offers music. As noted in our last issue, Broekmans en Van Poppel (Cobbett Members), who have a huge collection, have an excellent website at www.broekmans.com. I know that Bauer & Hieber (Munich), Jecklin (Zurich) and Doblengers (Vienna) all have websites as does Fazer (Helsinki). Several publishers have websites and some have e-mail addresses as well. As time goes by, I would imagine that we will hear more on this subject.

Publisher Has New Website

Please let your readers know that Rosewood Music Publishers has a new website: <http://freespace.virgin.net/s.westmeath>

Michael Bryant
Surbiton, England

It is my understanding that Rosewood specializes in unusual works for winds. Mr. Bryant, a member of our Board of Advisors and a frequent contributor to the Journal is its director. I encourage readers to visit the website to find out what interesting works are now available.

Are There Cobbett Music Workshops?

I have been to a number of music workshops around the country, but mostly the participants only want to play Beethoven and the like. Just the mention of something as 'off-beat' as Schumann or Borodin (let alone Stenhammar or Onslow) sometimes sends frowns of disapproval across their faces. At other workshops, music is selected in advance and lately Bartok and Shostakovich seem to be the rage. Are there any Cobbett Association Music Workshops?

Leonard Peterson
Fort Worth, Texas

Alas, there are no Cobbett Assn. Music Workshops. This was something the Board of Advisors has considered and at some point might try to organize. However, it might be more fruitful if we could get those of our members who attend workshops to 'spread the gospel.' One workshop at which 'Cobbett Music' is welcome is the San Diego Workshop held each August in California. You may contact the director, Dr. Ronald Goldman by writing him at 3443 Evergreen, Bonita CA 91902 or by e-mailing him at violinron@aol.com. If readers know of other 'Cobbett-Friendly' workshops, send the word along.

Wants to know about "John Bontempo"

I have recently heard a very nice piano concerto on the radio which sounded a bit like Haydn. It was by someone called John or Jean Bontempo. I have been unable to find out anything about him. Who was he and did he write any chamber music? Please help.

Irene Schoenberg
Lawrence, Kansas

Most likely, you heard the music of the Portuguese composer Joao Bomtempo (which more or less sounds like "John Bontempo" in English). Bomtempo (1775-1842) was the son of an Italian musician who settled in Lisbon. Trained as a pianist, at first Bomtempo succeeded his father as director of the Royal Chapel in Brazil. Around 1800 he travelled to Paris where, playing his own concertos, his performances met with critical acclaim. This led to a meeting and friendship with Clementi who helped him publish several of his works. Napoleonic Paris was at best a turbulent place for foreigners and Bomtempo left for London around 1810 shortly after the Emperor invaded the Iberian peninsula. He spent the last 20 years of his life in Lisbon, establishing an orchestra and a conservatory and generally serving as one of the most important musical figures of his time. Three pieces of his chamber music are extant: 2 piano quintets and a sextet for piano, string quartet and bass. None of these is, as far as I know, in print, however one quintet Op.15 was recorded and is available on a Portugalsom CD#870006.

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

First off, I wish to thank Michael Bryant for his fine article on Phylloscopus and the many interesting works they have brought out. Thanks also to Mr. Opolis and to Mr. Ussi whose three part article on Borodin is probably the best and most detailed ever printed in English about this composer's chamber music.

As reported in the last issue of the *Journal*, the Board of Advisors examined a number possibilities for situating our library. When it became clear that no agreement could be reached with Northeastern Illinois University, Dr. James Whitby approached the Dean of the Music Department of the University of Western Ontario (UWO), inquiring if they might be interested in housing the library. Their response was very positive. It was therefore decided to negotiate an agreement for the transfer of the library from Northeastern Illinois in Chicago, where it is currently boxed and unavailable for use, to UWO located in the city of London, Ontario in Canada. Negotiations have been based on the terms which were published in the Autumn 1999 issue of the *Journal*. I am pleased to report that negotiations so far have been positive and are in an advanced stage. There are legal questions in an agreement of this type which are going to be of concern to any institution. I am hopeful that I will be able to report a successful conclusion in the near future.

This is our 10th Anniversary and in celebration we shall begin issuing ratings of the chamber music repertoire. This will either begin with the summer or autumn issue. The ratings will be mailed with, but issued separately from the *Journal*. They will be sent loose, that is without binding or stapling, but there will be enough room on the left hand margin for punching holes so that they can be placed in a loose leaf binder. We will most likely begin with string quartets and issue the ratings over several issues. At this point, it is not clear how long the list will be or the layout it will assume, but it is fair to say that this project may go on for several years.

Renewal notices were sent out in December. Most of you have responded. If, however, you receive a second notice with your copy of the *Journal* this means you have not. We depend on your prompt renewal to continue operating.

Bridge's 9 Miniatures for Piano Trio (continued from page 1)

in interest in Bridge's music which took place during the last part of the 20th Century has concerned itself exclusively with his more 'radical' works, dating from 1924 onwards. Ironically, these works did nothing to create or further enhance the firm reputation he had established with both professionals and amateurs. Rather, it was works just like the Miniatures which contributed to his success.

The second set appeared in 1910. While the technical demands placed on the string players are hardly extraordinary, nonetheless, as the example below clearly shows, these are no longer easy pieces. No.4, *Romance*, is somewhat longer than the others and has some rather forward tonality in parts with considerable emotion. *Intermezzo* (shown in part below) is a rhythmically tricky little tour de force

The image displays a musical score for a piano trio, featuring piano and violin parts. The score is divided into two systems, each labeled 'Tempo I'. The first system includes a piano part with a 'p leggiero' marking and a violin part. The second system continues the piano and violin parts. The notation includes various rhythmic values, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Published in sets of 3, the first appeared in 1908. These pieces are the simplest but nonetheless charming. No.1, an updated *Minuet* is child-like in its simplicity yet elegant. It has a lyrical trio section. No.2 *Gavotte* begins with a jaunty theme in the violin taken up by all later. A very short, chromatic and contrasting middle section follows. *Allegretto*, in 2/4, is perhaps the most interesting with a spirited and quite English sounding melody. There is a lovely pizzicato ending. Although these three pieces are quite easy, and could be managed technically by any beginning-intermediate player, the writing is on a level which makes the music suitable for public performance by professionals, who wish to perform beautiful light music with a minimum of rehearsal time

with the voices chasing each other about. No.6, *Saltarello*, certainly requires nimble fingers from all players in a bright modern version of the classic Italian format.

The last set appeared in 1915. Each one is a gem. No.7, *Valse Russe* is a slow, sad waltz with lovely string solos and duets. The cello writing is particularly effective. No.8, *Hornpipe*, is a modern, snappy sailor's ditty with the word 'encore' written all over it. Great part writing. No.9, *Marche Militaire*, sounds Elgarian and Edwardian. Stirring music that might have been heard on a WWI patriotic newsreel. This enjoyment can be yours, because the music is available from Music Masters (M1673) or Galliard.

The Chamber Music of Alexander Borodin (continued from page 1)



were beyond his ability to complete, he hit upon the idea, much to the horror of his good friend, Mussorgsky, of writing a string quartet. Mussorgsky, at that time Borodin's teacher, considered the string quartet an outdated and retro-

grade format. Nonetheless, Borodin began work on his first string quartet in 1874. It was not completed until the end of 1879 and premiered in 1880. Its immediate success led to it being performed throughout Europe and the U.S. while Borodin was still alive. It was also his first piece of chamber music published during his lifetime.

