

THE
CHAMBER MUSIC
JOURNAL

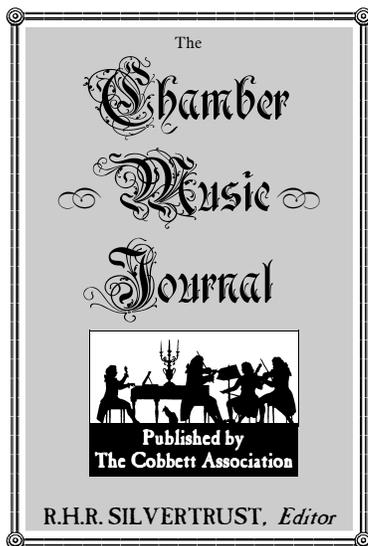
*The Essential Guide
For Players & Listeners
To The Wider World
of Chamber Music*

***Sergei Taneyev's Chamber
Music for Piano & Strings
The String Quartets
Of Robert Simpson
Gounod: Petite Symphonie—
Nonet for Winds***

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The Sounding Board-Letters to the Editor



String Quartets of Pierre Baillot

I was recently invited to play string quartets at a colleague's house. He has a very large collection of old editions and during our session, he pulled out a quartet by one Pierre Baillot. It was quite hard to read as it was at least 100 years old. I had never heard of this composer and my friend did not know too much about him other than he was French and had been a violinist. I enjoyed the music, but I wonder if it has ever been republished. What can you tell me about Baillot.

Gunnar Nilsson
Mexico City, Mexico

Pierre Baillot (1771-1842) was one of the most important violinists in the history violin pedagogy. He was the author of the instructional L'art du violon which had a profound influence on violin technique. He studied the violin with Viotti, perhaps the greatest violinist before Paganini and along with Pierre Rode and Rudolphe Kreutzer was one of the founders of the so-called French School of violin playing. In addition, he was widely regarded as one of the finest touring virtuosos of his time. During his long career, he served as violinist to Napoleon and was was leader of the Paris Opera Orchestra. While most of his music was for the violin, he did write three string quartets and fifteen string trios. His three string quartets, Op.34, were composed in 1823. While they are not Quatuor Brillants (a vehicle for the first violinist) as are the string quartets of Rode and Kreutzer, nonetheless, the writing for the other three voices rarely rises above an accompaniment role. Though supposedly influenced by the German school of composition, it is fair to say that by comparison to the quartets being composed by Onslow, the part writing of Baillot's quartets are old fashioned by at least a generation. The quartets were republished in a new edition about 10 years ago by Erickson Editions. <http://home.earthlink.net/~ronerick/>

Die Drohende Gefahr by Anton Csermak

I recently played a very strange string quartet published by Verlag Doblinger called the Die Drohende Gefahr by Anton Georg Csermak. His dates were given as 1774-1822. It was in 10 movements, each had a title. The first was "The Threatening Danger" (Die Drohende Gefahr). The second movement was entitled "Recovery from the Danger." The third was called "The Nobility Mounts". Then came "Taking Leave of Wives and Sweethearts, Arousing Heroism in the Nobles." After this came "Embracing the Family", followed by "Marching Off", "Diversion in the Camp, Ver-

bunkos, Slovak and Wallach Dances", "The Call to Battle", "Couriers Arrive, News of Victory is Made Known by the Sound of Trumpets and Drums", and finally, "Entrada, at which the Musicians Become Drunk in Their Joy." Clearly one of the weirdest pieces I ever played. Unfortunately, Doblinger gives absolutely no information whatsoever about this work. I have never heard of the composer and this strange music.

Jack Reilly
Phoenix, AZ

Anton Csermak's place and date of birth are not known and even his origins are unclear. Born somewhere in the Habsburg Empire, his last name is of Slovak origin while his given names are German, leading to the conclusion that he came from one of the many Slavic families that became Germanicized. It is known that he was working as a violin teacher in Vienna in 1790 and by 1795 had emigrated to Pest where he lived from then on. There, he served as leader of the Royal Theater Orchestra. Die Drohende Gefahr string quartet was composed in 1809 and the threatening danger refers to Napoleon's invasion and a French attack at the Hungarian border which put the Hungarians to flight. The victory was administered by the Austrian Archduke Charles in 1809 at Aspern, one of the few Napoleon suffered. The Verbunkos was originally a stirring Hungarian folk dance, played by military bands as recruiters passed through towns. About this time, the Verbunkos was adopted by Hungarians as the new national style of music—some of Liszt's Hungarian music is based on the Verbunkos.

More Humorous Chamber Music

With regard to Bill Smith's letter in the last issue of *The Journal* asking about humorous chamber music, there are some others which were not mentioned in the editor's reply. These include several works of chamber music by Peter Schickele, also known as P.D.Q. Bach with which I have had great success as to laughs. The Sonata for Viola 4 Hands is an easy one. It only needs two players, one viola, 2 bows and a hacksaw (!). Another good one is the Schleptet, a takeoff on Beethoven's Septet. The Schleptet is great fun, but needs some rehearsal time as well as seven people. It is a scream for the audience as well as the players. Sid Curtiss
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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SERGEI TANAYEV'S CHAMBER MUSIC FOR PIANO & STRINGS

by Robert Max



Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915) remains the great unsung master of Russian chamber music composition despite an increase in the number of concert performances and recordings of his music during the past decade. No one who knows his music well questions his contrapuntal skills, which are on a par with those of the very greatest composers and I think that his melodic skills, which sometimes come in for criticism, are perfectly in tune with the task in hand. His melodies are lyrical and engaging and prove ripe for the kind of motivic development at which he was so adept. In this respect his melodies might be compared with Beethoven's. In his greatest works he constructs the most startlingly original forms which constantly excite and delight and this is intricately linked to his sensitivity to the colouristic effects produced by different keys and harmonies.

Taneyev studied composition at the Moscow Conservatoire with Tchaikovsky and performed Brahms' D minor Concerto under Nikolai Rubinstein's baton while still a student at a time when the work was unknown in Russia. He was one of the most important pianists of his era, giving the first Russian performance of many of Tchaikovsky's works, including the First Piano Concerto, and was also noted for his performances of music by Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms.

After Tchaikovsky resigned from the Conservatoire in 1878, Taneyev joined the staff, later teaching composers including Glière, Medtner, Rachmaninov and Scriabin. He was Director from 1885 but after relinquishing the post in 1889, he continued to teach counterpoint until his resignation from the institution in 1905. He remained a close personal friend and confidant of Tchaikovsky, even if his frank opinions were not always welcomed, and he had an often uneasy relationship with the *Moguchaya Kuchka* (Mighty Handful), who he regarded as dilettantes.

(Continued on page 4)

The String Quartets of Robert Simpson

By Dr. Edward Green

In an eloquent talk, available—with musical illustration—on Dunhelm Records, the noted British musicologist Malcolm MacDonald, in cheerful defiance of academic opinion, declares Robert Simpson the creator of the finest body of string chamber music in the 20th century. To those who have taken time to weigh the evidence, MacDonald's opinion is surprisingly persuasive. At the very least, it is no embarrassment to place him with Bartók, Shostakovich, and Carter. For Robert Simpson (1921-1997) was an important and unjustly neglected composer—with a unique and vital approach to tonality, rhythm, and the problems of musical form.



