



## At The Double Bar

As I hope members are aware, we are in the midst of raising funds so that we can purchase Bob Maas' chamber music library. Response has been good, but to date we have only raised approximately 25% of the \$6,000 we will need to buy it. In January, we applied for a grant from the ACMP, but have not as yet heard whether we will receive one. Acquiring a core chamber music library of rare and hard to obtain works is central to our plans and I would encourage those of you who have not yet contributed to do so, and those who have to consider another contribution if you are able.

In the past few months, we have gained several new members. (including Eugene Purdue, former first violinist of the Thouvenel Quaretet) Much of this is due to the efforts of Dr. Ronald Goldman who has recommended us to the members of his chamber music workshop. However, we have only begun to reach those whom might be interested. In the months to come, please mention us to your musical friends and colleagues.

Special thanks to Andrew Marshall of England who sent press releases about The Cobbett Association to English musical periodicals including *The Strad*, *BBC Music Magazine* and *The Musical Times*.

I am pleased to announce that a number of members have expressed interest in joining the Association's Advisory Board and we will formally announce its composition in our Septemer issue. I encourage those members who are interested in taking an active role to please contact me.

Members who have not renewed their membership should do so now. We are unable to continue sending the *Journal* without your renewal.

## An Overview of Vagn Holmboe's String Quartets

By Dr. David DeBoor Canfield, Ph.D.

Vagn Holmboe, born in Horsens, Denmark, in 1909, is unquestionably one of the 20th Century's greatest composers and probably the leading symphonist and composer of string quartets in Scandinavia after Carl Nielsen. That he should be so comparatively little-known outside of Scandinavia is surprising considering the quantity, quality and consistency of his output. He began his studies in Copenhagen in 1926, studying with Finn Hoffding and Knud Jeppersen, and later became a student of Ernst Toch in Berlin. From there he travelled to Romania where he undertook the study of

Romanian folk music, following in the steps of such luminaries as Bartok and Kodaly. Upon his return to Denmark, he gradually established himself as one of her leading composers, recognition coming to him for his brilliant *Symphony No.2* of 1939. To date, he has written some 23 String Quartets.

Holmboe's musical style was initially influenced by Nielsen whose musical fingerprints can be seen especially in his first three quartets, but this influence was tempered by the then fashionable neo-

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## The Problem of Rating Chamber Music

By R.H.R. Silvertrust

Given the fact that The Cobbett Association is about to embark upon what will certainly be a massive project and one of its long term goals, the rating of as much of the chamber music literature as possible and the production of a reference source, either in book or pamphlet form based upon the results of this rating, it seems both timely and german to consider the problem of rating chamber music. Further, as the rating is going to be done by groups from within the membership and not by one person or one group, it seems a good idea to try and generate a discussion on the subject to help us arrive at a method which will result in the greatest usefulness from our work. What follows, therefore, is written in the spirit of generating discussion, dialog and debate, and not as some sort of pontification by a self-styled expert.

that it is largely a question of taste, a subjective business where "one man's meat is another's poison." Is it fruitful or worthwhile to argue about or to try and determine whether Beethoven's *First Rasumovsky Quartet* is finer than his Second or than Schubert's *Death and The Maiden*. You may have your preferences and may enjoy one masterpiece more than another, but then this is a matter of taste and not some objective or quantifiable screening system. In the end, it boils down to the fact that rating art is unscientific and highly open to the personal prejudices of the persons doing the rating.

While this position may be sound from a purely logical standpoint, does it irrevocably lead to the conclusion any attempt at rating chamber music will only

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The problem of rating chamber music, it seems to me, quite clearly is in the nature of what is to be rated. It is certainly arguable that chamber music, like any kind of art, is not susceptible to any meaningful sort of rating. Perhaps the strongest argument to made against rating something like chamber music is

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## THE SOUNDING BOARD-LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I have enjoyed reading your informative, interesting journals and am happy Bob Maas' dreams are being further realized. Our Palm Strings Quartet enjoyed playing every week. Bob would always bring in one or two works he wanted us to play through. Soon his "discoveries" became our regular fare. Bob did it all! His enthusiasm led him through finding the music, xeroxing the parts, writing historical sketches and putting together the *Newsletter* which Alice then typed.

Though Bob was our guide, Betty Martin, Herb Fiss and I all expressed our opinions. We graded works guided by the standards mention by Dr. Cunningham in his APGAR II score sheet, but never found such beautifully descriptive adjectives. Working with Bob and his Cobbett Association was a wonderful experience for me. Best wishes for your continuing excellent work.