Virtually unknown today, **String Quartet No.1 in A**, subtitled "Suggested by a theme of Beethoven," happily is still in print, Breitkopf & Härtel No.5660. The first movement, *Moderato-Allegro*, starts with a slow introduction which builds tension and expectation especially as it begins to accelerate:



The *Allegro* is said to have been the part which had a Beethoven-like theme:



I've have yet to recognize anything which suggests Beethoven in this theme. Borodin, however, was quite taken with it and repeated it countless times in this 888! measure movement. If played at a quarter note=160, it's long, but not excruciatingly so. The second theme, to me, lacks somewhat in contrasting value.



The second movement, *Andante con moto*, begins with a duet in the first violin and viola. It is introspective and pensive. The middle section is a relaxed fugue on a chromatic rising line. The third movement, *Scherzo: Prestissimo*, in 3/8 is an extraordinary movement by any standards. It has a triplet figure which is quickly handed off from voice to voice like a hot potato, it goes at breakneck speed. The trio section, based on a theme very close to the opening *Allegro*, is mostly made up of harmonics in all of the voices and creates a marvelous fairyland of tone. There was certainly nothing like it up until that time. To be sure, this is not an easy movement to put together. The finale, *Andante-Allegro risoluto*, begins with a short and moderate introduction. Both the

1st violin and cello have short cadenzas. The main subject of the *Allegro*, though not long on melodic material makes up for this in energy. The second subject sounds to similar to many of the other melodies. The ending is quite exciting. The only criticism I think that can be leveled at this work is the length of the first movement (which for performance can easily be judiciously cut) and the apparent similarity of so much of the melodic material which in my opinion is due to the excessive chromaticism. Still, all and all, we deserve to hear this work on stage from time to time. Good amateurs will enjoy it as well.

String Quartet No.2 in D was composed in what was for Borodin a relatively short period of time during the summer of 1881 after Mussorgsky's death. This may have been the impetus for the work although it is dedicated to composer's wife, who was quite ill at the time. In four movements, it begins with an amiable *Allegro moderato* in which the cello sings out the main theme, which is then taken up by the first violin.



The 1st violin then introduces an equally lyrical second theme. The tempo remains moderate throughout like a Sunday walk with no particular goal. The end of the movement cleverly integrates both of the main themes in a magical and soft finale. In the second movement, *Scherzo Allegro*, the violins state the main theme which is a rapid and repeated series of six descending 8th notes which are played slightly higher in pitch each time they are repeated. Against this, the viola plays a sustained counter melody. There is no real trio section, but a further development of the two themes. It is well-known that Tolstoy, after hearing the *Andante Cantabile* to Tchaikovsky's String Quartet No.1 at a private concert, fell to his knees and wept. Interestingly, Turgeniev came to a private concert to hear the music of Borodin. But just before it was to begin, Turgeniev suffered a severe attack of gout. Borodin, the only doctor in the house, examined him and was forced to send him home. Hence Turgeniev never heard the *Notturmo*, which has as its opening and essentially only theme one of the most beautiful and well-known of all quartet melodies:



It has been used on Broadway and in Hollywood and there are few who cannot have heard it. There is no real second theme except for a brief and fast bridge passage of scales. In the finale, Borodin plays with two separate tempi. The main theme to the finale is stated in the opening *Andante*. Then comes a faster section, *Vivace*, in which the lower voices bring forth both parts of the first theme. Later, the first violin sings out a lyrical second theme. Borodin gradually builds tension throughout this long movement and brings it to a close in a spirit of celebration and triumph. This great quartet is performed all too rarely. Amateurs who do not know it will enjoy making its acquaintance.

Phylloscopus—A Publisher of Another Feather (Continued from page 1)



had the privilege of playing Rheinberger's Nonet will welcome the nonets by Louise Farrenc, Franz Lachner (pictured right) and George Onslow (requiring a C clarinet in its 19th century manifestation, but a B flat clarinet part has been provided in the Phylloscopus edition). There is a rival edition of Lachner's Nonet by Accolade Musikverlag (ACC 4030)²

Stanford's Serenade, (for flute, clarinet, bassoon, horn, 2 violins, viola, 'cello and double bass) is very fine work, in my opinion. The autograph score of the Serenade Opus 95 c.1906 was preserved by Stainer and Bell at some stage, for it bears their stamp. The score was then acquired by the University of Newcastle. The parts used by the bassoonist John Parr (1869-1963) for his performance of it in Sheffield on January 2nd 1937 have been lost or



mis-laid, as also has much of his extensive, unique and invaluable music collection - much of which was in manuscript and unpublished. The programme sheet for this concert, one of a long series (1930-57, a partial collection of which is in the British Library), notes that this occasion was the first public performance. The parts were written out again by the Rushton family, which led to a performance by students at the RCM in March 1987 and the Hyperion CD 66291 by the Capricorn ensemble, made later that year.

The Nonet by Andreas Späth (Rossach, near Coburg 1790-1876 Gotha) is for oboe, clarinet in B flat, horn in E flat, bassoon, 2 violins, viola, 'cello and double bass. It was written in about 1850 and dedicated to Prince Karl Egon III of Fürstenburg. Stylistically it lies somewhere between the Leipzig School and Spohr and was first recorded by Consortium Classicum on LP (BASF 29 21142-8). It has since been included in the 2 CD set, Pilz-Acanta 44 2174-2, a successful work that remains interesting after several hearings.

Späth has no entry in Cobbett, Slonimsky/Baker, Wier, Grove V or New Grove, but can be found in MGG, Thompson, Pratt and Pamela Weston's *More Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past*. He played in the wind band at the court of the Prince of Coburg, who sent him to Vienna in 1816 for some composition lessons from Philipp Riotte (1776-1856). In 1821 he left Saxony for Morges on Lake Geneva where he was employed as an organist, choirmaster, conductor and teacher and was in demand as solo clarinetist and violinist. He moved to Neuchatel (1833-38) and then returned to Coburg as concertmaster.

The Octet Opus 7 by August Walter, for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, 'cello and double bass, is a work to be relished. It is not without humour, especially in the finale. The oboe part is less substantial than that for the clarinet. It was written in Stuttgart and exists in three versions, one of which was published by Kistner in 1880. Cobbett noted that it was probably written long before that date and Fétis suggested a date about 1863. This edition is based the second version, the manuscript score of which is at the University of Basel. August Walter (Stuttgart 1821-1896 Basel) was a violin student of Molique. He moved to Vienna in 1842 and then to Basel in 1846, where he was employed as a conductor of the Basel Choral Society and private music teacher. In recognition of his achievements he was offered Swiss citizenship by the city of Basel in 1874. Walter wrote very little, only twenty works, an overture, some fine songs to texts by the German poet Emmanuel Geibel (1815-1884), and three string quartets (1845) dedicated to Spohr. His Symphony, Opus 9, was his greatest public success. However his reputation as a fine composer remained mainly confined to the private circle of the banker Friedrich Riggenschach-Stehlin.