He is perhaps most famous for his symphonies, and I'll just comment just briefly on this fact before moving on to the quartets. Simpson wrote eleven symphonies, including one funded by—of all organizations—the Rex Foundation, which administers the charitable fund of the Grateful Dead. And Simpson, for whom Beethoven, Nielsen, and Bruckner were musical idols (he wrote engaging books on all three) is certainly no rocker!

Meanwhile, the *Ninth Symphony* (1987) can serve as a useful beginning point to see how audacious Simpson was as a composer. It is possibly the longest orchestral work ever written with a single, unvarying underlying pulse. It is just one movement in design, yet 50 minutes long.

Simpson's approach, in a sense, is the reverse of that taken by Elliott Carter. Through metric modulation, a constant flux and superimposition of various tempi, Carter strives to make a one of speed and slowness, with an emphasis always upon flexibility—upon *souplesse*. Simpson, by contrast, finds within an unyielding beat all the drama he needs of fast and slow, steady and spasmodic, tranquil and agitated, subtle and blunt rhythms. Violent, the music certainly can be; but there's also calm: that singular pulse provides a unifying principle in the midst of all that diversity.

(Continued on page 8)

Charles Gounod

Petite Symphonie for Wind Nonet

by Jean-Luc Belcoir

In the last issue of *The Journal*, I wrote about Vincent d'Indy's Septet for Winds, *Chansons et Danses*, which was composed in 1898 and which had come into being as the result of a commission from the famous Parisian flutist Paul Taffanel, founder of the Société des instruments à vent, probably the most influential late 19th century European organization for wind instruments. Monsieur Taffanel and his Société are also to be thanked for Charles Gounod's nonet for winds, the *Petite Symphonie*, the subject of this article.

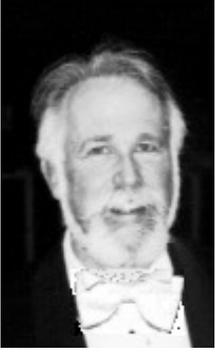
Both of these works epitomize the changing nature of late 19th century French music. After Berlioz's death (1869), many of the younger generation of French composers fell under the influence of Wagner, strange though it may seem today. Surprisingly, this influence did not manifest itself in French opera, but rather in instrumental music and the genre of the art song. Yet, simultaneously, at the very zenith of Wagner's influence, came a renewal of interest

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At The Doublebar



Once again, we are fortunate to have had three excellent articles submitted to us and I wish to thank Dr. Edward Green as well as Robert Max and Jean-Luc Belcoir.

I have been fortunate in having had the opportunity to have played Taneyev's Piano Trio, Piano Quartet and Piano Quintet and can certainly vouch for the fact that they are important works well-worth getting to know.

As for Gounod's *Petite Symphonie*, being a string player, I will never have the chance to play it, but I own two recordings and have heard it several times. It is an attractive work and I would think that wind players would do well to make its acquaintance even though it takes a bit of organizing to get nine people together.

Robert Simpson's string quartets, I cannot claim to have played or have heard, although I had heard of them. But like the works of so many other contemporary composers, I arbitrarily made the assumption, after reading perhaps a paragraph here and there, or hearing a work on the radio, that most likely Simpson was a serial composer and that his quartets probably would not be very appealing to me some like me, who holds the opinion that there is no reason why modern music cannot be tonally attractive. Hence, I felt little motivation to explore these works. But after reading Dr. Green's excellent exposition, I now want to find out more for myself and will be getting the music as well as obtaining recordings.

We sent out renewal notices with the last issue of *The Journal* and most of you have promptly responded. In the past we sent out three renewal notices before stopping your subscription. As a result, some took nearly a year to renew by which time it was time to renew for the following year. This led to considerable confusion so we are now only sending two notices. Therefore, if you have not yet renewed, this will be your last issue and you will not receive any further reminders.—Ray Silvertrust, Editor

SERGEI TANAYEV'S CHAMBER MUSIC FOR PIANO & STRINGS

(Continued from page 3)

His most important chamber music was written towards the end of his life between 1900 and 1912 and this includes his Trio for violin, viola and tenor viola, the fourth and sixth String Quartets, a Quintet with two violas and a further Quintet with two cellos. It also includes the three mighty works for piano and strings: The Piano Trio in D Major, Op.22, the Piano Quartet in E Major, Op.20 and the Piano Quintet in g minor, Op.30. All these works are towering masterpieces in which his complex and original thinking is matched by remarkable melodic and formal inspiration.

So why is his greatest music not better known? It is perceived as being complicated and technically demanding, belonging more in concert performance by professionals than in informal exploration by amateurs. But chamber works by Beethoven, Brahms and Schubert are no less challenging and I have worked with many capable amateur and student groups whose members adore playing his music. The more players and listeners delve into his music, the more they gain from it. That the treasures contained within have to be painstakingly teased out is something to celebrate. It is one of the facets that links otherwise disparate works of art.

Another reason for this neglect may be the lack of information written in English about the composer and his music. He receives no mention in Alec Robertson's 1957 *Chamber Music* or Athol Page's 1964 *Playing String Quartets*. Aulich and Heimeran's 1936 *The Well-Tempered String Quartet* grants him four lines in a volume of 154 pages. More recently Francis Maes interestingly subjective *A History of Russian Music* grants him one paragraph in a huge book that runs to 427 pages. The earliest significant article I found on my shelves is in Alfred Swan's 1973 book *Russian Music* where Taneyev's life and work is discussed over four pages. Since then David Brown wrote an excellent article in the 1980 New Grove and most important of all, the late Richard Beattie Davis has written a uniquely perceptive article in *The Beauty of Belaieff*, published in 2008. This is a truly staggering book that I cannot recommend highly enough, available from www.gclefpublishing.com. The Russian musicologist Victor Mikahilovich Belaieff (who was not related to the publisher Mitrofan Belaieff) wrote the article on Taneyev's chamber music in Cobbett's 1930 Cyclopedic Survey. He writes in a positive tone and in some detail about the string chamber music works but lacks insight into the works with piano, which are dealt with in just three paragraphs. His occasionally inaccurate summary was, I suspect, truncated and recycled by Maurice Hinson in his 1996 volume *The Piano in Chamber Ensemble*. If so many of the experts either ignore or fail to understand Taneyev, what hope have the rest of us?

Belaieff published all of Taneyev's works from the 1896 Op.5 until the **Piano Quartet in E, Op.20** in 1907 (plate no. 2712). The dedicatee, Julius H. Block, brought the first Edison phonograph to Russia in 1889. He was a businessman and amateur pianist and recorded many notable artists on his new machine including Taneyev in 1895 playing Mozart's C minor Fantasy. My first encounter with the chamber music works including piano came when my Barbican Piano Trio read the Piano Quartet out of curiosity during a rehearsal of other more familiar pieces. We were blown away by the explosive beginning of the first movement *Allegro brillante* which is one of the most exciting opening statements in the chamber music repertoire. I cannot believe that Alfred Swann, whose book is generally perceptive, encountered these bars before writing "*One waits in vain for a touch of the unreal or mysterious—for a startling row of chords, or a volcanic rhythm*". A procession of dotted rhythms and trills in c sharp minor build up, bursting radiantly into E Major for the euphoric first theme of the movement. This comes firmly to a full stop and then the strings reflect on the opening, gradually adding new motifs and melodies. After drawing spine-tingling conclusions in E flat Major, the preparation for the "second" subject begins delicately in A flat Major with fragmentary ideas passed around between the instruments in subtly juxtaposed tempi. The second tune arrives in B major leading towards a concluding melody at which includes material from the fragmented ideas before. The codetta opens with a most extraordinarily complex and beautiful phrase (fig.25 see example at top of page 5), with brilliantly interweaved harmonies and motifs and concludes with a statement of the first theme in B Major. In the develop-

ment the dotted rhythm of the opening skips through a succession of keys on a fantastical journey, leading to a full-blown argument. The recapitulation is preceded by a splendid build-up and leads towards another broad statement of the main theme, now in E flat, followed immediately by its restatement in E Major that leads breathlessly into the cascading chords that round off this stunning movement.

