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***A Brief Survey of
Piano Quintets with Bass***

***The Chamber Music of
Felix Draeseke***

***Works for String Quartet
by Nikolai Sokolov***

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A Brief Survey of Piano Quintets with Bass

Sandra Minkus

Why do piano quintets which feature the bass get played so rarely. I myself am a bassist and a distant relative of the more famous composer Ludwig Minkus and many has been the time I have wondered about this. But actually, the answer to the question is relatively straight forward, and it is not because there are so few because there are enough for quite a number of evening sessions. No, the answer rests with how any piano quintet comes to be played.

The standard piano quintet, that is to say a piano, two violins, viola and cello usually comes about, at least in amateur circles, because an existing quartet ensemble knows a pianist with whom they would like to play piano quintets. As far as professionals go, it is slightly more complicated. A chamber music society who wishes to hear a piano quintet often will have to pay

more than they normally would for a concert program existing only of string quartets. This is because a pianist must be engaged and paid. Also there is the time the quartet must take away from learning string quartets to learn study the quintet they will be performing with the pianist as well as time rehearsing with him or her. And you never hear an entire program of piano quintets. It is always just one, usually sandwiched between two string quartets. And sadly the same three or four piano quintets are the only ones which ever get presented—those by Schumann, Dvorak, Brahms and Shostakovich. Of course, these are all masterpieces of the literature, but still...The only way this would ever change is if there were a professional touring piano quintet. To my knowledge, there have been none and are none now.

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The Chamber Music Of Felix Draeseke

By Reinhard Walter



Felix Draeseke (1835-1913) was attracted to music early in life and wrote his first composition at age 8. He encountered no opposition from his family when, in his mid-teens, he declared his intention of becoming a professional musician. A few years at the Leipzig conservatory where he studied with Julius Rietz and Ignaz Moscheles did not seem to agree with him because he was won over to the camp of the New German School centered around Franz Liszt at Weimar, where he stayed

from 1856 to 1861. In 1862 Draeseke left Germany and made his way to Switzerland, teaching in Lausanne. Upon his return to Germany in 1876, he relocated to Dresden. However, he was unable to obtain a permanent position and for many years made his living as a piano teacher. Finally, in 1884 that he received an appointment as a Professor of Composition at the Dresden Conservatory which offered him some financial security.

Today, if Felix Draeseke is known at all, it is as an admirer of Wagner. 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. His chamber music consists of three string quartets, a string quintet and a quintet which includes a violetta.

String Quartet No.1 in c minor, Op.27 was composed in 1880 and published in 1885. The opening movement, *Allegro risoluto*, is fresh

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Works for String Quartet

by Nikolai Sokolov

by R.H.R. Silvertrust



Nikolai Sokolov (1859-1922) was born in St. Petersburg and studied at the conservatory there under Rimsky-Korsakov. He became one of several composers, mostly students of Korsakov such as Glazunov and Borodin,

who came to be known as the Belaiev Circle, named after the important Russian music publisher, M.P. Belaiev. These composers dedicated themselves to creating a "Russian School", (i.e. Russian-sounding). Sokolov eventually became a professor at the Petersburg Conservatory where Alexander Tcherepnin and Dmitri Shostakovich were among his many students. He wrote music for the ballet and orchestra as well as chamber music, including three string quartets. Today, if he is known at all, it is for his contributions to a collection of short pieces for string quartet by the composers of the Belaiev Circle. The collection came to be known as *Les Vendredis*, It commemorated the chamber music concerts and

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The Chamber Music of Felix Draeseke *continued from page 2*

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. In my opinion, this is the most approachable of his quartets and the most deserving of attention..

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. It is a decent effort and a work which can still be recommended to amateurs and perhaps to concert audiences.

