



The Cobbett Association for Chamber Music Research

6827 Roxbury Dr. Sarasota, Fl. 34231 Tel. 813-922-6986

Muir Quartet Has Link to Natural Beauty



Peter Zazofsky, Violin
Bayla Keyes, Violin

Steven Ansell, Viola
Michael Reynolds, Cello

The Muir Quartet of Boston University, one of the world's finest quartets, was named after John Muir, the turn-of-the-century conservationist who devoted his life to preserving America's wilderness.

The four original members met as students at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute where they organized the group in 1979. The following year they won the Evian International String Quartet Competition, and in 1981, the Naumberg Chamber Music Award. These early successes paved the way for tours of North America and Europe, and a residency at Boston University that continues to this day.

Membership has been quite stable, but the quartet has had three first violinists. For the past five years that position has been held by Peter Zazofsky. The other quartet members are Bayla Keyes, violinist, Steven Ansell, violist, and Michael Reynolds, Cellist.

When Zazofsky joined the group it was with the understanding that Bayla Keyes would play first violin part of the time,

and that scheduling would allow him time to continue the solo career he had already established. Income from the Muir's residency at Boston University has made this possible. The group limits its concerts to about 85 a year, including trips to Europe four or five times.

This balance between teaching and performing allows the members time to spend with their families -- a high priority for these talented young musicians. In 1989 all four members became first time parents within a six month period. In 1991, Bayla Keyes added to the "Muir babies" (all girls) by giving birth to her second child. Most of the time, she takes her children with her. (A nanny goes along since her husband's business usually keeps him at home.) The male quartet members often take their wives and babies along also. This makes for what Reynolds calls "completely zooey tours" which all four families seem to enjoy.

Fortunately, the quartet members are the best of friends as well as musical colleagues. As Reynolds explains, "None of us are cut out to be orchestral musicians at all. We don't like people telling us what to do." Though they do not always see eye to eye, and sometimes have heated sessions over repertoire selection, they always settle their differences amicably.

Their name sets them apart from other quartets who usually name themselves after famous musicians, instruments or cities of origin. It was chosen because three of the original players, including Reynolds and Ansell are absolutely avid outdoorsmen. With today's emphasis on environmental concerns this unusual name quickly met with widespread approval throughout the world.

In an effort to do more for the environment than just use John Muir's name,
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Piano Trios Highlighted

Trios for piano, violin, and cello are so important in the field of chamber music that they deserve more and more attention. The first installment of our list of recommendations of such trio literature, with our evaluations, is enclosed with this newsletter. It will be continued in October.

Chamber music players having the opportunity to play trios are fortunate since many great composers devoted a remarkable amount of their creative talent to this combination. For example, trios by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Dvorak, and Mendelssohn have always been popular. But there are many neglected composers whose trios are also worthy of public performance. These works deserved to be revived.

Today, there are many prominent trio performing groups, but one that stands out is the Mirecourt Trio which is a member of the Cobbett Association and was featured in our Newsletter No. 6. This group has been concertizing for 20 years and is to be commended for its diligent research, collecting and outstanding interpretation of rarely played works, as well as introducing new works to the concert audiences.

Lark Quartet Wins Gold Metal in Russian S.Q. Competition

The renowned Lark Quartet, members of the Cobbett Association, won the Gold Metal in the Shostakovich Intl. String Quartet Competition last December, as reported in the quartet's spring, '92 newsletter.

In addition to the first prize, they won the Borodin Quartet Prize, The Shostakovich Society Prize, and the Pro Quartet Prize. A total of ten quartets participated in the competition — 6 Soviet, 1 French, 1 Italian, and 2 American.

Tours and radio broadcasts are being planned for The Lark in the spring of 1993 to include the countries of France, Great Britain, and Russia.

In their fascinating 16 page newsletter, Eva Guesser, first violin, gives her interesting impressions of Russia. Anyone desiring a copy of the Lark's newsletter may write to the Lark Quartet, 140 Claremont Ave. # 6H, New York, NY, 10027.

Virtuoso - Printed Music Service,

A new member of the Cobbett Association, Justin Root, is head of the above named company which is an important source of chamber music from the world's publishers.

The company specializes in procuring all types of classical sheet music in print. What's more, they have a 24 hour order line and toll free number, 1-800551-0147. Their address is 912 165th Ave., Bellevue, WA 98008-6024.

Olivier Messiaen Dies at 83

Olivier Messiaen died April 28, 1992 in Paris. He was regarded as France's greatest living composer. A deeply religious mystic, he believed that music was closely linked to religion, philosophy and folklore.

He was known for his use of Oriental music, exotic rhythms, and his catalog of bird songs for piano.

He noted and classified by species and habitats the singing of birds, traveling widely to record the sounds that he often used as parts of his complex musical scores.

One of his prominent chamber works is the **Quartet for the End of Time** scored for violin, clarinet, cello, and piano. It is in eight movements and was composed in 1941 and performed for the prisoners while he was interned at a prisoner-of-war camp in Silesia.

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Phone: (813) 922-6986

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Robert H. Maas

Secretary & Editor
Alice L. Maas

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Villa-Lobos and His Exotic Chamber Music



The famous Brazilian composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959), is known mainly for his nine Bachianis Brasileiras, with No. 5 being the most famous because it is an outstanding work for soprano and eight cellos. These were dedicated to Bach who Villa-Lobos believed to be a universal source.

The striking originality in most of his music is derived from his skillful use of his native folk themes and rhythms. One also detects strong French and Spanish influences in much of his music. He made a profound study of his country's folk music by traveling to the heart of Brazil.

In addition to being the most famous Latin American composer, he was a cellist, a conductor, guitarist, and teacher. Pianist Arthur Rubinstein admired him and did everything he could to promote the music of Villa-Lobos.