Taneyev employs one of his favourite devices in the second movement—the combining of two movements into one—in this case a slow movement *Adagio più tosto largo* and an *Allegro Agitato* scherzo. The touching violin melody that opens the movement bears some resemblance to the rather more famous *Blue Moon* by Richard Rogers, but note that the music to the song was not composed until 1934. This tune then weaves among the other instruments before the scherzo bursts in. It is brilliantly scored and features nervously racing compound-time rhythms. The opening melody is soon weaved into the scherzo and the Adagio's calm is recovered, the melody now soaring high up the viola's fingerboard. The music that comes next (fig.102 example on right) is one of the most extraordinary passages I know in the whole chamber music literature—the richness of sound Taneyev creates is quite unprecedented, and it is this texture that the composer recreates for the overwhelming C Major conclusion to the movement. (example on right)

The *Finale, Allegro molto* starts by displaying Sonata tendencies, with edgy, dancing melodies, a clearly defined contrasting subject and significant structural pauses. Taneyev's mastery of counterpoint can be seen in this

short excerpt (fig.139 example on right) where canonic imitation is combined with augmentation. But Taneyev has a much bigger plan in his mind and this becomes clear where he announces that the time is now ripe for a fugue, whose theme is to be played *quasi tromba*. The finale's main theme is the subject and finds itself stated, answered, inverted and augmented in both lyrical and angular guises until it reaches a final *Largamente* unison statement, followed by recalcitrant grumblings in the cello. The passage that follows is astonishingly beautiful and is marked with a touchingly apt marking *Moderato seraphico*. Spirits of the melodies of the preceding movements are summoned by each instrument in turn, the music taken onwards and upwards (featuring harmonics) to a heavenly conclusion in the stratosphere. I think that V. M. Belaiev is wrong when he writes "the first and third (movements) are written in sonata form on somewhat analogous lines", but correct when he observes that it is "a remarkable work". This is one of the very greatest works ever written for piano quartet.

The **Piano Trio in D, Op.22** was published by Jurgenson in 1908 (plate no.32579) and was republished by Anton J. Benjamin in 1928 (plate no.8934). Jurgenson had previously published the first works of Taneyev's to appear in print back in 1880. The trio was dedicated to the composer Alexander Gretchaninov, and Taneyev was awarded the fourth prize of 500 roubles for this work in a competition in memory of Glinka organised by Belaieff in 1908. In this work the composer aptly aims for a more transparently classical sonority than in the piano quartet which proves appropriate to the more intimate size of the group.

The tonal structure of the first movement *Allegro* is less complex and the formal structure of this movement is concise enough to include an exposition repeat. The movement is in brisk triple time and includes strongly pointed motives, lyrical melodies, some extraordinary cross-rhythms but studiously avoids any suggestion of a waltz. By sidestepping the expected moment of recapitulation after the development section Taneyev allows the movement to come full circle at its conclusion where the opening theme makes a triumphant final appearance.

The *Allegro molto – Tema con variazioni – Tempo del commincio* which follows is another example of one movement containing two largely self-contained movements within. The opening Scherzo in duple time is dark and demonic with an anger that struggles to burst free of the forces that restrain it. After a lyrical theme emerges accompanied by a slithering motif until a return of the opening storm heralds what my ensemble affectionately calls the "car-crash" (fig.72 example on left) before the music slides effortlessly into a

Theme and Variations based upon a completely new theme. The first variation is where accompanying triplets flow into accompanying semiquavers. The ensuing variations are by turn skittish, stormy, full of sentiment, and exaggeratedly loud or soft. The *Andantino* variation is one of Taneyev's Brahmsian moments, neatly complimented by a twist of Saint-Saens and includes a brief recitative for the cello. The following variation leads back into the reprise of the scherzo, which eventually disappears in a distant puff of smoke reminiscent of Baba Yaga in Liadov's atmospheric tone poem.

The third movement, marked *Andante espressivo*, is a solemn ballad in F Major that starts as a dialogue between the violin and cello. The second tune in B Major is presented by the piano and emerges in D flat Major when it reappears before the end of the movement, settling on a dominant A Major for the violin cadenza that leads directly into the *Finale: Allegro con brio*. This movement feels to me like a sort of Rondo, with reappearances of the theme, but the episodes in between give the impression of something more complex. The last occurrence of the theme, after a piano cadenza that mirrors the violin and cello cadenzas of the previous two movements, is the beginning of a whirlwind coda that incorporates the opening music of the first movement and brings the work to a brilliant conclusion. We have found that this wonderful trio excites even the most conservative of audiences and without doubt deserves to feature regularly in concert programmes.

The **Piano Quintet in g minor, Op.30** is the last work to be explored in this article. It was published by Kusevitsky's Edition Russe de Musique in 1911 (plate no.R.M.V.115) and was dedicated to the composer Georges Catoire. Although V. M. Belaieff describes it as "*the crowning glory of the works with piano*" I think that it pays the work its due by describing it as fully equal in stature to the Piano Trio and Piano Quartet. As in many of his other first movements, the *Introduzione: Adagio mesto – Allegro patetico* starts in the "wrong" key, in this case e flat minor, Taneyev's grasp of the effect tonality has on structure is already at work. The music of the first few bars glides effortlessly through b minor, F Major, D major and f sharp minor before the phrase repeats in d minor, as if struggling to find the "correct" key. The third attempt is in a flat minor, which turns out to be an especially significant key throughout the movement and this leads into the Allegro which starts with an extended, angular and impassioned melody in which the music is at last in g minor. The lyrical second tune is played by the piano in A flat Major and repeated by the whole group. The music immediately shifts to B Major and its relative g sharp minor and then there is a development section of epic proportions. A flat minor returns significantly in the reprise, its Neapolitan colours. But Taneyev is keen to avoid any feeling of comfort at the recapitulation and offers it over a tolling dominant pedal that lasts for seventeen bars. The second subject returns in the expected key of B flat, significantly reappearing in A flat Major shortly afterwards ready for the shift back to the home key. In the coda Taneyev resurrects the tolling dominant pedal, this time lasting twenty bars, before g minor is re-established unequivocally in the *più mosso* coda.

The *Scherzo: Presto* that follows is a self-contained movement in E flat that marches along with some entertaining ricochet bowing. Ridiculously fast violin semiquavers sound like a cross between

Grieg's Peer Gynt played at a "fast-forward" tempo and a riotous hornpipe. The trio section marked *moderato teneramente* is in G Major, its consolatory song-like melody subsequently shared between all the instruments. The scherzo returns and there is a *prestissimo* coda that contains the semiquaver music mercifully converted into triplets, but still at the limits of playability. After a final recollection of the trio section the movement trips to its conclusion.