String Quartet No.3 in c sharp 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. To be honest, amateurs should be warned that this quartet requires a few hearings to better understand the music. Sight reading without doing so will not likely be an edifying experience. Nonetheless it deserves to be heard and played

His String Quintet in A Major for 2 Violins, Viola, Violotta and Cello, WoO25. dates from 1896. The violotta, not to be confused with the baroque instrument of the same name, was developed in the 1890's by a instrument maker Alfred Stelzner. Though played like a viola, it sounded more like a cello in its tenor register. Draeseke became interested in it and wrote this quintet in 1896. Of course, like all other such attempts to create a new string instrument (q.v. the Arpeggione et.al.), it went nowhere and this music would never have seen the light of day if a second cello had not been substituted for the violotta. In 4 movements: Sehr mäßig bewegt, mit Feuer; Sanft bewegt; Scherzo and Frisch und keck, this music is composed in a post-Wagnerian idiom. Tonally rich and superbly executed, it is a fine work

The String Quintet for 2 Violins, Viola & 2 Cellos in F Major, Op.77 dates from 1901. The opening movement Langsam und düster, begins slowly. The yearning tonalities are at times post-Wagnerian. One definitely feels the influence of Beethoven's late quartets and this is true for all of the movements. The following Scherzo is restless and energetic. The austerity of the melodic material keeps the mood on its somber pitch. The third movement, Langsam und getragen, is deeply elegiac. There is a universality to the way the thematic material is presented.

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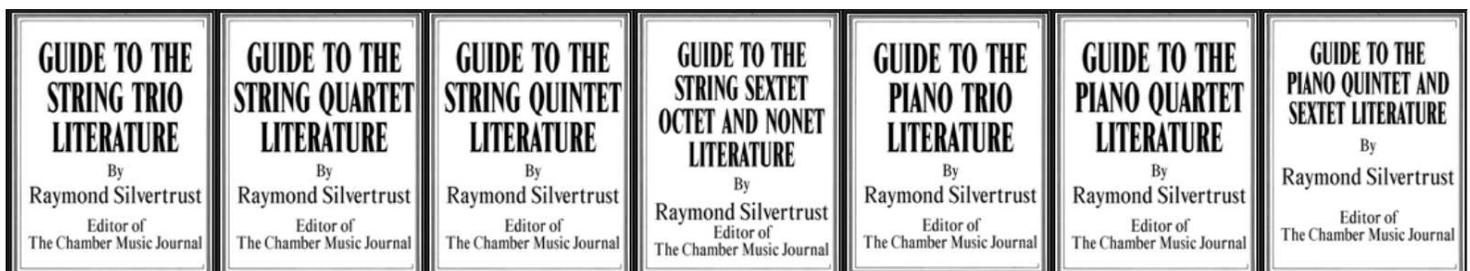
This is a very impressive movement. The finale, *Langsam und düster; rasch und feurig*, begins almost in the same mood as the 3rd movement ends but then brightens, becoming rather jovial. It ends rather gently. Without question the complexity of the thematic material sometimes requires careful listening to grasp. The overall whole requires more concentration to hear. One definitely feels the influence of Beethoven's late quartets and this is true for all of the movements. The following restless and energetic Scherzo is easier to grasp but once again by comparison to the earlier work, it is as if Draeseke did not want to allow himself the luxury of writing a truly rich melody. The melodic material is fairly austere, though somewhat less remote in the slower trio. The third movement, *Langsam und getragen*, is deeply elegiac. There is a universality to the way the thematic material is presented. Whether intentionally or not, again there is a very strong influence of late Beethoven. The melodic material even sounds like it could have been written by him—a very impressive movement. The finale, *Langsam und düster; rasch und feurig*, begins almost in the same mood as the 3rd movement ends but then brightens, becoming rather jovial. Surprisingly it ends rather gently. Although the thematic material is not always easy to immediately grasp. Though there are a few commentators who have called it a masterwork, I rather agree with the assessment by that great chamber music expert and critic Wilhelm Altmann, who writing of this work in Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music: “*The string quintet may be considered his most important chamber work. Truly, Beethoven's Late Quartets are easy to understand, compared with this. In view of its masterly thematic and contrapuntal treatment, the quintet arouses some admiration, but not much intellectual satisfaction, nor the affection that is born of understanding. The composer would have done well to supply a programme with each movement--for here it is clearly a question of programme music. Did he, one wonders, intend to describe his own artistic career, or the dissatisfaction that he was bound to feel at the little interest shown in his creative work outside Dresden? Or was this quintet designed as a musical expression of gloomy pessimism? Be that as it may, the music gives the idea of the fierce struggles of a sullen*

Titan. It makes great demands on the performers, particularly in regard to intonation. The gloomy introduction (Langsam und duster) is brought into the finale--- and that twice over. In the same finale (rasch und feurig) there also appears a theme from the first movement (twice as quick as the introduction). Both the outer movements are stamped with undeniable dramatic power; cheerfulness and light-heartedness venture but timidly to raise their heads. The scherzo seems to represent a kind of witches sabbath. The hero is caught up in a wild orgy; then, in the slower trio, he is approached by pure love, but is past saving. The trio is a really charming inspiration. The slow movement is rhythmically interesting, but is, above all, imbued with the gloomy character of the whole work, which should be frequently played, though it is true that it calls for great mental efforts on the listeners part.”