The manuscript of the Serenata by Georg Druschetzsky (alternative Czech spelling: Jirí Druzecky) was found in Budapest. It is for the same forces as the Octet by Walter. It should be noted that the Septet Friedrich Witt (1770-1836) is for clarinet, horn, bassoon and string quartet, with the optional double bass part, making it an octet.

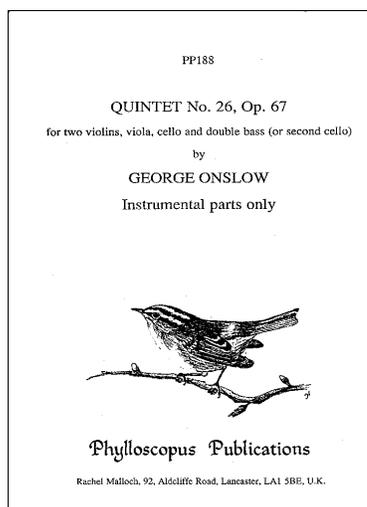
The Septet by Charles Wood (1866-1926) uses Beethoven's instrumentation. The manuscript parts and score of the Septet were preserved by his college in Cambridge. This is its first edition.



Among the smaller ensembles for wind and strings, basset horns players should note that an alternative part has been provided for them in the Grand Quintet for bassoon and string quartet by Anton Reicha, (first edition). It has been recorded by the American bassoonist John Heard on the Carlton CD 30367 02602 (1998).
Strings

Works for Strings

Phylloscopus has a short list of music for strings which includes Suk's radiant Quartet Opus 11 (1896). He wrote two full scale quartets of which this was the first. Suk gave it a new finale in 1915. The introspective second Quartet Opus 31 (1911) is in one continuous movement. Suk's short single movement compositions for string quartet include a Minuet; a Barcarolle; a Fugue - arranged from a piano piece, a Ballad in Dm (1890) and a Meditation on a Czech Chorale Opus 35a (1914).



The string section of the catalogue also includes Onslow's String Quintet Opus 67 in Cm and Eugene Walkiers (1793-1866): a Quintet Opus 90. Both require a double bass or a second cello, and James Beament (1921-): a Sextet Opus 50, scored for 2 violins, 2 viola and 2 'cellos.

Professor Sir James Beaumont, a distinguished agricultural botanist and Cambridge academic, received no formal musical education, but taught himself and has been taking composition seriously since 1960. He has been interested in jazz and classical music and plays the piano, guitar, double bass and some other instruments. He has also written two books on music, *The Violin Explained* (OUP 1997) and *How We Hear Music*. He has written much, with wit and humour, for theatre revues and musical comedies. His many short works for string quartet were designed to attract young players and listeners. Some contain hidden 'lollipops', such as *Jimmy's Tune*, published by Phylloscopus. On his retirement he decided to turn to something a little more serious and wrote a String Octet, two Sextets, (of which Opus 50 is one), and a Quintet. He admires the harmony of Delius, the melodic gift of Borodin and the contrapuntal skill of Brahms, but does not expect to be compared to any of these. The Sextet has four movements, a passionate opening, a light-hearted Scherzo, a romantic slow movement, with a theme that one cannot get out of one's head afterwards, (you have been warned), and a rondo finale. Technically, it does not make excessive demands, but some care is needed with intonation.

Works for Winds

Here is Briccialdi's Quintet Opus 124. All the wind quintets by the flute player Giulio Briccialdi (1818-81) are in bel canto style, a popular idiom with opportunities for technical display (Stradivarius CD STR 33331 and Naxos 8.553410). Martin Mengal's three wind quintets are written in the style of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven respectively. The parts for Anton Reicha Quintet in A Opus 99/3 are available from Phylloscopus without a score, and have no current rival edition. In contrast to Danzi, for whom Peters produced a complete set of scores (3 volumes) of his nine wind quintets (now out of print), scores of Reicha wind quintets are rare, but a few having been produced in Prague, Brno and the USA. All the Reicha wind quintets have been recorded by the Schweitzer Wind Quintet for the CD company 'cpo' in Osnabruck, Germany.

In the section for large wind ensembles, Wilhelm Berger's Serenade Opus 102 (1911) for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons and 4 horns is worthy of immediate recommendation. It was the composer's swan song, written in the same year that the young Richard Strauss's Suite was published, (composed at the behest of Hans von Bulow in 1884). Whereas Strauss's young talent is well known, this highly successful mature work was only recently re-discovered in Berlin and recorded under the direction of the pianist

and clarinetist Jost Michaels on Koch Schwann 3-1072 and then by a Swiss group on Claves CD 50-9409 (both 1994). Highly recommended.

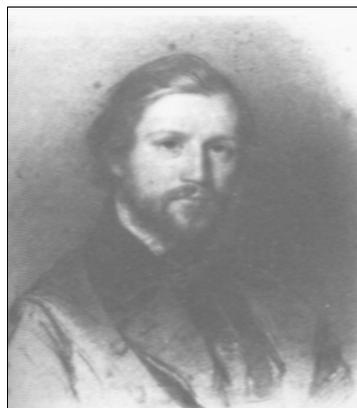
The enjoyable Serenade for ten wind instruments by Nicholas Sims-Williams, a specialist in Persian and related Indo-European languages, is well written.

Works for Winds and Piano

Among the works for wind and piano I would like to mention in particular Roddy Elmer's Sextet for wind quintet and piano. I saw this work in its developmental stages. It has an immediately attractive harmonic style and melodic ideas and consists of two movements, a prelude which leads to a fugal finale. There is a flicker of a reference to the style of Shostakovich. Some of the tempo changes need some care to be worked out successfully.

Other works

Onslow's Grand Septet Opus 79 of 1849, (flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon, double bass and piano) is also available in a quintet version for piano and strings (violin, viola, 'cello and double bass). The wind version has been recorded on Erato 2292-45777. It was one of the many attractive chamber works by Onslow that were highly praised in Paris, where each Winter the fruits of his Summer labours at the chateau at Bellerive in the Auvergne, were presented to members of a privileged musical circle. While somewhat backward looking to the classics, and admitted not one of the great composers of the nineteenth century, it is difficult to explain his great success then and his comparative neglect today.



For rarity and for curiosity value, nothing can quite match the conception of Alkan's (pictured left) Funeral March for a Dead Parrot for SATB voices, three oboes and bassoon. From now on, I cannot imagine any music camp or Summer School being complete without it!

I wish to record a note of thanks to Rachel Malloch, and Chris and Frances Nex for their kind help in preparing this article. They are providing a marvellous service. The catalogue contains many serious works and ample proof that music can also be fun. It has enormous scope for small and large ensembles of all kinds.

Footnotes

1. Phylloscopus is a genus of warblers, native to the Eurasia and includes the Chiffchaff (*P. collybita*), the Wood Warbler (*P. sibilatrix*), Willow Warbler (*P. trochilus*) and the Arctic Warbler (*P. borealis*). The bird chosen to illustrate the covers of Phylloscopus editions is Pallas's Willow Warbler (*P. proregulus*), an inhabitant of Siberia and Asia and occasionally seen in the Autumn in Europe as a vagrant.