The *Largo* is a noble passacaglia in C Major based on a descending scale. After initially starting on the wrong note and taking twice too long to find itself, the bar of music is repeated without modification thirteen times while the upper voices spin a web of ever more elaborate counterpoint. The passacaglia theme itself is then modified before the music eventually modulates to the dominant. The inversions, augmentations and further modulations that take place are staggeringly intricate and beautiful. The music returns to the key of C ready for another sixteen repetitions, the seventeenth and final repetition causes the notes to get further and further apart until they vanish completely. This passacaglia certainly has a serious side but it is not without humour. In this noble movement Taneyev has succeeded quite as well as Brahms and Britten did in breathing fresh life into a form that was over two hundred years old.

The *Finale: Allegro vivace* makes its serious intentions clear from the outset, setting the piano against the strings in pithy and argumentative commentary. The pounding quavers in c minor might recall Brahms' c minor piano quartet, but Taneyev's own way with melody asserts itself immediately and the textures remain crisp throughout. The opening theme of the first movement is brought into the fray in g minor. Hard on its heels, the same movement's glowing second subject is pitted against the finale's angular semiquavers, now in the key of E flat and recalling the racing semiquavers of the scherzo. The same theme reappears in G Major, now heroic in character and played on all instruments except for the viola and piano who struggle on valiantly with semiquavers. The final culmination pits the piano and first violin against the rest of the group, who are now creating an outrageously huge sonority with multiple double-stopping leading to the final triumphant G Major chords that bring the work to its magnificent conclusion.

If you would like to listen to recordings of these works, I can of course recommend our Barbican Piano Trio recording of the Piano Trio and Quartet on Dutton CDSA6882. The Mendelssohn Piano Trio has recorded the same two works on Centaur. There is a fine recording of the Piano Trio and Piano Quintet by Pletnev/Repin/Gringolts/Imai/Harrell on Deutsche Grammophon. The Trio is also recorded by The Trio di Torino on Realsound. The Piano Quartet has been recorded by the Ames Piano Quartet on Dorian.

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The String Quartets of Robert Simpson (continued from page 3)

Allegro vivace e grazioso (♩ = 56)

opening of *Quartet No. 2*, written in 1953. (example above)

Or, thirty-six years later, the opening of *Quartet No. 13* (1989, example on right). This is modern music, quite clearly. At the same time, it is music unashamed of its heritage, the great classical tradition of quartet writing. Often with Simpson one senses a beautiful rapprochement between the late twentieth century and the late eighteenth. Not an ironic pastiche, mind you, but a true junction—where the best musical values of each period are honored simultaneously. In fact, Simpson is one of the very few 20th-century advocates of the kind of extended Scherzo which Beethoven innovated. More than half of his quartets have a movement written in that spirit.

Simpson's fifteen quartets—the earliest from 1951, the last, 1991—are diverse in both form and content. And all are powerfully emotional. Some, for example, reflect his commitment to

Tranquillo (♩ = c. 56)

"In reality, opposites are one: art shows this"—wrote the great American philosopher Eli Siegel, the founder of Aesthetic Realism. And the truth of that statement is blazingly supported by the work of Simpson. I have just mentioned some of the opposites which are brought together in his music. And I'll mention another pair: his music is filled with passionate, unique, unmistakable and warmly individual feeling, and at the same time it possesses cool objectivity: a kind of "wide vision," and universality.

It is therefore not surprising to learn that one of Simpson's greatest passions was for Cosmology: for a rigorous, scientific sense of the workings of the universe. He was a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society; and in composition after composition one senses a desire to create a contemporary "Music of the Spheres." Moreover, in his writings and interviews Simpson loved to relate questions of musical aesthetics to the ultimate principles guiding the universe.

Now, since I mentioned Carter earlier, let me hasten to add that Simpson's quartets are nowhere near as difficult to play! In general, they pose difficulties similar in degree to those of Shostakovich. And several of them are positively "Haydnesque" in their clarity, joy, and—yes—solid tonal feeling. Consider the

Allegro molto (♩ = C. 72)

Gandhian pacifism. As illustration of this, one can consider his *Tenth Quartet* (1983), which is subtitled "For Peace" and was a response to the aggressive posturing of the Reagan Administration. Incidentally, before turning decisively to music and earning his doctorate under Hubert Howells at Durham in 1951, Simpson was trained in the healing arts—that is, he studied medicine.

As I intimated before, other quartets by Simpson arose from his profound study of the science of astronomy. Their music evolves, one might say, in a manner reflecting the forces of the cosmos: its energy, and its vast time-scale. Here, for example, is the opening of his *Quartet No. 7*, written in 1997 in honor of the centenary of the astronomer Sir James Jeans. (example on left) Later in this essay, I'll look at these opening measures in some technical detail.

Meanwhile, it is fair to say that while Simpson was a "cosmically" oriented composer, the "cosmos" for Simpson was not just grand, massive, and sublime; it was also playful, delicate, and miniature. His *Eighth Quartet* (1979), for example, has a scherzo subtitled *Eret-*

mapodities gillettii—a portrait of a mosquito named after the entomologist who discovered it, J.D. Gillett, to whom Simpson dedicated the quartet. The opening measures of that scherzo can be seen in example on the right.

Molto vivace (♩ = c.96)
(ERETMAPODITES GILLETTI)

During the 1950s and 60s, the heyday of atonal serialism, Simpson was that rarest of modernists: dedicated to tonality, but without relying on facile imitations of the past. His sense of tonality, in fact, could at times be ferociously dissonant and demanding. Technically, he worked with a principle that Stravinsky—in relation to his own late work—once called “pure interval music.”

Said Simpson, in a conversation with music journalist Bruce Duffie: “I try to see what kind of energy can be got from the differences between, say, the 4th and the 5th, and the 3rd and the 7th, and all the intervals between the notes. They create resonances which created tonality in the first place; and there are new ways of looking at that....It’s a question of deriving [musical] energy from the actual sounds themselves, from the intervals.” As you could see in the last score sample, that “mosquito scherzo” was, to a large degree, a study in the interplay of 5ths and 2nds.

I ought also to mention that along with his quartets, Simpson also wrote a *String Trio* (1987) and two *String Quintets* (1987 and 1994) in addition to various other chamber pieces in which strings join with instruments of other families: for instance, his *Quintet for Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, and String Trio* of 1983. These pieces, fine as they are, are not the subject, however, of this essay.

As to Simpson, himself, he was a man of noticeably strong opinions, unwilling to bend to prevailing winds, political or musical. For most of his adult life, he was employed as a producer for the BBC. But when, just months before his scheduled retirement, the Thatcher government decided to cut brutally the number of orchestral musicians employed by the network, while simultaneously expanding the military budget of the UK, Simpson was outraged. His friends advised him to keep quiet. Instead, he led a very public protest, the result of which was dismissal from the BBC and the complete loss of his hard-earned pension. In 1986, he left England for good, relocating to Ireland.

Meanwhile what makes a musician a true “musician” is not his politics, or his personal courage (however fine they may be), but his artistry with sound, his ability to do what Eli Siegel explained so clearly—to show, through the medium of art (and for musicians it is sound-in-time), what is true, permanently true, about the world itself. Ultimately, beauty and truth support each other, and an authentic composer has to be able to organize sounds in such a manner that the world’s opposites are present in that sound—present coherently, engagingly, beautifully! In a word, a true composer must have a true technique: as deep and as solid as the world itself.