It may well be said that Draeseke's Quintet for String Trio, Horn and Piano in B flat Major, Op.48 is his finest chamber music work. It was completed in 1888. The opening movement, *Allegro con brio ma non troppo vivace*, begins with a short energetic chordal introduction, perhaps aimed at gaining the audience's attention. The lovely main theme, first heard in the violin, is quite lyrical. We later learn as the work progresses that the chordal introduction is actually a motif which makes its appearance again at the beginning of the finale as well as at other points in the quintet. The opening melody to the second movement, marked *Andante grave*, is not particularly tragic but has a questioning quality. Then comes a heavy march-like, subject with a pounding rhythmic foot-step. Throughout the movement it is interspersed with sweet and singing melodic interludes which provide a strong contrast. The third movement, *Presto leggiero*, is a lively, dance like scherzo. A slower, dreamy trio section provides fine contrast. The finale, *Allegro con brio*, begins with same chordal progression which began the work. However, the main subject, a jovial and buoyant melody which follows is entirely different. The music remains bright and sunny throughout, no cloud darkens the celebratory mood. The work comes to end with an elaboration of the final set of notes from the opening chords. This fine work, one of the very best for this combination,

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The String Quartets of Nikolai Sokolov

banquets which took place most Friday evenings at the mansion of the publisher Belaiev. All of the pieces in the collection were specifically composed for those Friday evening concerts. Over the years, there were literally dozens of such occasional pieces composed. After Belaiev's death, Rimsky Korsakov, Liadov and Glazunov selected what they considered to be the 16 best and had Belaiev's publishing firm print them in two volumes. There are four contributions by him, three in the first volume.

The first piece by Sokolov which appeared in the first volume of *Les Vendredis* collection was titled *Canon* is a rather stodgy but short adagio, is begun by the cello. There is some resemblance between the opening four note theme and a hymn of glorification from the opera of Boris Godunov. Sad to say, it is a rather unremarkable effort.

The third piece in Volume I is the perhaps the best known of the lot, it is the *Les Vendredis Polka*, a collaborative effort by Nicolai Sokolov, Glazunov and Liadov. The tradition of collaboration in Russian music began with Balakirev and the young composers he gathered around himself as he formed the *Mighty Five* with Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Cui and Mussorgsky. They often collaborated each contributing a set of variations or a section to a work. This tradition was continued by Rimsky-Korsakov and the Belaiev composers and more than a few pieces were penned by more than one person. The *Les Vendredis Polka* was apparently hurriedly written on the spot in Belaiev's study while the concert was going on, and then given to him as a surprise present. It is an incredible accomplishment. In three sections, the first by Sokolov, features the viola, Belaiev's instrument, to whom the main theme is given with a filigree accompaniment in the 1st violin against pizzicato in the other voices. It is perhaps the best part of the polka.

The final work in Volume I is also by Sokolov entitled *Scherzo*. It was, according to the composer, based on a theme from *30 Popular Melodies of Lower Brittany*. In the first section, two melodies are used. The first is given out in a long solo by the cello: The first violin then responds with what is really a second melody rather than the second part of the first theme: In Sokolov's setting, while the melodies may have come from Brittany, the music sounds quite Russian. But this does not take away from what is a very effective and, within the context of the *Les Vendredis*, substantial work, the longest in Volume I. Although it is in 3/8, at first it sounds too slow for a scherzo. After a while, the tempo appears to quicken, but actually it is simply a matter of the notes becoming smaller in val-

ue. However the mood does change from wistful to passionate, in an almost violent frenzy. A beautiful, slow middle section, full of Russian Orthodox flavor, follows before the first section is repeated. This work, assuming Belaiev's quartet could manage it, must have created quite a sensation. None of the parts are particularly easy when played up to tempo and, by comparison to the other works in this volume, which make little or no technical demand whatsoever, the music here is technically more challenging.