Ann Edelson  
Sarasota, Florida

*Ed. Thank you very much for your kind words and vote of confidence. Having the Quartet available to him to explore these works, I am sure, was one of the foundation blocks upon which he was able to build the Association and certainly you, Dr. Fiss and Elizabeth Martin were contributing founders. (Ann Edelson was violist in the Palm Strings Quartet. A picture of Ann and the Quartet appears in this issue of the Journal on the second page of the article entitled "The Problems of Rating Chamber Music."*

### COMMENTS FROM THE EDITOR

In my opinion, the fewer comments from the editor one has to read the better. In any event, we already have "At The Double Bar" and that should be enough. But since we were rather "thin on the ground" as to letters, that is to say, no one wrote to the editor, I have taken the opportunity to use this space to present a few reminders.

First, this column can be used as a "Classified Ad" section for those trying to locate parts etc. For example

Wanted  
String Quartets by Franz Krommer  
Contact: Joseph Hellmesberger  
Blut Gasse 19  
1010 Wien-Austria  
☎:47-47-47

Once The Association obtains its library, you will be able to get parts from us.

**Attention: Professional Musicians & Groups:** The Cobbett Association would like a listing of your Concert Schedule for the second half of 1995. We will publish these schedules and mail them to members either with the *Journal* or by a separate mailing. Starting in 1996, we will be doing this for the whole year.

Sifting through some of the research and notes that Bob Maas made, I came across an interesting letter he wrote in the Spring of 1991. In it, he talks about how much time the research takes and that although he was spending full time on it (and he was retired) he was far behind and could not seem to catch up. He notes how he would have liked to write a paragraph or two about each quartet but that this would have meant a book and he was not up to it. The rest of the letter deals with aspects of rating works and since this issue is, in part, devoted to this subject, it seems timely.

### Bob Maas On Rating

"...I agree, we should list the fair and poor works, but it is not practicable because, already, we have around 500 of them that have been eliminated by just studying the parts and by playing them. I don't have the space in the *Newsletter* to do it. Someday, I'd like to make a separate list of them and distribute it, if I can ever find the time.

"One reason a work is often rated poor is that the first violin part is soloistic and

the other parts have hardly anything to do but accompany. Some works have themes which are dull and uninteresting. Others are so fiendishly difficult they can not be sight-read. Some are too simple, or pale copies of Haydn or Mozart, some are too pianistic.

"We rated Arriaga (*ed. Spanish composer 1806-25 known, if at all for his three quartets. Dubbed "The Spanish Mozart", though his music is more like Schubert*) excellent because we felt that in its class, period and style, they compared very favorably with other composers--and everyone I've played them with in the past 50 years has rated them high.

"Granted this rating process is a very subjective thing and there can be wide disagreement among those rating them.. Nick Cunningham conducted a survey of rare chamber music in the 1970s and had a rating system from 1 to 10. He admitted that people he played with would sometimes change their rating of a work from high to low and vice-versa after playing it again at a later date. I've known top professional players who can't stand Reger and others who've rated him very high. So you see, taste enters in as well. But what we try to do is answer these questions when we evaluate a work: Are the themes interesting and of a high quality? Are they inspired with emotions? Does it have any originality? Is it too monotonous or dull? Is it rhythmically interesting? Does it have variety in its harmonies and modulations? I could go on. Of course, most of the standard classics, we would rate very good to excellent, with few exceptions, so in a sense we are comparing with them.

"The reader of our ratings, in seeking these rare works we recommend, might wonder if it is worth the time or trouble to find them. And there is always the risk that in the personal opinion of the reader, it will not be. But the lure of an adventure is that you don't know what the outcome will be. I've been so pleasantly surprised so many times, that the incentive is always there."

## A Chamber Music Workshop Director's Ramblings

Dr. Ronald Goldman

As director of the San Diego Chamber Music Workshop, as well as a violinist, I'm well acquainted with the attitudes of musicians, both amateur and professional, toward the music of unfamiliar composers. Simply stated, many players are reluctant to play it. There is a pervading attitude that there is already enough musical literature by popular composers without trying unknown works of unpredictable merit, "If that composer's works aren't known there obviously is a reason," goes the usual admonishment.

There are several arguments against limiting one's exposure to only the works of recognized masters. The most obvious one is the loss of the opportunity to experience the joy of discovery of a new worthwhile work. In a reading session with your friends, encountering meritorious new melodies, harmonies, and rhythms in concert with your other equally stimulated partners can be exhilarating. If you are able as a group to get at the musical information and convey your parts to one another with authority and sensitivity, you have the opportunity for a wonderful experience.

Secondly, for the lover of chamber music reading, successfully confronting unknown works, is an affirmation of one's musicianship and instrumental skill. Additionally, a newly discovered composer's work will stimulate your curiosity to find other pieces by the same composer.