With all this in mind, let me turn now to some technical matters. Simpson was, arguably, the greatest 20th century master of the fugue, as well as various more arcane forms of counterpoint. (And counterpoint is, by its very nature, a way of expressing reality’s opposites; a way of showing how many different things can function together as one; how disagreement can also be agreement; how independence of voices can also be mutual dependence.)

His *Ninth Quartet* (1982), for example, is a set of 32 variations and fugue on a theme of Haydn; and each variation is designed, as was Haydn’s minuet, as a perfect palindrome. (The minuet is from *Symphony No.47*). Even Webern never attempted mirror-composition on so far-reaching a plan.

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

Here is Variation IV, whose palindrome is quite easy to hear, since the four members of the quartet all play the same line. For that reason, I present only the first violin part: (Example on right)

IV Poco più mosso (♩ = c. 96)

The concluding fugue is a study in sustained momentum. Growing ever faster over nearly 13 minutes, it ends with an exhilarating vortex of sound, a coda in which the tonic G acts increasingly as a “black hole,” a “singularity”, pulling everything towards it until all the other pitches are gone. An awesome moment, with no true parallel in chamber music literature—especially when one realizes that the work as a whole is nearly an hour long, and is entirely continuous.

ALLEGRO MOLTO (♩. c. 88)

It is worth noting that nearly every one of Simpson’s fifteen quartets has its own unique design, in terms of number of movements and their tempi. The opening set of three quartets, for example, was written in the early 1950s, and was designed as one single large “arch” of music—even as each quartet by itself is perfectly satisfying to play and hear. *Quartet No.1* is in two movements, allegro and andante; *Quartet No.2* is in a single movement, and *Quartet No.3* reverses the design of the first by being again in two movements, but now adagio and allegro deciso.

5

A very different aspect of Simpson can be seen in his next trio of quartets. At various points in his career, he was an advocate of what could be called “composition by appreciation.” I offer this example: between 1973 and 1975 (twenty years after his initial set of three), he wrote, as his *Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Quartets*, a trio of inventive paraphrases (*analogies* might be the better word) of the Razumovsky quartets. See if you can’t sense, hovering behind these two incipits, the Beethovenian originals: (Example on left) Yes—Op. 59, No.2, its opening gestures re-imagined. That was Simpson’s *Fifth Quartet*.

Now, examine the example the on right. This is how his *Fourth Quartet* opens, and, of course, this is inspired by Beethoven’s Op. 59, No.1. And the internal design of these three quartets mirror, as one might expect, movement-by-movement, what Beethoven did both as to tempi and form.

ALLEGRO (♩. c. 12)

5

As I mentioned, twenty years separate the first two groups of quartets. But once Simpson returned to the genre, it seems he never wanted to leave it. He wrote five in the 1970s, five more in the 1980s, and two in the early years of the 1990s.

His *Quartet No.7* (1977) is in a single movement, designed as a large arch: tranquillo, vivace, and tranquillo. *Quartet No.8* (1979) is in four movements, but not the “standard” classical form, since the opening is marked “grave,” and the scherzo is placed second rather than third among the four movements. *Quartet No.9*, as I earlier indicated, is a grand study in variation and fugue.

10

With *Quartet No.10*, we reach the 1980s. It is from 1983, and for its design two large outer movements framing a short scherzo, with the opening movement an allegretto, and the third movement a “molto adagio.” *Quartet No.11* again sees the composer interested in single movement/single pulse form—but in this case there are four obvious sections within: an opening allegro, an adagio, a presto, and then a concluding “molto adagio pianissimo.” Incidentally, this quartet is also strongly reminiscent of Beethoven—his Op.95; but unlike the earlier “Razumovsky Quartets” of Simpson, this is not a case of direct modeling, but just of strong family resemblance and “influence.” Here are its opening measures. (example on right)

The image shows the first eight measures of a quartet score. It is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo), *sf* (sforzando), *pizz.* (pizzicato), and *arco* (arco). The Violoncello part starts with a *pizz.* marking and a *ff* dynamic. The Violin I part starts with a *ff* dynamic and a *pizz.* marking. The Violin II and Viola parts also start with *ff* dynamics. The score shows a variety of rhythmic patterns and articulations, including accents and slurs.

Nearing the end of this survey of the Simpson quartets, it is worth noting a surprising fact about them, namely their conservative use of string technique. There is hardly anything in them of a “20th century” nature—no glissandi, col legno battuti, or odd scordaturas. In fact, hardly even any harmonics; and not that many instances of muting, either! Nearly all of this music is scored simply for normal arco and pizzicato. And yet what varieties of color and texture Simpson invents. Of course, Haydn and Beethoven pretty much restricted themselves in the same way, and no one with a good set of ears ever would say their quartets lack color!

This image shows the continuation of the quartet score from the previous block, covering measures 9 through 16. The instrumentation remains the same: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score continues with various dynamic markings, including *ff*, *sf*, and *pp* (pianissimo). The Violoncello part shows a *pp* marking in measure 16. The Violin I part shows a *ff* marking in measure 10. The Violin II and Viola parts also show *ff* markings. The score continues with a variety of rhythmic patterns and articulations, including accents and slurs.

What remains to be considered are the quartets of the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Quartet No.12* (1987) in two long movements, adagio and “molto vivace,” and—by stark contrast—*Quartet No.13*, written two years later, which is the composer’s most compact work: four movements, played without a break and lasting, in all, only 18 minutes. With *Quartet No.14*, we reach the year 1990. It is, surprisingly enough, the very first of his non-Beethoven modeled works to be in the classical four-movement form. And yet what do we see in his last quartet, *No.15*? Once again, a “three-in-one” design: a single movement with an internal structure of adagio, severo, and allegretto.

Simpson was a tonal composer, but of a distinctly 20th-century frame of mind. A frequent technical feature of his music is progressive tonality, a predilection he shared with the Danish master Carl Nielsen. To give two examples from Simpson: the tonal centers of A and Eb fight it out in his *First Quartet*. In *Quartet No.5*, the dueling centers are C and E. If the customary image of tonality is a circle, with its unified focus, its undisputed central point, then Simpson is a partisan of ellipses—with their dual foci. Nielsen, however, is not the only—or even the primary source of Simpson’s interest in the structural potential of simultaneous tonal centers. Keep in mind his love for astronomy and how it informs his musical decisions. For planets, comets, and pretty much all celestial bodies obey the power of the ellipse. At any given moment, one gravitational source may seem stronger than the other; but both are always in action, however subtly. And so it is, often, with Simpson’s sense of tonality. This makes his music, at times, resemble that of Bartók—tonal, but mysteriously so; dissonantly so. I mentioned earlier his *Quartet No.7*. It is music in which one can see and hear, at once, Simpson’s philosophic concerns, and also his technical mastery. As Lionel Pike, an authority on the music of Sibelius as well as of Simpson, has noted, the composer himself “[drew] parallels between the music of this work and aspects of the universe: quiet and mysterious and yet pulsing with energy.” And Dr. Pike continues: “At first the vastnesses of space are invoked.” Which is true enough; for its opening arch of sound is structured around a series of long-held pedal tones. How quiet, and yet how active this music is; one literally senses space expanding from a center. Please look again at the example at the top of page 9. What are we experiencing as we hear this music? The oneness of perhaps the most ontological of opposites, Stability and Change—Reality as the conjunction of Rest and Motion, presented to the ear through sound. Nor would Simpson be the first composer to sense the musical implications of this dialectic. Stravinsky, in his *Poetics of Music*, writes probingly about the ancient dispute between Parmenides (advocate of the view that reality never changes) and Heraclitus (proclaimer that it is ceaseless in its mutability).