The fourth and last piece of his which was included in the collection appears in Volume II, entitled *Mazurka*. The music very successfully captures the wistful melancholy of this dance form. The tempo indication is *moderato* and playing the work any faster than a leisurely pace totally destroys the mood and color of this fine miniature. There are basically only two parts to it, a plaint-like call given out by viola:

It is his three string quartets which comprise his best music in this genre and which surely deserve to be heard in concert and enjoyed by amateurs. It is a sad state of affairs when Rimsky Korsakov's second rate works for string quartet have been recorded more than one and not one of Sokolov's far superior works has ever had this privilege.

His *String Quartet No.1* in F Major, Op.7 was composed in 1890 and was published by Belaiev. The main theme of the first movement, *Allegro moderato*, is powerful and richly scored. The second theme is driving and has even more forward motion. The mood of the *Andante* which follows is darkly colored by its sad melody. A lively, bright scherzo, *Allegro*, lightens things up and is complimented by a lovely contrasting trio. The festive main theme of the finale, *Allegro*, is undeniably Russian and full of energy while the second subject is a kind rustic Russian peasant dance. Here is a work which is fun to play, sounds good and makes a good impression.

String Quartet No.2 in A Major, Op.14 dates from 1892 and was published by Belaiev. The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, after a brief introduction, takes off with buoyant melody passed from voice to voice and characterized by its triplet rhythm. The second movement, *Allegro*, is a lively, rustic scherzo, constantly moving forward and with some very interesting use of chromaticism. Next comes a lovely, romantic, song-like *Adagio*. The exciting finale, also an *Allegro*, might almost be called a *moto perpetuo*, relentlessly pressing forward.

String Quartet No.3 in d minor, Op.20 was composed in 1894. The quartet is typical of the writing of the Rimsky Korsakov school in that one is treated to

The String Quartets of Nikolai Sokolov

many fine Russian melodies within the work. The opening movement, Allegro assai, moderato is also marked molto rubato and this constant tempo change creates added interest to what is already a very atmospheric musical canvas. The second movement, Allegretto grazioso, is a typical Korsakovian scherzo, light, charming and full of forward movement and not without lovely lyricism, all topped off with a wonderfully contrasting trio section. Next comes a slow movement, Sostenuto assai, perhaps the most striking of all. Brick by brick, as it were, Sokolov, carefully builds tension, almost imperceptively, to a powerful

dramatic climax after which, slowly and just as carefully, tension is lessened until the music softly fades away in a meditative mode. The finale, Allegro non troppo, is full of life and nervous energy. Then without warning, Sokolov inserts a fugue which begins slowly and softly but, this serves as only a brief contrasting interlude before things are brought to a rousing fini. A first rate work deserving of concert performance and warmly recommended to amateurs.

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If the situation is grim as to the presentation of the standard piano quintet on concert programs by professionals, it is geometrically more grim when one gets to piano quintets with bass, that is to say, a quintet consisting of violin, viola, cello, bass and piano. And this applies to amateurs and professionals.

You will notice that in a piano quintet with bass, one of the violins drops out. So a preexisting amateur quartet group has to uninvite one of its violins which could be awkward, but if it is not a permanent group, it is less of a problem. And, of course, if one has a regular string trio going, then all that needs to be done is invite the pianist and bassist. But when it comes to professionals, the situation is almost insuperable. First off, there are few if any permanent string trios touring. So an existing quartet would have to ask one of its violinists to sit out as well as paying for two outsiders, the pianist and bassist. The result is that you will virtually never hear a piano quintet performed in concert by professional string quartet. I know I haven't. No the only way one will get to hear such a quintet performed live is at a music festival where random musicians can be assembled to create various ensembles. And then, odds are 99.9 out of 100, it will always be the same one—the only one your probably ever heard of—that by Franz Schubert, the famous Trout Quintet.

As disheartening as this is, I am writing this article in the off chance,, small though it may be, that this will encourage readers to explore the literature for piano, violin, viola, cello and bass. Proceeding then in alphabetical order, let us begin, keeping in mind that this is not an exhaustive list of such work but rather a culling of what I consider those most worthy of your attention.