2. Accolade Musikverlag, Austrasse 7, 83607 Holzkirchen, Germany, Tel +49 8024 92143 fax 92146 Email: Accolade@t-online.de and url: <http://www.accolade.de> Phylloscopus advertise Accolade's catalogue of music for oboe and bassoon.

Onslow's Last Years & the Riddle of Why his Quartets Fell into Oblivion

By
R.H.R. Silvertrust

(In the first 12 parts of this series, the author dealt with the composer's life from his birth in 1784 until 1845. All 36 of the composers string quartets were presented and analyzed.)

Although the purpose of these articles has been to familiarize the reader with George Onslow's string quartets, I felt it was necessary to do this against the backdrop of his life. So although this effort is not meant to be an exhaustive biography, I feel it incumbent to remark briefly upon his final years simply for the sake of completeness before dealing with the final question of how it was that his string quartets (and other chamber works) disappeared.

During the mid 1830's, George and his brothers had quarreled over the terms of their father's will and the inheritance of various properties primarily located in England. A lawsuit brought by George was successfully resolved in his favor, but in 1837, a further lawsuit led to his losing possession of his father's chateau, Chalendras. This forced him buy land and build a new home. Having grown up in the Auvergne, he found land nearby and built a new chateau which he called Bellerive. For first half of the 1840's, he was busily occupied with this project.

With the publication of his 36th string quartet, Op.69, Onslow seemed to be heading off in new directions. But, although he lived for 8 more years, he never returned to the genre again. He did however write another 15 chamber works, 14 of which are for ensembles larger than a quartet. (I shall mention them in passing but unfortunately any detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this article.) Onslow's preoccupation with such compositions can be explained by the growing popularity around the mid 19th Century in France for larger ensembles such as quintets and sextets, especially those which combined piano with strings or strings and winds or all three. In Paris, these works were all the rage and several then well-known composers, such as Bertini and Louise Farrenc, were also writing for these combinations.

In the autumn of 1845, immediately following his last string quartet, Onslow composed his First Quintet for Piano and Strings, Op.70. It was dedicated to Sigmund Thalberg, an Austrian pianist then regarded as Liszt's only rival. Later in 1846, Onslow made his first visit to German soil since the French Revolution. He had been invited to the annual Rhineland Music Festival sponsored by the Gesellschaft des Musikfests den Nieder Rhine which that year was being held in Aachen (Aix-la Chapelle) The Gesellschaft, formed in the year of Beethoven's death, had held a festival each year inviting distinguished performers and composers from all over Europe to participate. While at the festival, Onslow got to hear Jenny Lind sing and Mendelssohn, the festival's director, conduct. He was impressed by both. And Mendelssohn demonstrated his high esteem for Onslow by publicly honoring him. After conducting the latter's overture to *Le Colporteur* and his Fourth Symphony, which closed the festival, Mendelssohn called Onslow onto the stage and in an emotional gesture gave him the baton with which he had conducted.

After the festival Onslow journeyed to his estate and did not return to Paris with compositions in hand until the spring of 1848. He brought with him 4 string quintets (Nos.28-31) and his Second Piano Quintet, which was for the *Trout* grouping (i.e. vln, vla, vc & Kb). The string quintets were all published with a 2nd

cello or alternative bass part. The 30th quintet achieved some popularity and was championed by Henri Vieuxtemps.

1848, of course, was a seminal year in both French and European history. In France, it marked the beginning of the end of the old aristocratic system and the gradual erosion of the class system. Although most of these changes little affected Onslow's life as they happened slowly and over the course several decades, one change was more rapid, that of fashion in the arts and music. The rise of Louis Napoleon and the middle classes created rapid change in Parisian musical tastes. During the first half of the 19th Century, music in general and chamber music in particular, had been the special preserve of the aristocracy. With the political and cultural ascendancy of the middle classes, the popularity of chamber music declined quickly. Compared to the years immediately preceding Louis Napoleon's election, the number of chamber music performances decreased suddenly. Onslow did not escape this trend and as the bulk of his music was chamber music, there was a measurable decrease in the amount his music being performed in front of the Parisian public. 1848 was also the year Onslow composed his Nonet, Op.77, for strings and winds. It was dedicated to Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, whom Onslow knew personally. Albert was not only a fine musician in his own right but also an promoter and sponsor of musical concerts in England and Germany. Subsequently, Onslow arranged the Nonet as a sextet for piano and winds, Op.77b. The Nonet originally enjoyed some popularity but soon disappeared although the work remained popular as a *Grand Sextet*.

1849 was a fruitful year for Onslow. He composed 5 fine works. The first was String Quintet No.32, Op.78 (2vla), the second a Sextet for Piano, winds and bass, Op.79. He also arranged this work for piano and strings (*Trout instrumentation*) as Op.79b. Next, he finished his 34th String Quintet (2vla), Op.80, then a Wind Quintet (Fl,Ob,Clu,Bsn & Hn) Op.81, and finally, his last string quintet No.34, Op.82 (2vla). A year later (1850) and deeply depressed, Onslow writing to a friend about these works, uncomfortably noted that while they were charming, they presented nothing new. Certainly they break no new ground, but it must be said that the three viola quintets (Opp.78, 80 & 82) are among his finest chamber music works. I have played them many times and can without qualification say they belong in the first rank of all viola quintets. This is an opinion that has been shared by nearly every player with whom I have played them. (No small number, certainly more than 35.) The effects of Onslow's hunting accident had left him with frequent and severe headaches which in turn led to bouts of depression. As the years went by these increased and in 1850, he composed no chamber music. In 1851, he composed only one work, his last, Piano Trio No.10.

It is without question that the acute depression from which Onslow suffered during the last years of his life greatly affected his judgment. This depression was further exacerbated by the fact that from 1850 on, the French finally "discovered" Beethoven's Late Quartets. For decades, the French had either ignored or written-off these works as unintelligible gibberish. Then suddenly, almost overnight, these Quartets became wildly popular. Contem-

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porary Parisian accounts at that time relate that works of other composers, including Onslow's, which appeared on the same program as those of Beethoven late period generally received a rather tepid, if not cool, reception.

Also weighing on him were his duties at the Conservatoire and the Academie des Beaux Arts. He complained that engagements with fellow composers and colleagues such as Halevy, Mme Farrenc and Berlioz frequently forced him to lay everything aside. When Halevy went to conduct his opera in London, Onslow took over all of his duties at the Conservatoire, including judging student examinations. He had no time for himself, let alone time to compose. As he somewhat bitterly noted, "*I am nourished by student fugues from 9 in the morning until 6 in the evening.*" As time passed, he found it increasingly difficult to remain separated from his wife Delphine who continued to live at Bellerive in the Auvergne. Yet, the more time he spent in Paris, the more he found himself importuned by a myriad of individuals seeking his support for various elections to academies, or his help with their projects and publications. His influence was such that those who obtained his support (such as the opera composer, Ambrose Thomas) could be assured of success in their endeavors. Aspiring composers inundated him with their latest creations seeking his help. And to all of these demands, he gave of himself unstintingly. Nearly 70, Onslow became unable to keep up such a frenetic pace. His personality, which until then had been described as full of vigor, liveliness and zest began to change. One of his acquaintances remarked that formerly when rehearsing a work, "*his ardent encouragements to the artists electrified and enlivened them. His inspiration raised them above the earth.*" It was, he noted, "*impossible to remain irresponsive in front of such a man. The coldest ice would thaw in that fire. before his energy.*"

But by 1851-2, this had all changed. He became more subdued. No doubt this was caused by a degeneration in his health. He complained of constant headaches and feared that he was losing his sight as well as the hearing in his one good ear. In the summer of 1853, he briefly returned to Paris for the last time, a mere shell of his former self. Halevy, who had seen him there, related that Onslow had difficulty seeing and all who came upon him felt that he "*would soon be leaving their earthly company forever.*" Back in Bellerive, his health declined rapidly and in late September he contracted pneumonia. He died October 3, 1853.