The Russian composer concludes that music must find a way to reconcile these philosophic perspectives. Simpson would agree.

To see how this is accomplished technically, consider the opening 10 measures, during which we encounter the first of the series of pedal tones. That opening D serenely pulses with a rocking motion caused by the alternation of open and fingered strings on the first violin. Soon, the second violin enters, and on the last beat of measure 4 takes this D over—presenting it now in a subtly altered manner: sustained rather than pulsing. Against this newly “quieted” D, the first violin responds by adding a fresh form of energy: spinning out a rising, chromatically-inflected melody. Another ontological pair, Unity and Diversity, is also expressed in the opening portion of this quartet; and with a depth and beauty that only becomes apparent when the score is closely scrutinized. Consider, again, the initial ten measures. Unity, of course, is symbolized in them by the presence of the unchanging pedal tone; diversity by the fact that these same measures encompass the *entire world of chromaticism*. All twelve tones are present.

As a medieval theologian might have said, they are a *plenum*: a symbol of “all that is.” Or as one of Simpson’s astronomical friends might have said: this is a symbol of the universe: it is one thing, and all things! And what happens here at the beginning of the piece, happens throughout: as we meet sustained pedal-tones, we also hear, unfolding against them, the full chromatic aggregate. Nor, may I add, is this the only piece in which Simpson uses this remarkable technique.

In his essays and books, persistently and with great feeling, Simpson wrote of the need for art to be “positive and constructive”—of its need to be “essentially hopeful.” He felt a warm humanism was necessary to the creative mind. Even in his most hard-bitten moods, he was reluctant to give up the idea that reality *is* beauty, and that the job of an artist was to convey that encouraging fact to Humanity-At-Large. I am not saying, of course, that Robert Simpson consciously put it to himself in precisely these terms. It

is Eli Siegel who first stated the full equation of Ontology and Aesthetics; for that matter, of Ontology, Ethics, and Aesthetics. It is why a feeling is growing in the scholarly community that Siegel was the 20th century’s most important and innovative philosopher. But Simpson’s music certainly does point in that direction, as do his scholarly writings. One finds literally dozens of passages in his book and in his essays in which Simpson implies that for music to be effective, moving, valuable, it must put opposites together.

In sum: Simpson’s string quartet cosmos was both vast and intimate; bracingly dramatic, yet playful; carefully-wrought, but audacious; filled with intense passion, yet clear in their logic throughout. It was a musical cosmos deeply respectful of tradition—and at the same time surprising, questing. And it was unique! It is a world of sound—a world of chamber music—that deserves to be far better known.

A List of Simpson’s String Quartets Including

	Year	Time	Publisher	Recommended Recording		
No.1	1951	25’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66419
No.2	1953	15’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66386
No.3	1954	20’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66387
No.4	1973	41’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66419
No.5	1974	44’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66386
No.6	1975	38’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66376
No.7	1977	20’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66117
No.8	1979	31’	Faber	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66117
No.9	1982	58’	Faber	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66127
No.10	1983	27’	Robertson	Coull Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66225
No.11	1984	25’	Lengnick	Coull Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66225
No.12	1987	31’	Lengnick	Coull Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66503
No.13	1989	18’	Lengnick	Delmé Quartet	Hyperion	CDA66905
No.14	1990	34’	Lengnick	Vanbrugh Qt	Hyperion	CDA66626
No.15	1991	18’	Lengnick	Vanbrugh Qt	Hyperion	CDA66626

Dr. Edward Green teaches at the Manhattan School of Music. Besides being a recognized authority on the music of Robert Simpson, he is an award-winning composer and musicologist.

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New Recordings



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

String Quartets

Frank BRIDGE (1879-1941) 3 Novelletten , Cherry Ripe & Sir Roger de Coverley, SOMM 087 / Heinrich von HERZOGENBERG (1843-1900) No.1, Op.18, CPO 777 083 / Alfred HILL (1869-1960) Nos. 3, 7 & 9, Naxos 8.572446 / Erich KORNGOLD (1897-1957) Nos.1-3, CPO 777 436 / Franz KROMMER (1759-1831) Op.7 Nos.1-3, Hungaroton 32623 / Gyorgy LIGETI (1923-2006) Nos.1-2, Naxos 8.570781 / Jose VIANNA DA MOTTA (1866-1948) No.2, New Classical Adventure 60167 / Joly Braga SANTOS(1924-88) No.2, New Classical Adventure 60167 / Dan WELCHER (1946-) Nos.1-3, Naxos 8.559384 / Graham WHETTAM (1927-) Nos.1 & 4, Carducci 5847

Strings Only-Not Quartets

Frank BRIDGE (1879-1941) Rhapsody for 2 Vlns & Vla, SOMM 087 / Eugene YSAYE (1858-1931) String Trio Nos.1 & 2 and Trio for 2 Vlns & Vla, Simax 1295

Piano Trios

Ernest BLOCH (1880-1959) 3 Nocturnes, Claves 50-2912 / Lorenzo FERNANDEZ (1897-1948) Trio Brasileiro, Claves 50-2916/17 / Arthur HONEGGER (1892-1955) Trio in f, H214, Claves 50-2912 / Zhou LONG (1953-) Secluded Orchard & Spirit of Chimes, Delos 2397 / Frank MARTIN (1890-1974) Trio on Popular Irish Folk tunes, Claves 50-2912 / Georges MIGOT (1891-1976) Trio, Atma 2543 / Joachim RAFF (1822-82) No.1 in c, Op.102, Claves 50-2912 / Kurt ROGER (1895-1966) Op.77, Naxos 8.572238 / Cyril SCOTT (1879-1970) Nos. 1-2,

Chandos 10575 / Heitor VILLA LOBOS (1887-1959) Nos.1-3, Claves 50-2916/17

Piano Quartets, Quintets & Sextets

Erich KORNGOLD (1897-1957) Piano Qnt, Op.15, CPO 777 436

Winds & Strings

Kurt ROGER (1895-1966) Clarinet Quintet, Naxos 8.572238 / Cyril SCOTT (1879-1970) Clarinet Quintet, Chandos 10575

Winds, Strings & Piano

Georges MIGOT (1891-1976) Le livre des dancieres for Fl, Vln & Pno, Atma 2543 / Cyril SCOTT (1879-1970) Trio for Cln, Vc & Pno, Chandos 10575

Piano & Winds

None this issue

Winds Only

Filipe da SOUSA (1927-) Wind Quintet, New Classical Adventure 60167

(Continued from page 3)

in chamber music and along with this interest also a preoccupation with a new delicacy of harmony and melody. Gounod and with Cesar Franck, were the first to break away and became the pioneers that paved the way for the works of d'Indy, Debussy and Ravel among others. At the time, Gounod's turning away from the operatic to a more intimate, abstract lyricism was unnoticed. But in light of what came next, it must be viewed as a prophetic step toward the new style of French music. And chamber music was one of the prime catalysts for this change.