Jan Dussek (Dusek in the Czech form 1760-1812) was one of the first great touring piano virtuosi during the last quarter of the 18th century. He concertized throughout Europe and served as Pianist to the likes of Catherine the Great, whom he was later accused, probably speciously, of trying to assassinate. He also served as pianist for the King of

Prussia, Marie Antoinette and later Talleyrand. While in England, he collaborated with the famous piano maker John Broadwood and encouraged him to extend the piano's range and power. Broadwood's piano with Dussek's improvements was eventually sent to Beethoven and became his favorite instrument. Not a lot is known with whom Dussek studied, however, it is thought he may have studied composition with C.P.E.

Bach

Dussek's **Piano Quintet in f minor, Op.41** dates from 1799. Dussek probably had few if any examples at hand when he wrote a work for this combination of instruments. Neither, Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven had written anything for piano quintet. It is in three movements, opening with an Allegro moderato ma con fuoco. The writing here, specifically the melodies, in many ways anticipates the early romantic composers such as Carl Maria von Weber and Johann Nepomuc Hummel. What is particularly striking is that Dussek on occasion integrates all of the parts rather than massing the strings against the piano. The lovely middle movement, Adagio espressivo, is a theme and set of variations. The finale, Allegretto ma espressivo e moderato, begins with an appealing melody first presented by piano. The music races along effortlessly.



Louise Farrenc (1804-1875 born Jean-Louise Dumont) enjoyed a considerable reputation during her own lifetime as both a performer and a teacher. Her parents were well-to-do— and recognizing her talent on the piano, were able to engage the best artists of the day such as Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Nepomuk Hummel to teach

her piano. Because she also showed great promise as a composer, her parents decided to enroll her when she turned 15, at the Paris Conservatory where she studied composition with Anton Reicha. She married Aristide Farrenc, one of France's leading music publishers in 1821. While the great bulk of Farrenc's compositions were for the piano alone, chamber music was also of great interest to her. Her reputation as a piano virtuoso was such, that in 1842 she was appointed to the permanent position of Professor of Piano at the Paris Conservatory, a position she held for thirty years and one which was among the most prestigious in Europe. No woman in the 19th century held a comparable post.

Upon the publication of her **Piano Quintet No.1 in a minor, Op.30** later day commentators have wondered why she did not choose to write a work for the so-called "standard" instrumentation of piano and string quartet. But in 1839-40, the time she was composing this work, there was no such standard instrumentation. Schumann, whose own piano quintet did so much to bring about this "standard" instrumentation, had not yet composed his work. There were earlier examples of both instrumentations. Schubert and Hummel had written piano quintets with Bass during the 1820's, while her own teacher Reicha had composed a Grande Quintet for Piano and String Quartet in 1826. The most likely explanation for her choice of

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instrumentation is that Schubert's Trout Quintet, first premiered in Paris in 1838, had become very popular. The second possible explanation was her friendship with the great bassist of the Paris opera, Achille-Victor Gouffé. But judging from the Bass part which is rather simple, (far more simple than Schubert's), I think it more likely that she preferred the added depth of sound which the bass provides and the fact that the cello is then freed up to sing its tenor and treble registers. The main theme of the opening movement, Allegro, is full of possibilities. Farrenc understands how to write well for strings and the development of this theme, which takes place primarily in the strings is the most attractive part of this rather long movement. One must admit that she gives the piano several lengthy solo passages of concerto virtuosity that surpass any-thing Mendelssohn ever put into his chamber works. The fact is these passages could be eliminated altogether with no loss to the quality of the music. Happily, there is none of this in the lovely the second movement, Adagio non troppo. The difference is really astonishing. It is as if her teacher had taken her to task and pointed out what she had done. In this movement, the piano is perfectly integrated into the ensemble for the entire movement. A beautiful, dreamy Schumannesque opening theme is entrusted to the cello, high in its tenor register. The development is quite deftly handled with seamless interplay between the parts. The second theme, which appears but once, is in the minor. The presentation of it by the viola, (see right) though dampening the dramatic affect, intensifies the aura of unrest which disturbs this otherwise peaceful Idyll. Next comes a marvellous breathtaking Scherzo: Presto. The piano and the violin present most of the thematic material chasing after each other at breakneck speed. The theme of the scherzo is both effective and appropriate to the moto perpetuo effect Farrenc is trying to create. The buoyant trio or middle section is every bit as good as the excellent scherzo which precedes it. Anyone who hears this little tour d'force, of less than four minutes duration, will concur that it has come from the hand of a real master composer. In the convincing finale, Farrenc allows her pianistic exuberance to run away with her at times and the piano is given a part more or less comparable to that which it has in Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in d minor Op.49. It is a part which is busy but which does not harm the beauty or effect of the music and which, it must be admitted, generally adds to the overall excitement.