At a posthumous performance of his Grand Sextet (the Nonet arranged for piano sextet) in 1855, the then prominent French critic, Auguste Blanchard wrote that Onslow was "*as great and justly celebrated as his brothers Mozart, Weber and Beethoven.*" How is it then, that his works completely disappeared from the repertoire and his name was relegated to musical dictionaries where he was classed as a second rate composer? (albeit as one critic wrote, in the front ranks of the second raters)

Even the casual reader of this series will, no doubt, have realized that during his lifetime, George Onslow rose to the heights of fame and respect within his profession. His works were praised and he was considered a composer of the first rank by such men as Schumann, Mendelssohn, Berlioz and Chopin as well as by many others who counted. These were men who were among the most perceptive critics in Europe at the time. Yet since then, critics from the late 19th Century on have given us an historical view which holds that: 1) Onslow's music had only didactic merit; 2) Onslow developed his ideas in a scholastic, cold manner without the outbursts of genius associated with the great masters; and 3)

Onslow failed to give brilliance to his instrumentation. (A good example of this type of criticism can be found in the article on Onslow in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey* as well as in Cobbett's own wrong-headed, inane addenda) It seems strange that Schumann and Mendelssohn could have been so deceived by Onslow's quartets and quintets which they ranked amongst the finest of all chamber music creations while these latter day experts have been able to "see through" Onslow. How did they accomplish this? Most of these critics clearly had never played, let alone heard Onslow's music performed. Instead, they drew their "opinions" from and paraphrased what had already been written by earlier "experts". Some merely looked at the music on paper. Again, Woollett's article in the *Cyclopedia* (the longest and most detailed ever to appear in English) is an excellent example of this kind of criticism .

But the question remains, who initially murdered Onslow's reputation? It is significant that there has never been a full-length substantive biography on Onslow in any language by a music historian which would have opened up his life and presented the knowledge which could have secured his proper place for posterity. Only short biographical sketches appeared on the composer, usually as entries in a musical dictionary. Of particular significance is the fact that virtually every biographical sketch about Onslow published since 1880 can be traced to a rather cool five column article on the composer by the famous Belgian music scholar, François Joseph Fetis in his *Biographie universelle des musiciens et Bibliographie generale de la musique*. This book established Fetis' reputation and went through 7 editions between the time of Onslow's death and 1877. Although Fetis was not the only one to write about Onslow, (For example: Gustav Schilling in his *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* penned a very flattering entry) Fetis' opinions about the man and his music were held to be the most authoritative because he had known Onslow personally. Unfortunately, Fetis was not unbiased. First of all, Fetis who was very class conscious, did not like aristocrats of any stripe. This would have affected his opinion of Onslow before they ever met. Fetis' bias can clearly be seen in his *Bibliographie* where time and again, he refers to even the best composers who were also aristocrats as "distinguished amateurs." Secondly, Dr. Franks (author of a doctoral thesis on Onslow) postulates that personal dealings between the two may have led Fetis to have harbored hard feelings toward Onslow which colored his judgment.

But perhaps the most important factor which ultimately destroyed Onslow's reputation was how freely the French had considered him Beethoven's equal. This occurred during a time when none of the Late Quartets were known, understood or played in France. Beethoven's music first reached France between 1805-1810 and despite the efforts of Reicha, Onslow and others, it met with failure. Only during the Restoration (1815-30) did Beethoven's early music become known but it still was regarded as difficult to understand because of its sudden shifts in dynamic levels, interweaving melodic lines, dense harmonies, and unusual solos given to the lower voices—all similarities it shared with Onslow's music. As such, Onslow's reputation suffered with Beethoven in the beginning. In 1830, when Beethoven's early quartets began to be understood and appreciated, the fact that Onslow's music was similar, at least in these characteristics, did not escape the pub-

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New Recordings



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

String Quartets

Martin BOYKAN (1931-) No.2, CRI 841 / Luigi CHERUBINI (1760-1842) Nos.2 & 5, CPO 999 464 / Tandem TDM99-09-2 / James DILLON (1950-) No.3, Col legno 20050 / Klaus EGGE (1906-79) No.1, Naxos 8.554384 / Johann ESCHMANN (1826-82) Qt in d, Guild 7171 Lorenzo FERNANDEZ (1897-1948) No.1, Soarmec 011 / Roberto GERHARD (1896-1970) Nos.1 & 2, Metier 92032 / Filimon GINALIS (19??-) No.1, Agora 143.1 / Karl GOLDMARK (1830-1915) Qt in Bb, Op.8, ASV DCA 1071 / Francisco GUERRERO (1951-97) Zayin I-VII for Qt., Almaviva DS 0127 / Leontios HADJILEONTIADIS (19??-) No.1 / Reynaldo HAHN (1875-1947) Nos.1 & 2, Auvidis Valois 4848 / Kostas KLAVVAS (19??-) PHEIS, Agora 143.1 / Johan KVANDAL (1919-99) No.3, Naxos 8.554384 / Laura LOMBARDINI (1745-1818) Nos.2-3, CPO-999-679 / Fanny Mendelssohn HENSEL (1805-47) Qt in Eb, CPO-999-679 / Alfred JANSON (1937-) Qt., Naxos 8.554384 / Meyer KUPFERMAN (1926-) Jazz At, Moon in Blue, Soundspells 126 / Joseph MARX (1882-1964) Quartetts (3) Chromatico, In Modo Antico, Classico, ASV DCA 1073 / Emilie MAYER (1812-83) Qt in g, Op.14, CPO-999-679 / Jean ROGISTER (1879-1964) Nos 2 & 6, Cypres 1620 / Nino ROTA (1911-79) Str. Qt. (1948), ASV DCA 1072 / Christos SAMARAS (19??-) No.1,

Agora 143.1 / Fartlein VALEN (1887-1952) No.2, Naxos 8.554384 / Anastasios VASILADIS (19??-) No.1, Agora 143.1 / Yorgos ZERVOS (19??-) Studio, Agora 143.1

Strings Only-Not Quartets

Jehan ALAIN (1911-40) Fugue for Str. Qnt., Arion 68447 / Alexander BORODIN (1833-87) Str. Trio (unfinished) Guild 7179 / Karl GOLDMARK (1830-1915) Str. Qnt, Op.9 ASV DCA 1071 / Johann Gottlieb GRAUN (1702-71) 4 Trios for 2vln & Vc, CPO999 623 / Franz Anton HOFFMEISTER (1754-1812) 3 Qts for Vln,Vla,Vc & Kb, Koch Schwann Musica Mundi 3-6727 / Klaus HUBER (1924-) Ecce Homines for Str. Qnt (2vla), Col legno 20050 / Franz KROMMER (1759-1831) Grand Trio Op.96, Vars 0098 / Vaclav PICHL (1741-1805) Trio in D, Vars 0098 / Carlos VEERHOF (1926-) Str. Trio No.1, Col legno 31879 / Georg WAGENSEIL (1715-77) 6 Qts for 2 Vla, Vc & Kb, Symphonius 99168-9