Charles Gounod (1818-1893) was born in Paris, the son of a pianist mother and a well-known portrait painter father. He studied with Halévy at the Paris Conservatory and in 1839 won the Prix de Rome. In Italy, he studied the music of Palestrina and other sacred works of the sixteenth century, an interest he retained throughout his life. After returning to France, he began studying for the priesthood, but he changed his mind and went back to composition. His first great success came in

1859 with the opera Faust. Although he wrote several other then successful operas, Faust remains his best-known work. It is said that Fanny Mendelssohn introduced Gounod to Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier of which he was so enamored that he called it "The essential textbook of musical composition". The melody to his world famous Ave Maria was based on a Bach prelude. From 1870 to 1874 Gounod lived in England, becoming the first conductor of what is now the Royal Choral Society. Later in his life, Gounod returned to his early impulses, writing much sacred music and also many songs.

Adagio

As I noted earlier, the *Petite Symphonie* was the result of a commission from the famous Parisian flutist Paul Taffanel, founder of the Societé des instruments à vent. It predates d'Indy's *Chansons et Danses* by 13 years, being composed in 1885. It is scored for Flute, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Horns and 2 Bassoons, and though clearly written with Taffanel in mind, one nonetheless, upon hearing the work, feels that Gounod's affection for vocal music has manifested itself in this beautiful composition. This tendency is especially noticeable in second movement *Andante cantabile* where the flute sings a long, cool melody of Arcadian charm.

Nº 2 - ANDANTE CANTABILE

Andante (quasi Adagio) **SOLO**

The opening movement *Adagio-Allegretto*, begins as a chorale in the Adagio and exploits the blended wind timbres to their richest capacity. (see the example at the bottom of the left column). The opening *Allegretto* has a bucolic lilt to it, heightened by the recurring ornaments in the flute part. Here, Gounod creates a mood painting with Pan-like melodies which bubble forth.

But one should in no way conclude that this is a work that is simple a vehicle for the flute. Far from it, though singled out from time to time, this is not a work for solo flute. Each of the instruments is provided with ample exposure and each carries its own share of the structural weight of the piece as a whole.

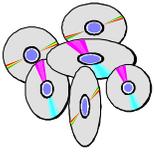
In the opening *Allegretto*, the Oboes and the Clarinets are counterposed and importantly embellish an otherwise simple theme. In the third movement, a celebratory *Scherzo*, the horns lead the way, in a clever movement, which in its way is an updated version of the Classical era's, especially that of Haydn's, witty sense of humor.

The finale, *Allegretto*, is a sublime mix of seriousness and humor. The ensemble writing is as good as anything for this combination. Here, the bassoons, like hounds upon a fox, are loosed upon the others and in their madcap part almost run amok.

The *Petite Symphonie* is a Romantic era take on the divertimento much in the tradition of Mozart or of Beethoven's Septet. One senses that the freshness and clarity, as well as the part-writing, were inspired by these earlier works.

Several recordings are available and the parts and score are available from International Music Company and Edition Silvertrust.

Diskology: Hear Sound-bites to These CD Reviews On Our Website—www.cobbettassociation.org



Felix Draeseke's Three String Quartets

Peter von Winter: A Septet, An Octet & Quartet for Winds & Strings



Felix Draeseke (1835-1913) was born in the German city of Coburg. He began composing at an early age and subsequently entered the famous Leipzig Conservatory where he studied composition with Julius Rietz and piano with Ignaz Moscheles. However, his musical outlook was shaped and influenced by the so-called New German School of which Liszt and Wagner were the leading proponents. He held a number of teaching positions in Switzerland and Germany, eventually settling

in the city of Dresden and a few years later began teaching at the Dresden Conservatory. He wrote in nearly every genre and his works were frequently performed during his lifetime. Liszt was a champion of many of Draeseke's compositions and helped them gain publication. His music was played with some regularity during his lifetime and up until the end of the Second World War, but none of it could be said to have achieved any lasting popularity. As Hans von Bülow, one of his staunchest supporters once wrote, "Draeseke's music is a hard nut to crack". And, indeed, his style does take some listening to get used to. All three of his string quartets are presented on two **AK Coburg CDs # 0011 & 0012**. **String Quartet No.1 in c minor, Op.27** was composed in 1880 and published in 1885. The opening movement, *Allegro risoluto*, is fresh and energetic but soon gives way to a more lyrical, cantabile second theme. Of particular note is a delicate question and answer dialogue between the cello and first violin. Next comes a slow movement, *Largo*, which is filled with lovely melodic themes. A restless and quicker middle section provides excellent contrast. A powerful, thrusting *Menuetto, allegro moderato* follows. The trio section, entitled *Intermezzo*, is noteworthy for the transparency of the writing, which is further enhanced by principally giving the cello the lead. The finale, *Presto con fuoco*, is particularly effective with its exceptionally fine contrast between the passionate, yearning main theme and the almost religious, chorale-like second subject. **String Quartet No.2 in e minor, Op.35** dates from 1886. The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, opens with a very impressive singing theme in the cello. A clear, mellow second theme follows. The second movement, a *Scherzo*, is lively and genial while the trio, with its fine melody, is more serious. The slow movement, *Adagio molto espressivo*, impresses by virtue of its excellent use of tone color and its rich embellishments. The finale, *Allegro molto vivace*, sports a lively theme which is followed by an inspired lyrical melody. Draeseke's third and final quartet—**String Quartet No.3 in c# minor, Op.66**—was composed 1899. The first movement, *Andantino elegiaco*, expresses sadness which is at times interrupted by stormy episodes. The bubbly, sparkling second movement, *Scherzo, allegro spumante*, lives up to its title, while the trio, with its easy tunefulness, provides a soothing contrast. A very expressive slow movement, *Adagio non tanto*, which is tinged with melancholy comes next. Before the finale, Draeseke inserts a graceful *Intermezzo*. The finale, *Allegro risoluto*, begins in a powerful, almost harsh fashion, while the second theme is a lovely cantabile melody. All three quartets are good, if not great, works. The Third in particular requires a few hearings to better

understand the music, but nonetheless is appealing. Certainly they deserve to be heard and played (the music is available). Highly recommended.



Peter von Winter (1754-1825) was born at Mannheim. A child prodigy on the violin, he played in the Mannheim court orchestra and studied with Sallieri in Vienna. In 1778, he became director of the Bavarian Court Theater in Munich at which point he started to write stage works, writing more than 30 operas, most of which enjoyed success in their day and it is for these that he is mostly remembered. However, he did writing a considerable amount of chamber music, including, accord-