The critical success of the First Quintet's premiere at a private concert encouraged Farrenc to write another for the same instrumentation. **Piano Quintet No.2 in E Major, Op.31** bears certain other outward resemblances to her first effort. The opening and long-

est movement has a short, pregnant Andante sostenuto introduction which slowly builds to a climax not entirely suggestive of the relaxed and somewhat limpid theme of the following Allegro grazioso presented by the strings. When the piano joins in, one hears that Farrenc has not entirely learned her lesson. It's not as serious an offense as she committed in the opening movement to the First Quintet, nonetheless, the piano writing is really too florid. This does not occur during the piano's limited and tasteful solos but during its accompaniment sections. It is a sin Mendelssohn and countless other virtuoso pianists have committed time and again when writing chamber music. The problem here is that all these notes given the piano in accompaniment are rather too noticeable because the thematic material, unlike the finale of the First Quintet, cannot withstand such writing. It is neither heavy enough nor dramatic enough to sustain such an assault. This is not a problem in the slow movement, here a Grave. The main theme is backward looking, almost baroque-sounding. Though it is not pedestrian or threadbare, neither is it very original sounding or particularly memorable. A very fine Vivace, though not marked as such, is obviously a scherzo. The thematic material is far stronger and fresher than the preceding two movements. The opening theme is full of forward motion. The strings minus the Bass give forth the opening four bars and the piano finishes the rest of what is the first theme. The finale, Allegro, is a very engaging movement though at first, a little bombastic. Later there are echoes of Schubert, especially in the longer and more lyrical lines given to the strings. But there are also Schubertian Trout-like touches in some of the piano's accompanying parts, particularly in certain triplet passages. Of course, it is unlikely that Schubert would have written a piano part in the fashion Farrenc. He was no virtuoso and his chamber music piano parts always serve the music rather than showcase technique.



Hermann Goetz (1840-1876) studied theology and mathematics in Königsberg where he was born. Eventually he switched to music and attended the Stern Conservatory in Berlin where he studied with the founder Julius Stern, as well as Hans von Bülow and Hugo Ulrich. In 1862, he succeeded Theodor Kirchner as organist at the church in Winterthur.

The lush and brooding opening measures of the Andante sostenuto introduction to his **Quintet in c minor, Op.16**, in which the piano is tacit, at once announces a masterpiece and for nearly four move-

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ments, Goetz is able to keep the thematic writing at this high level. The part writing is throughout very fine. The piano is never allowed to dominate and for long stretches it is so well integrated into the quintet, one is unaware of it as a separate entity from the strings. The conclusion to the introduction gives way attacca to the main movement, *Allegro con fuoco*. Dramatic and powerful, this movement need fear no comparison with anything written for piano quintet. It is followed by a lovely *Andante con moto* in which the Bass is given an opportunity to shine. A march like *Allegro moderato*, quasi *menutetto* is also first rate, in the trio, only the cello has the melody which is not strong enough. It is in the finale, *Allegro vivace*, one feels a let down, as Goetz, whose music sits squarely between Schumann and Brahms, seems to have run out of thematic inspiration. While what follows is not necessarily a bad movement, it is very average and sticks out like a sore thumb after such fine writing.



Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) was not only considered one of the most important composers of his time but was also widely regarded as the greatest piano virtuoso of his era. We owe the transmission of Mozart's pianistic style and technique to him.