We've all had the experience of coming away from an exciting encounter with a new work and later recommending the same piece to another group of playing partners only to have it less enthusiastically received (and probably played less well). This can partly be avoided by making the effort to assess the relative difficulty of each part in order to not overly tax the abilities of any one player. Many well seasoned amateurs and professionals are insecure when encountering unpredictable rhythms and musical progressions. Evaluating this and

allowing these musicians to become familiar with their part in advance may be all that is needed to win their confidence before you come together for an evening of reading. Another hint to creating a receptive reading group for unknown music is to include at least one other musician in the group who is musically inquisitive and technically secure.

Previous Cobbett newsletters have listed sources of out of print music. My favorite one is the Philadelphia Free Library (215-686-5316). Ask for the chamber music librarian, Paula Mentusky, and send my regards. The music you find is frequently old and fragile with little or no binding intact. I find it fairer to my source to simply copy the borrowed music and return the originals without subjecting it to more wear.

One often encounters unfamiliar notations and abbreviations in old editions which can be confusing. A good future project for The Cobbett Association would be to make a syllabus of older terms and notations to assist our interpretation of these older editions.

At the San Diego Workshop, we encourage participants to share musical discoveries through performance, fre-lancing, and copying parts and score for each other. Several of my most enthusiastic musical explorers are Canadians James Whitby and Peter Lang and my countrywoman Dorothy "from Kansas" Thomas. Let's all be champions of the works of worthwhile but little known composers and support The Cobbett Association and its efforts to familiarize us to the availability of this large body of music.

[Those of you interested in obtaining information about the San Diego Chamber Music Workshop should contact Dr. Goldman by calling (619-479-7995) or writing him at 3443 Evergreen Road / Bonita, CA 91902-1407 / USA]

## More Recent Publications

No column, such as this, can print everything which is coming out and this is not an attempt to do that. In the last issue, the bulk of the works mentioned were for string players alone. Our members, however, also include pianists and wind players and this column includes works for strings and these instruments which have been republished in the past year or two.

First works for strings and winds. Max Bruch's excellent Eight Pieces, Op.83 For Piano, Clarinet and Viola (or cello, Bruch scored it for both) has just been reprinted. From Haydn there are Symphony Nos. 7-9, as arranged by the famous London Salomon for flute, 2 violins, viola, cello and piano. From Antonin Kammel [1730-1788] Three divertimenti Op.12, Nos.2,4, &6 for flute (or oboe) 2 violins and bassoon (or cello) There is also the wonderful Rheinberger Nonet, Op.139 for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello and bass.. From Wenzel Stich, Op.2, No.1 a quartet for Eb Horn, violin, viola and cello. From Robert Fuchs, his excellent Clarinet Quintet, Op.102, Friedrich Kuhlau's Flute Quintet, Op.51 No.3 is now available. And two interesting Clarinet Quartets from classical composers, A. Gyrowetz and J.B. Vanhal, both without opus.

Pieces of interest for piano and strings recently reprinted include Alexander Alyabiev's Trio Movement in Eb, Max Bruch's Piano Trio, Op.5, Robert Fuchs' Op.115 for violin, viola and piano, Glinka's Grand Sextet for piano, string quartet and bass, Fanny Mendelssohn's Piano Trio, Op.11, Theodore Kirchener's superb Serenade for Piano Trio, Lalo's Piano Trio Op.20, and finally two trios for violin, viola and piano by Philip Scharwenka, Op.121 and Ernst Naumann, Op. 7.

# String Quartets Dedicated To Joseph Haydn (Part II)

By Dr. James L. Whitby

[The first part of this article appeared in the last issue of the *Journal*, Vol.V., No.3, December 1995]

Ignaz Pleyel's [1757-1831] set of string quartets, Op.2, is "*Composti e dedicati al celebrerrimo estimatissimo fu suo Maestro il Signore Guiseppe Haydn in Segno di perpetua Gratitudine da Ignazio Pleyel*". The date of this publication is 1784, which thus precedes Mozart by one year. Barrett-Ayres writes rather disparagingly of Pleyel's string quartets and there is no doubt that they are uneven in quality. However Pleyel obviously had great facility and in his time pleased many people including - a severe critic of other peoples music - W.A.Mozart. The quartet "Op.36 No.2" that Barrett-Ayres puts in the pillory is usually known as Op.1 No.2. As Op.1 was the only set published (Nov.1, 1783) at the time of Mozart's letter to his father of April 24 1784, it seems that this quartet comes from the very same set that Mozart praised so highly. "Some quartets have come out by a certain Pleyel, a scholar of Joseph Haydn's. If you don't already know them, try to get them, it is well worth your while. They are very well written, and very agreeable, you will soon get to know the author. It will be a happy thing for music if, when the time comes, Pleyel replaces Haydn for us." Perhaps there is a difference between opinion derived from musical analysis rather than playing music!