Villa-Lobos composed opera and ballet and has written for practically every combination of instruments. He has a neo-classic style with the use of polytonality and impressionism and uses a wide range of stylistic elements from simple to complex. His technique conforms to concepts of classical music, but to this he adds his individual and exotic style.

Villa-Lobos' output was enormous and his opus numbers, if used, would total around 2,000. Much of his talent and creativity was devoted to chamber music -- from duets to nonets, but this storehouse of music is infrequently heard, which is a great loss to intelligent audiences.

Much of his chamber music has been published by Max Eschig Editions of Paris and Associated Music Publishers of New York City.

String Quartets and Trio

Villa-Lobos 17 string quartets were written from 1915 to 1957 and trace his development. They are very well crafted, difficult to play, and an interesting challenge. We have found the following to be among his best:

No. 4 is in classical form, is less demanding than the others, and accessible to advanced amateurs. It is typical of his early style. Moderate - Very Good.

No. 5 "Brazilian" is a striking work exploiting the capabilities of the instruments with constant motion. Rhythmic dance-like melodies, as well as good humor, give way to nostalgia and melancholy moods. It features a strong viola part. Ensemble problems are evident. The andantino is very satisfying and the finale allegro has pounding rhythms.

Difficult - Excellent.

No. 6 is probably his best quartet and was played and recorded by the renowned Hollywood S.Q. (Capitol L.P. P8472.)

Romantic melodies, exotic moods, tone clusters, and polytonality are featured in its 4 mvmts without losing tonality.

Difficult - Excellent.

No. 9 is a very exacting and complex work reflecting a later style and is suited best for professional groups. Part study is needed just to read the work. Very Difficult - Very Good.

No. 17 (1957) This last quartet was first performed by the Budapest S.Q. in 1959 just a short time before the composer's death. More refined than the earlier ones, it is still typical of his style and power. It has an outstanding lento mvmt. The cello has a prominent part here as in many of his other works.

Trio for violin, viola, and cello - This important work was in the repertory of the famous Pasquier Trio and was first performed in 1945. It was commissioned by the Coolidge Foundation. It is in the composer's original nationalist style with pungent harmony and special rhythmic effects. Its texture is amplified with double, triple, and quadruple stops, creating difficulties for the performers and a rich sound. Difficult - Excellent.

Piano and Strings

Trio No. 1 (Rio 1911) Not as difficult as No. 2, it is more typical of his early style and features strong classical

elements. Moderate - Good.

Trio No. 2 (Paris 1929) Written during his years in Paris but not in his typical style. Brazil is absent in this trio. Instead, it resembles Faure and has the refinement of the French academic tradition. It is written in virtuoso style requiring a technical display by the players.

Villa-Lobos has also written four sonatas for violin and piano, all worth exploring, 2 sonatas for cello and piano, and numerous duets for various instruments.

Winds and Voice

Wind players will be fascinated by two compositions with distinct exotic flavor. The first is the **Nonetto for flute, oboe, clarinet, saxophone, battery, and mixed chorus**. This has a Stravinsky-like flavor, with the composer's style evident by the long melodic lines.

The **Quatuor for flute, harp, celeste, and women's voices**. The composer handles this one with extreme delicacy and keeps it simple in design. It is pastorale in nature with graceful themes and features an unusual combination of instruments and voices.

In both pieces the choral parts are vocal lines without words. The voices take an independent counterpoint similar to an instrument, which adds special color.

These two works were recorded in the '50's by the Roger Wagner Chorale and the Concert Art Players on Capital P8191.

Villa-Lobos also composed a **quintet for flute, violin, viola, cello, and harp**, contemporary with string quartet No. 17, but we have not played or heard it. We would appreciate hearing from members who are familiar with this work.

(MUIR QUARTET -Cont. from page 1)

the quartet last year began a project to combine their musical talent with financial aid to environmental causes. Reynolds spearheaded the plan by forming a non-profit organization called EcoClassics. The plan is for a financial backer to pay for the compact disc production while the Muir Quartet and their guest artists donate their time and talent. Profits from the sales go to an environmental organization chosen by the financial backers.

The first EcoClassic CD, released this

last spring, is a performance of the Mozart and Brahms quintets with clarinetist Mitchell Lurie. Proceeds from the sale of these CD's will go the Nature Conservancy, a group which buys land to keep it from development, and preserves it in its natural state.

The Cobbett Association is pleased to have the Muir as one of its member quartets. In a letter written to your coordinator last February, Bayla Keyes, violinist, expressed her appreciation for the newsletters and evaluation reports which her group often refers to when considering new repertoire.

She also wrote, "We are touring up a storm this year, doing all of our regular repertoire plus the complete Beethoven cycle. This makes for quite a heavy rehearsal schedule, but it really keeps us in shape! We also teach at Boston University, both privately and in the well developed chamber music program. In the summers we do festivals in Minnesota, Utah, Virginia, New Jersey, France, and Germany. . . . I continue to take my two children, now 1 and 3 years old, with me on any tours lasting longer than two or three days. They are turning into excellent Gypsies."

She added that their quartet had recently recorded the Brahms Piano Quintet and the Brahms B Flat String Quartet, Op. 67, in addition to the clarinet quintets recorded for EcoClassics.

For information on purchasing EcoClassic CD's or financing their production, write EcoClassics, P.O. Box 6834, Holliston, MA 01746.

COMING SOON. . .

Martinu -- a modern Czech
The New Philadelphia Quartet
Continuation of Piano Trio Evaluations

Coordinator's Corner

I want to thank our members for sending in their membership fees and contributions for 1992. Your encouraging letters and comments were also greatly appreciated.

Your inquiries about rare chamber music are always welcome. And please forgive us if there is a delay in answering your requests. The backlog is heavy at times.