From early on, Hummel was recognized as a prodigy and not just on the piano. Brought to Vienna from his native Pressburg (today Bratislava) at the age of 4, Hummel auditioned to study with Mozart and became the only full-time student Mozart ever had. After his studies with Mozart, in 1788 Hummel spent the next four years concertizing throughout Germany, Holland and England and was considered the greatest prodigy ever seen after Mozart. After returning to Vienna in 1792, he spent the next decade studying with Vienna's leading composers, taking lessons from Albrechtsberger, Salieri and Haydn. As he reached maturity, Hummel opted for a more conventional life rather than the vagabond existence of a touring virtuoso. Instead, he spend most of his adult life serving as a music director at various German courts. His last and longest appointment was at the ducal court in Weimar. Surprisingly, in light of the small amount of touring he did, some years none at all, and never more than a month or 6 weeks, Hummel was widely regarded as Europe's leading pianist for more than two decades and most of the next generation's leading pianists at one point or another studied with him. Stylistically, Hummel's music generally represents the end of the Viennese Classical Era and the

bridge period between it and Romanticism.

Hummel composed his Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op.87 in 1802, almost 20 years before Schubert wrote the rout in 1819. It was not published until 1822. The first movement, *Allegro e risoluto assai*, at once captivates and impresses the hearer with its power and passion. The peculiar principal theme is of a somewhat martial character. The second movement, *Minuetto, Allegro con fuoco*, isa mixture of animation and exuberance but also with a melancholy strain. The finale, *Allegro agitato*, is full of light-hearted merri-ment and ends with a brilliant and effective close.



Josef Labor (1842-1924), who was born in the Bohemian town of Horowitz and blinded by smallpox at the age of three, was, as a result, sent to Vienna to study at the Institute for the Blind. His precocious musical talent resulted in his being sent to study at the Conservatory of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. For several years he

had a career as a concert pianist and then later studied organ and today is mostly remembered for his compositions for that instrument. Labor knew and was on friendly terms with virtually every musician of importance in Vienna as well as many others living elsewhere, including Brahms, Richard Strauss, Bruckner, Clara Schumann, Gustav Mahler and Bruno Walter.

Labor's **Piano Quintet in e minor, Op.3** dates from 1886 The impetus for composing a quintet for this instrumentation no doubt, was Labor's friendship with Frantisek [Franz] Simandl, a fellow Czech who was a virtuoso bassist whom most considered to be the equal of Dragonetti. Simandl was solo bassist with the Vienna Philharmonic for over 30 years. Labor dedicated the work to Simandl as a tribute and it is one of the few such works where the bass has an extremely important part with many solo passages and chances to lead the group. The four movement work begins with a powerful and sweeping *Allegro*. The parts are integrated seamlessly and the melodies are compelling. Next comes a playful, light-hearted *Scherzo, Allegro vivace*, with two highly contrasting trios. The second trio is marked "Mit humor, basso buffo" and here the bass leads the entire way. For vitually the first half of the third movement, *Andante*, the cello alone, with the support of only the piano and very occasionally the violin, sings the gorgeous and highly romantic main theme, surely one of the longest solos in the literature. In the middle section, the bass takes over with a somber and plodding, march-like melody which is then heightened with help from the viola. The movement

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ends with the bass taking the lead again. The finale, *Allegro ma non troppo*, after a short thrusting introduction, begins with a hard driving and exciting theme which breaks loose with great forward motion. The bass is given powerful short solos bursting with energy as the moods alternate between dramatic and gentle romanticism. The work ends with a hyper dramatic and masterful coda.

Franz Limmer (1808-1857) was born in Vienna. He attended the Vienna Conservatory where he studied cello, clarinet and composition, the latter with the composer Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried. Several of Limmer's early composition attracted considerable attention and led to him eventually obtaining the post of conductor of the German Theater in the then Hungarian Habsburg city of Temesvar (today's Timisoara in Romania), which at the time had a substantial German population. He eventually became music director of the city, a post he held until his death.

The **Piano Quintet in d minor, Op.13** dates from 1834 and is dedicated to Raimund Härtel, his publisher and owner of Breitkopf & Härtel. The main theme to the opening movement, *Allegro con energico*, is only four bars in length begun tutti but then enlarged by the piano alone. The second subject has a distinct Schubertian flavor. The dramatic second movement, *Allegro vivace assai*, is a scherzo. It is characterized by heavy syncopation and a continuous thrusting and parrying between the strings and the piano. In the trio section, we can hear that Limmer had been a composer of waltzes and the music is not at all unlike that of his better known contemporary, Johann Strauss Sr. The lovely third movement, *Adagio*, has a dreamy quality, complete with short cadenzas and telling dialogues between the various voices. An exciting finale, *Allegro con fuoco*, is full of appealing melodies and rhythmic surprises, tops off this fine work.