Piano Trios

Martin BOYKAN (1931-) No.2, CRI 841 / Gregory BULLEN (1949-) Trio, MMC 2058 / Elmar LAMPSON (19??-) Facetten for Pno Trio, Col legno 31885 / Guillaume LEKEU (1870-94) Trio in c, Arts 47567 / William MCKINLEY (1938-) No.2, MMC 2058 / Romeo MELLONI (1963-)(Trio, MMC 2058 / Modest MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881) Pictures at an Exhibition (Arr.), Chandos 9672 / Alan RAWSTHORNE (1905-71) Pno Trio, Naxos 8.554352 / Nicolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)

Trio in c, Chandos 9672 /

Piano Quartets & Quintets

Franz BERWALD (1796-1868) Pno Qnts Nos. 1&2, Naxos 8.553970 / Alexander BORODIN (1833-87) Pno Qnt, Guild 7179 / Guillaume LEKEU (1870-94) Pno Qt. (unfinished), Arts 47567 / Alan RAWSTHORNE (1905-71) Pno Qnt, Naxos 8.554352

Winds & Strings

Luigi BOCCHERINI (1743-1805) 6 Qnts for Fl & Str. Qt., Op.55, CPO 999-382 /-

Winds, Strings & Piano

Louise FARRENC (1804-75) Trio for Fl, Vc & Pno, Tudor 7074 / Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-47) Trio for Fl, Vc & Pno, Tudor 7074 / Francesco PENNISI (1934-) 3 Pezzi for Cln, Fl & Pno, BMG Ricordi 1055 / Nino ROTA (1911-79) Trio for Fl, Vln & Pno, Trio for Cln, Vc & Pno both on ASV DCA 1072

Piano & Winds

Martin BOYKAN (1931-) Echoes of Petrarch for Fl,Cln & Pno, CRI 841 / Ronald CALTABIANO (1959-) Hexagons for Pno & Wind Qnt, CRI 835 / Francesco PENNISI (1934-) Etude Rhapsodie for Fl, Cln & Pno, BMG Ricordi 1055

Winds Only

Lorenzo FERNANDEZ (1897-1948) Suite for Wind Qnt, Soarmec 011 / Richard WILSON (1941-) Gnomics for Fl, Ob & Cln, Koch Int'l 7483

(Continued from page 8)

lic's notice and his reputation rose as well. To the modern ear, it is hard to understand how the French could have considered Onslow and Beethoven to have sounded similar. Only when one takes into account the Restoration French preference for Italian music and the general lack of understanding for the 'new' German writing, sometimes even from the pens of Haydn and Mozart, is it understandable how they might have made this connection. As the Beethoven 'craze' grew throughout the 1840's so did Onslow's reputation. During this time, both the French public and French music critics regarded Beethoven's Late Quartets as the product of insanity in old age. When at last, the Late Quartets suddenly came into favor during the 1850's and 1860's, it was seen that Onslow's music had never progressed past a certain point, had never approached the unknowable universality of Beethoven's Late Quartets. Never mind the same could be said of every other composer's works, because it was only Onslow who had been regarded Beethoven's equal. As far as the public was concerned, Onslow had stopped innovating and his music lacked innovation because it no longer offered something new to the Parisian ear. Ultimately, this wrong-headed and unfair comparison had drastic consequences for Onslow's reputation. From our vantage point, we can clearly see that Beethoven's Late Quartets

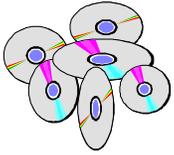
were *sui generis*. He stands alone a musical titan of the 19th Century. To have been regarded as an equal by his contemporaries placed Onslow in a very disadvantageous position wherein he was examined and criticized for something he was not nor ever intended to be. The reaction of the French musical public, never great lovers of instrumental (and especially chamber) music, was harsh. Onslow was not moved to a pedestal alongside of Schumann or Mendelssohn, but thrown away to be forgotten.

Onslow's fall to oblivion may also be explained by the fact that Onslow's 'public' music never achieved any lasting success. Whether his operas and symphonies were second rate is arguable. Certainly his symphonies, for a time, enjoyed some success in Germany under Mendelssohn and were appreciated in London. Be this as it may, what 19th Century composer was able to make a lasting name solely by writing first rate chamber music. One can argue that some of the well-known composers such as Beethoven or Mendelssohn might have, but the fact remains, it is pure conjecture. Whatever the reason(s), in the final analysis one thing is clear: Onslow's string quartets are a magnificent inheritance for which all lovers of chamber music should be grateful.

A Quick Guide to George Onslow's String Quartets

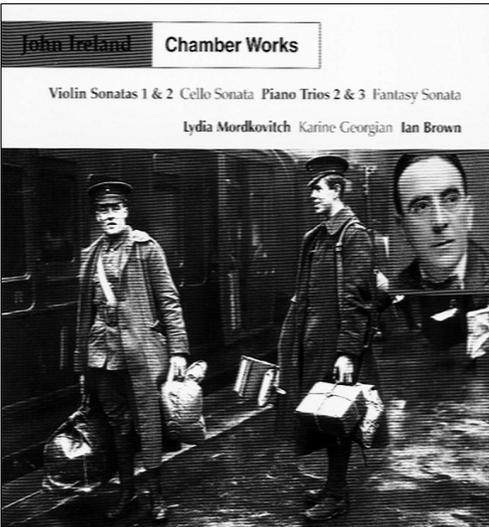
Rating Scale: 10—An unquestioned masterwork by any standard / 9—1st Class work which belongs in the repertoire / 8—Good work deserving of occasional concert hall performance / 7—A good work mostly of interest for amateurs / 6—Average but still enjoyable. Pluses (+) and Minuses (-) are used to further refine and indicate a work somewhat better or worse but not quite at the next number Unless otherwise noted all recordings are CDs (Ratings are the opinion of the author of the preceding article) For information on Merton Copying Service see Vol.X No.4, of the *Journal*