ing to Cobbett's Cyclopedica, 8 string quartets, 3 string quintets and the three works recorded on **Orfeo CD#751 101** The first work on disk is the **Septet for 2 Violins, Viola, Clarinet and 2 Horns, Op.10**. It was composed in 1803. Beethoven's Op.20 Septet, which achieved tremendous popularity, may well have served as its model, although the instrumentation and construction of the work are different, perhaps because Winter did not wish to be compared to the great man. Only in four movements, it opens with an *Allegro moderato* which alternates between bustle and tuneful lyricism. A slow movement, *Adagio*, though not so marked appears to be a theme and set of variations on a melancholy subject. A typical *Menuetto* with a ländler trio section comes next. The finale, *Allegretto, rondo moderato*, is a mild polonaise. Though the Septet is pleasing and would make decent dinner music, it is in no way close to Beethoven's work. Next we have a **Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Viola and Cello (WoO)** composed in 1780. It is a relatively short work in three movements, *Allegro, Adagio* and *Polonaise*. Surprisingly, it sounds just as up-to-date as the Septet written some 20 years later and its melodies are better. It is, however, primarily a vehicle for the clarinet, which is more or less treated as a soloist, much in the same way that Weber treats the Clarinet in his Quintet. In its favor, this work is more or less on a par with the Weber. The final work is an **Octet for Violin, Viola, Cello, Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, 2 Horns and Bass ad libitum**, also without opus. According to the jacket notes, it dates from 1813. It is only in three movements, the first, an *Allegro*, being longer than the last two put together. It predates Schubert's Octet and has a different instrumentation and I do not think could have served as model for the younger composer since it sounds so different. The first movement is very orchestral sounding, in the way of a Mozart symphony. The music is lively, the themes are good but exceptional and the overall effect is created by forward motion of the music, which in several places is very effective. The second movement, *Adagio*, is quite short, but makes a rather good impression. The scoring and grouping of the instruments is quite well done. The finale, *Rondo, allegretto*, has for its main theme a catchy folk-dance melody. Each voice is given a chance to take it and shine. Of the three works, the Octet is the best. But, it too cannot be called great. Still, this is a worthwhile CD.

A Piano Sextet & An Octet for Piano, Winds & Strings by Felix Weingartner Jose Vianna da Motta Music for String Quartet



Felix Weingartner (1863-1942) was born in Zara, Dalmatia, today's Zadar, Croatia, to Austrian parents. In 1883, he went to the Leipzig Conservatory where he studied composition with Carl Reinecke. He also studied privately with Franz Liszt in Weimar. Weingartner was one of the most famous and successful conductors of his time, holding positions in Hamburg, Mannheim, Danzig, Munich, Berlin and Vienna, where he succeeded Gustav Mahler as Director of the Imperial Opera.

Despite his demanding career as a conductor, Weingartner, like Mahler, thought of himself equally as a composer and devoted considerable time to composition. He wrote several symphonies, numerous operas, some instrumental concertos, and a fair amount of chamber music, including four string quartets, a piano sextet and a string quintet. Weingartner's style shows the influence of Wagner and combines late Romanticism with early Modernism. It can be said to share a great deal in common with such contemporaries as Richard Strauss and Mahler. On **CPO CD 777 049** we are presented with two very interesting and engaging works. The first is the **Piano Sextet in e minor, Op.33** was composed in 1904. It is a dark, brooding late romantic work written on a big scale for piano, string quartet and bass. The first theme to the opening movement, *Allegro appassionato*, is a powerful, striving subject which dissipates before achieving a climax. Rather it leads to the dramatic second theme which is hopeful and optimistic and sounding rather like the main theme from Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben*. The second movement, *Allegretto*, begins as an intermezzo. The striking main theme is a lopsided, grotesque dance of the marionettes, accentuated by the rhythm. The second subject, in the violins, couldn't be more different—sweet and highly romantic. A third melody is calmer but also lovely. A slow movement, *Adagio*, comes next. Weingartner instructs that it is to be played as if improvising but in tempo. It begins with a long piano introduction which certainly creates the exact mood of a pianist improvising. Gradually, and quite softly, the strings enter, embellishing but not taking center stage from the piano. Finally, the piano fades into the background as the strings begin to rise. This leads to a quicker middle section, followed by a highly dramatic episode. The massive finale is simply titled *Danza Funebre*, with no tempo marking. The pounding introductory measures give no hint of the sad funereal dance which follows. One can almost visualize a procession. From funereal the music moves on to the macabre. The gloom is only lightened briefly in the middle section which has a more elegiac quality. This is an outstanding work. The second work is the **Octet in G major, Op.73 for 2 Violins, Viola, Cello, Clarinet, Horn, Bassoon & Piano**. Whereas there are several piano sextets Weingartner may have examined, had he so desired, before writing his own, certainly this was not the case for his Octet which was completed in 1925. But I cannot say that this is a ground-breaking work in any sense and, in fact, sounds as if it were composed before the Sextet. The opening movement, *Allegro*, when all of the voices take part, sounds rather orchestral, perhaps because of the dense scoring. The music has a mystic air to it but the thematic material is

not all that compelling. The *Andante* which follows begins in funereal fashion. It is a set of variations based on the French folk song, the words to which Weingartner had printed in the parts: "*This is the death that holds my hands in chains / It is the grief for my friend / I die, alas, I die, since you must now go / It is the grief for my friend.*" The melody is nowhere near as sad as you might expect from the above words, but at least the theme is memorable, though the variations are not. The third movement, *Tempo di menuetto*, sounds like it was written about the same time as Beethoven's Septet and not 1925. It sounds strangely out of place. The finale, *Allegro moderato*, begins with a fanfare and then morphs into a spooky, syncopated dance. It is an odd mix of grotesquerie and almost an upbeat humor and is by far the best and most unusual of the movements. While not a bad work, it is not on a par with the excellent Sextet, the parts to which are available from Edition Silvertrust. As for the Octet, even though it is not a bad work, I doubt that I would take the trouble to organize a group to play it even if I had the music. Nonetheless, I give this CD a recommended rating, especially for the Sextet.

Perhaps because I am not a pianist, the name of **José Vianna da Motta** (1868-1948) was unknown to me until I encountered **Numerica CD#1144**. Vianna di Motta was born on the Portuguese



island of Sao Tome. He began piano lessons early and was soon adjudged a prodigy and sent to the Lisbon Conservatory, and later to Berlin where he studied with the Scharwenka brothers, Philipp and Xaver, and then with Franz Liszt in Weimar. Thereafter he pursued a career as a soloist, concertizing throughout the world while keeping Berlin as his base. After 1914, he moved to Geneva and then re-

turned to Lisbon, where he spent the rest of his life teaching and serving as director of the Lisbon Conservatory. Most of his compositions were for the piano, however, this disk presents two string quartets and 2 additional movements for string quartet. None have been published. I usually do not discuss the quality of the performance, as in most cases there is rarely more than one to choose from, and also because the goal of this column is to discuss the music not the performance and performers. However, I feel constrained to note that the performers here are so bad that I venture to say many experienced amateur quartets could do better. The intonation is absolutely atrocious—I would be embarrassed to release a recording this bad. Further, the tempi and interpretations, as best as I could make out, were flawed, which made it virtually impossible for me to judge the quality of what I was listening to. The music appeared to be a bizarre mix of Schumann, Liszt and post Brahmsian tonalities, which at times that briefly bordered on atonality. But this might have been the performers. If this was an effort to create interest Vianna da Motta's string quartet, it failed miserably. No one will want to find out more, whether or not they are worthwhile, although I heard nothing which leads me to conclude that these works should be published. This is one of the worst recordings that I can ever recall hearing. As such, I cannot recommend this CD and hope you will not be tempted, as I was, to buy it.

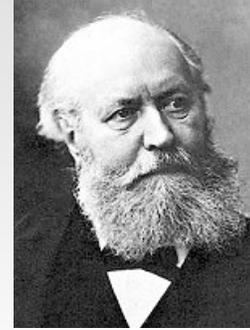
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