Jozef Nowakowski (1800-1865) was born in the Polish town of Mniszek located about 60 miles south of Warsaw. He initially studied with his uncle before attending the Warsaw Conservatory where his main teacher was Jozef Elsner. He pursued a career as composer, teacher and touring piano soloist. A good friend of Chopin, he visited Paris during his travels but mostly stayed in Warsaw. He was, during his lifetime, considered one of Poland's leading musicians and his compositions were often played.

His **Piano Quintet in E flat Major, Op.17** dates from 1833 and was dedicated to Nicholas I, Tsar of

Russia and King of Congress Poland. It was published in 1841 and by 1900 was considered lost. However, in 2003 the parts were discovered in the Staatsbibliothek of Berlin. In four movements, the work opens with a lilting *Allegro vivace* in which the strings have long-lined melodies against moving passages in the piano. Next comes an exciting scherzo, *Presto vivace*, with a soft meditative trio section. The lovely third movement, *Andante*, is subtitled *Romance*. The upbeat finale, *Rondo, allegro*, is a bouncing horse ride across the countryside.



Perhaps no composer, more than **George Onslow** (1784-1853), illustrates the fickleness of fame.

Onslow was born and lived his entire life in France, the son of an English father and French mother. His chamber music, during his own lifetime and up to the end of the 19th century, was held in the highest regard, particularly in Germany,

Austria and England where he was regularly placed in the front rank of composers. His work was admired by both Beethoven and Schubert, while Schumann, perhaps the foremost music critic during the first part of the 19th century, regarded Onslow's chamber music on a par with that of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. Mendelssohn was also of this opinion.

His **Piano Quintet No.1 in b minor, Op.70** dates from 1846. Onslow would almost certainly have been familiar with it as well as a similar work by Johann Nepomuk Hummel which though not so famous was quite popular. The treatment of the piano is worth noting, especially as the quintet is dedicated to Sigmund Thalberg, the great piano virtuoso, who was widely considered the equal to Liszt. It is significant that shortly before composing the work, Onslow had been spending time with his friend Mendelssohn. Both he and Mendelssohn preferred Thalberg to Liszt, who regularly, in their opinion, engaged in tasteless pyrotechnics for no other reason than to show off. Thalberg did not. In fact, Liszt admitted that Thalberg was the only pianist who could play the violin on the piano, a reference to the amazing singing quality of his playing. Onslow's treatment of the piano takes this into account and is quite similar to the way Mendelssohn handles the piano in his trios, both as to the way it is integrated into the whole as well as the difficulty of the part. The opening movement, *Allegro energico*, with its strikingly rich modulations is a thrusting and powerful affair, full of excitement. The middle movement, *Andantino cantabile e semplice*, features gorgeous melodies and ravishing harmonies produced by the cello with the help of the bass and viola. The finale, *Allegretto molto*

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moderato, begins in a genial, jovial mood but is suddenly interrupted by turbulent, chromatic passages which bring to mind the music used during frightful and dramatic scenes in the silent movies.



Today, **Ferdinand Ries** (1784-1838) is primarily remembered as a friend and student of Beethoven, as well as his first biographer. However, during his lifetime and for much of the 19th century Ries was remembered as a fine composer and virtuoso pianist. He showed musical promise from an early age, studying both violin and piano with his father, and the cello

with Bernhard Romberg. In 1801, he went to Vienna to study with Beethoven. He studied piano and composition with him for nearly 5 years. Thereafter Ries con-

certized throughout Europe for a number of years before settling in London and then finally retiring in Frankfurt. He wrote a considerable amount of music including several piano concertos and a large quantity of chamber music which was for many years often performed and well thought of.

Ries performed and published the **Piano Quintet in b minor, Op.74** himself while he was living in London during 1817. The first movement opens with a long, slow, ominous introduction, Grave which then leads to an exciting Allegro con brio. The second movement, Larghetto, opens with a beautiful cello solo. The piano follows up and other instruments are given cadenza like passages. The brilliant and dramatic finale, Rondo, begins without a pause from the Larghetto. The Piano Quintet bears the influence of Ries's teacher Beethoven, but also was clearly composed with himself in mind as the pianist.

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