Number / Opus / Date	Rating	Comments	In Print	Recorded
No.1, Op.4 No.1 1807	8	Deserves performance-Equal to Haydn's Op.76-Historically important early work	Kammermusik AG	CPO 999 329
No.2, Op.4 No.2 1807	8-	1st violin part fairly demanding. Part writing somewhat uneven	Kammermusik AG	No
No.3, Op.4 No.3 1807	9	Excellent early work by the Master	Kammermusik AG	No
No.4, Op.8 No.1 1813-15	10	Perform it. Record it. Put it in the Repertoire	Edition Silvertrust	No
No.5, Op.8 No.2 1813-15	6-	Dedicated to Violin virtuoso Baillot & sounds like it—Way too much 1st violin	SJ Music / Merton	No
No.6, Op.8 No.3 1813-15	9	Subtitled "Al Hispanuola" Original & clever treatment of Spanish Dance	Kammermusik AG	No
No.7, Op.9 No.1 1815	9	Variations on God Save the King as good as those Haydn's Emperor Quartet	Edition Silvertrust	CPO 999 060
No.8, Op.9 No.2 1815	8	Tough 1st violin part in the last mov't--1st 3 movts incredibly good	Kammermusik AG	No
No.9, Op.9 No.3 1815	8+	This is a fine work with a real powerhouse finale	Kammermusik AG	CPO 999 060
No.10, Op.10 No.1 1816	10	Shows rhythmic influence of Beethoven Op.18 & sounds different from earlier wks	Edition Silvertrust	Koch 3-1623
No.11, Op.10 No.2 1816	7+	Still generally good work, 1st violin dominates a little	Kammermusik AG	No
No.12, Op.10 No.3 1816	8-	Nice work, like all three of the Op.10 qts it features a Dance from the Auvergne	Kammermusik AG	No
No.13, Op.21 No.1 1822	8-	1st mov't has concerto level difficulty 1st violin part. Terrific dramatic andante	Kammermusik AG	No
No.14, Op.21 No.2 1822	8	Solid Work with charming melodies and good part writing	Kammermusik AG	No
No.15, Op.21 No.3 1822	8	Catchy military maestoso 1st mov't. Effective minuet. Tough moto perpetuo finale	Kammermusik AG	No
No.16, Op.36 No.1 1829	9	Very fine and original Andante, Haunting and propulsive scherzo	Kammermusik AG	No
No.17, Op.36 No.2 1829	9	Set of variations on an Air Popular des Montagnes d' Auvergne	Kammermusik AG	No
No.18, Op.36 No.3 1829	10	Each movement is better than the last. Leaves nothing to be desired	Edition Silvertrust	No
No.19, Op.46 No.1 1831	10	Incredibly powerful tragic opening, good middle movements, What a finale!!	Edition Silvertrust	ASV DCA 808
No.20, Op.46 No.2 1831	9	Effective pizzicato Andante, Drum-like finale very rousing	Edition Silvertrust	No
No.21, Op.46 No.3 1831	9	Very effective opening movement rhythmically reminiscent of Dohanyi's 2nd Qt	Edition Silvertrust	CPO 999 329
No.22, Op.47 1833	10	Shows influence of Beethoven's Op.59. Has everything you could want	Edition Silvertrust	Advisis Valois 4749
No.23, Op.48 1834	7++	Problem here: Last 2 movements are a '10' but the 1st 2 are rather ordinary	Edition Silvertrust	No
No.24, Op.49 1834	8+	Outer movements excellent, finale Presto 1st rate, middle movements good	Kammermusik AG	No
No.25, Op.50 1834	8-	Concerto writing for 1st violin in 1st movement. Marvelous scherzo	Kammermusik AG	No
No.26, Op.52 1835	8	Typical 1st rate Onslow-esque Minuetto. Satisfying finale	No	No
No.27, Op.53 1835	7-	1st movt very difficult ensemble-wise to put together. Scherzo a 10, Finale a 6	No	No
No.28, Op.54 1835	7	Very nice 'Prayer' Andante. Brilliant scherzo, another ordinary finale	No	No
No.29, Op.55 1835	10	Technically difficult cello part throughout. Brilliant use of arpeggio in last movt	No	No
No.30, Op.56 1836	10	Needs pro cellist for astounding 1st movt. Finale a knockout, whole qt tour d' force	Edition Silvertrust	ASV-DCA 808
No.31, Op.62 1841	9+	Mendelssohnian scherzo. Top notch Andante cantabile and Finale Allegro vivace	Kammermusik AG	No
No.32, Op.63 1841	9	Lovely cello solo in Adagio with dramatic storm episodes	Kammermusik AG	No
No.33, Op.64 1841	9	Beethovenesque scherzo. Typical exciting 'La Chasse' finale	Rara Avis Sorozat	No
No.34, Op.65 1842	8	Anticipates Wolf's Italian Serenade in finale	No	No
No.35, Op.66 1843	10	Very unusual 1st movt, very brilliant scherzo with dramatic basso trio, great finale	Edition Silvertrust	LP: CCV 1020
No.36, Op.39 1845	8	He's heading in new directions. Music of the spheres Adagio Not typical but imp	No	No



The Piano Trios of John Ireland & Wind Trios by Ignaz Pleyel Kasper Kummer, Francois Devienne & Leonardo De Lorenzo

This 2 disk Chandos CD#CHAN 9377-8 is a very welcome addition to the recordings of **John Ireland**'s chamber music. There is, to my knowledge, only one other set which contains all three of his trios. Ireland (1879-1962) although fairly well-known in England, mainly for his songs, is hardly a household word even there. It is only in the last 15 years that there has been any real interest

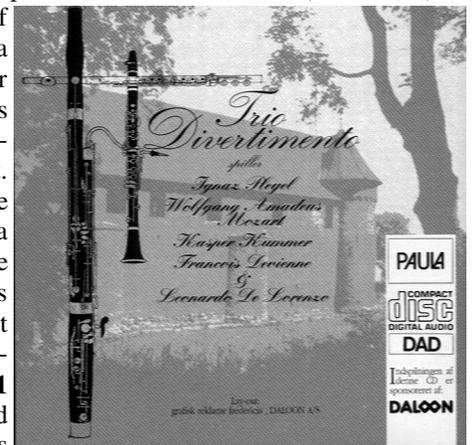


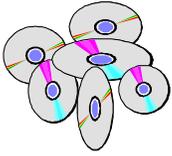
in his chamber music of which there is a fair amount. The first trio, known as **Phantasy Trio**, dates from 1907 and was written for the second Cobbett Chamber Music Competition. (Readers may not be aware of the fact that our namesake, W.W. Cobbett throughout the early part of the 20th Century, in an attempt to encourage young British composers, sponsored competitions which offered prizes for the best works. Works were to be short and in the format of the 'Fancy' or 'Fancie' as favored by 16th Century English composers, especially, Purcell) In the 1907 competition, for piano trios, Ireland's work took 2nd place out of some 67 submitted entries. (Frank Bridge came first) This superb little trio, in one movement, is bright, vibrant, full of wonderful melodies with excellent part writing. It has no particular 'English' sound to it but is more in the stream of Euro-Germanic writing. I do not know why this work is never programmed. **Trio No.2 in e minor**, also in one movement and relatively short, was composed in 1917. It has a melancholy, dejected resignation to it but is not, in my opinion, of a tragic mood. Certainly one does not encounter the savage anger one hears in the music of Shostakovich about WWII. Yet critics saw in this piece Ireland's strong revulsion of WWI. The theme is changed gradually by an extended set of variations. There is a very English, pastoral quality to the music, of a type which is often encountered in his songs. It is imbued with a sense of restlessness. Only toward the end does one encounter some energy of a positive kind. Although the part-writing is good, the music sounds, at times, as if it should have been written for piano and 2 voices. Still, it is an effective work well worth hearing in the concert hall. **Trio No.3** composed in 1938 is dedicated to William Walton. In four movements, (which are not given on the disk) the first movement sounds as if it could have been written by a student of Debussy or Ravel, it is vigorous and perfumed. The second movement is filled with the angular muscularity of Celtic fiddling while a middle section has a lovely somewhat dreamy English folk melody. Then comes a passionate, even at times exotic romance. The finale, in some ways reminiscent of the opening, is strongly rhythmic and full of forward drive. This is a very fine work which, it goes without saying, ought to be in the repertoire.

From Denmark comes a group which has called itself, Trio Divertimento. They are a flautist, a clarinetist and bassoonist. On this Paula CD #84 they present works for this combination by five composers, four of whom are either little known or unknown. (The fifth is Mozart) First up is **Trio Concertante No.2 in C by Ignaz Pleyel**. Pleyel (1757-1831) was a student of Haydn's and subsequently a well-known Parisian music publisher and piano manufacturer. (Chopin is said to have been partial to Pleyel's pianos) Pleyel left a massive amount of chamber music none of which has obtained lasting fame or is considered in the first rank although during his life time his works were very popular. The trio recorded here, said to date from 1805 and in 3 movements (Allegro—Romanza, andante—Rondo, allegretto), could just as easily have been written for 2 violins and cello or violin, viola and cello. The jacket notes imply as much. The flute dominates this charming work but the others are given very substantial innings. It does not seem like Pleyel had advanced much past the early 1780's judging from the style of this piece. Next is a work by the onetime famous German flautist, **Kasper Kummer** (1795-1870) His **Trio in F, Op.32** is three movements (Allegro-Andante grazioso-Rondo allegretto). Although it is not clear when this work was composed, the jacket notes point out that his music shows the influence of his contemporaries, Schubert and Mendelssohn. I found the influences of different contemporaries. In the first movement, one can hear early Beethoven as in the Clarinet-Bassoon duos, and in the Rondo, the voice of Carl Maria von Weber adorns this fetching piece. **Francois Devienne** (1759-1803) a contemporary of Pleyel's, also wrote a great deal of chamber music, mostly for winds as he was a stellar bassoonist and flautist. (First bassoonist of the Paris Opera Orchestra and Professor of Flute at the Conservatory. His two movement

(Allegro—Rondo, allegro) **Trio in B, Op.61 No.5** dates from around 1796. Stylistically, it is not further advanced than Pleyel's, yet the music seems to suit winds better. The influence of Mozart and early Beethoven can be felt throughout this graceful, elegant music. The short one movement **Divertimento Brillante, Op.29 by Leonardo De Lorenzo** (1875-1962), an Italian, later American composer and flute virtuoso, is a tour de force composed in several styles from classical to neo-classical. It provides a suitable conclusion to this engaging disk.

The back of the jewel box to Musica Sveciae CD MSCD #510 asks, "How many people have listened to or even heard of Oscar Byström's c minor string quartet in all its classical lucidity or the tonal splendour of Johan Lindegren's string quintet?" Not many would be my guess. Certainly, from an historical standpoint these





Unknown Swedes: A String Quintet by Johan Lindegren & A String Quartet from Oscar Byström



are two interesting works by little known 19th Century Swedish Romantic composers. (Also on disk are some works by Emil Sjögren for violin and piano) The sleeve notes lament how unfair it is that posterity has consigned both Lindegren and Byström to anonymity, claiming they were able to

write imaginative and technically advanced chamber music, but this may be somewhat overstating the case.



Johan Lindegren (1842-1908) was the son of an impoverished farmer from southern Sweden who was never really able to make a living as a composer. For much of his life, he eked out what money he made from directing the chorus of the Royal Stockholm Opera and by composing salon music to order which others signed. Despite his commercial failure, his technical mastery was nonetheless eventually recognized by the Swedish academic establishment and he taught at several schools

including the Royal Conservatory in Stockholm.

The **String Quintet in F** (2 violas) dates from 1870 and may be his only chamber music composition. Published in 1907, it is a massive piece lasting over 35 minutes. In four movements, the opening *Allegro non troppo*, begins in a genial, almost drawing room-like, vein. An exciting, but brief, second theme appears twice. There is a French, rather than German, feel to the music, which on occasion, sounds 30 years ahead of its time. Yet, despite the great wealth of musical ideas, the movement is overly long. However, it does make rather good use of the violas. The following *Romans-Andantino poco allegretto*, though it begins in a pedestrian fashion, turns out to quite unusual and full of atmosphere and bizarre effects. Without doubt, this is the most original writing within the Quintet. While the music does not sound as if it were composed at the piano (as do, for example, Schumann's quartets), there is a certain quality to it which gives the feel of a pianist improvising on a theme one section after another. There are long episodes which are characterized by rapid, flowing—almost florid—violin writing to a somber theme in the lower voices. It is these parts which do not quite sound right as string chamber music. The strange thing is that most of the movement displays very effective writing for strings. The third movement,

Adagio con devosione, is a long, ponderous piece, which is not particularly striking or memorable. The finale, *Allegro vivace*, is full of fugues and other academic devices that show off the composer's technical mastery, but the most important element—the melodic—is sadly lacking any real spirit or originality and as a result prevents the music from standing out in any particular way.



Oscar Byström, (1821-1909), although trained as a musician, early on pursued a career in the military as it was nearly impossible to make a living as a musician in Sweden. Byström's family was well-connected which allowed him to move in aristocratic and royal circles, at one point teaching one of the princesses piano. At first, Byström made his name as a salon pianist and composer of occasional pieces, but around 1850 after meeting Franz Berwald, he attempted more ambitious works, including a piano trio, a piece for cello and piano and two string quartets. For the next 30 years, he was quite active on the Swedish musical scene as a conductor, composer and professor but from 1880 on, he mainly devoted himself to researching and reviving church music.

Byström's **String Quartet in c minor** was composed in 1856, originally in 3 movements. But nearly 40 years later, in October of 1895, on the occasion of his being honored by Sweden's leading chamber music organization, the Mazer Chamber Music Society, with a performance of this Quartet, Byström decided to compose an additional movement, an *Intermezzo* consisting of Swedish songs (or as he called them "cantici svedesi") which he stuck between the second and old third movement. He then rechristened the Quartet with the name Quartetto Svedese. Most Swedish critics have attacked this 'meddling' on the grounds that stylistically, the *Intermezzo* 'destroyed the work's unity.' As a result, the makers of this CD chose to present the Quartet in its original form and then recorded the *Intermezzo* as a stand-alone movement afterward. The opening movement, *Lento-Allegro molto*, features a lovely, lilting melody of a rather relaxed and unrushed nature, despite the tempo suggestion. It is lyrical and effective but sounds more like an *Allegretto* and a middle movement. A *Largo* comes next. The main theme is a vocal melody which sounds vaguely of Stephen Foster. It is repeated several times after brief interruptions by a second theme which is nothing more than a series of dramatic chords rather than a sustained melody. The main subject to the finale, *Allegro quasi presto*, bears some affinity to a theme from one of Beethoven's Late Quartets and feels like a scherzando. This is a unpretentious and charming effort. While in no way a great work and clearly derivative, it is still within its limits, accomplished. Of the two works discussed here, it shows a better understanding of chamber music style. The *Intermezzo, cantici svedesi*, consists of two Swedish folksongs. The first, a kind of Christmas carol, is sung by the 1st violin to pizzicato in the lower voices and is very fetching. The second is clearly a church hymn written in choral fashion. Also very effective. Without doubt, this movement would make a charming encore.