Pleyel's quartets contain much that is pleasant but Barrett-Ayres is right in saying that the development is often weak, and, that in many, Pleyel finds it hard to modulate from the main key of the movement. Not infrequently (perhaps to force himself to modulate?) he will specify an episode in the minor, in which he very quickly modulates to, and stays in, the relative major. Thus C-c minor-E flat. At other times he will, so to speak, wrench himself into a remote key with no feeling of preparation or inevitability. The quartets are slighter than those of Haydn and Mozart and are usually in 3 movements, except for Op.3, which all

have 4. Some have only two movements and this is particularly likely to occur where the second movement is a set of variations. In such cases Pleyel usually adopts a "concertans" style with each instrument having its own variation and the decoration becoming more and more florid as the movement progresses, while the harmonic structure is very little changed. There is none of the harmonic and emotional intensity of Mozart's variation movements. However there are often very charming moments in Pleyel; his melodies may be simple but they are often pleasing and sometimes quite long. He does at times achieve genuine conversational episodes between the different parts. Like other writers of the period he often adopted the "concertans" style, in which each instrument has its solo passages, particularly in first movements. The second violinist or violist who sits down expecting an easy time because it is "only Pleyel" is often faced with quite tricky and high passages on the instrument in circumstances where any hesitation in execution is likely to be detected. Movements we have particularly enjoyed include a number from Op.2, which seems an altogether better set than Op.1. The "King of Prussia" set contains a number of good movements, and we particularly like the "Minuet en rondeau" from the "King of Naples" set.

Pleyel wrote a lot of string quartets most of which were published between 1783 and 1792, during which time he also brought out much other music. He then seemed to dry up or was too busy with other matters to compose much music. Even with the aid of Rita Benton's catalogue it is hard to state exactly how many proper quartets he wrote, as some are only short movements and there was a certain amount of recycling. They must have been very popular as there were many editions and arrangements. La Rue writing about the listings in the Leuckart Supplements from 1788-92, records Pleyel listings as ahead of all others. Twenty six composers are cited in his article and 1600 listings. Three composers attained more than 100 listings viz.: Pleyel 481,

Hoffmeister 368, and Haydn 134. While the large number of Hoffmeister listings may be attributable to Hoffmeister's status as a music publisher, La Rue cannot be correct in attributing the large number of Pleyel listings to the same cause, since Pleyel only commenced the business of music publishing in 1795. Thus it would seem that this impressive number of listings truly reflects the great popularity of Pleyel's music at the time.

All of Felice Radicati's [1778-1823] string quartets are listed in Elssler's catalogue of Haydn's music library, but it is his last and clearly best set that is dedicated to Haydn. They are well written and enjoyable for all four members of the quartet. Radicati was a violinist, who also wrote some string trios and quintets none of which have been republished as far as I am aware.

Andreas Romberg [1767-1821] was a moderately prolific composer of string quartets. There is a celebrated story of Haydn allowing a quartet to be played under circumstances where the assembled company believed they were going to hear a new quartet by Haydn. After the listeners had expressed their pleasure, Haydn informed them that the actual composer was Andreas Romberg. This incident occurred in 1801(8), at which time Romberg's Op.1 had already been published, and so it is presumed that one of the three quartets from Op.2, published in 1802, and dedicated to Haydn, was used for the occasion. The audience was listening to a new work, publicly played for the first time, but when one is armed with the knowledge that the piece is by Andreas Romberg, it seems hard to believe that anyone could mistake it for Haydn. Nevertheless the three quartets of Op.2 are good examples of Romberg's work. They are tuneful, the part writing is interesting and unlike some of his other quartets, they are not "Quatuors brilliant". The second in a minor might be the best candidate for a Haydn composition as it has a number of Haydn-like attributes. For instance the first movement is strongly monothematic, and one can also sense a

## String Quartet's Dedicated To Joseph Haydn *(continued)*

definite relationship between that theme and that of the finale. The minuet, in two part harmony, has some of the flavour of that of Op.76 No.2. The two parts are reversed in the recapitulation, the Trio is in thirds and sixths and has a clear thematic link to the slow movement. Twenty eight string quartets by Romberg were published as well as some other compositions for the same medium. They must have been reasonably well known as there were a number of editions including a collected edition by Richault. Romberg was a violinist and presumably wrote the first violin part for himself. Yet Spohr complained of Romberg's poor execution of these compositions though he admired the quartets. Perhaps "semi-brilliant" would be a good way to describe them, for while the first violin part predominates, that predominance (though not all the difficulties) usually occurs in the first movements. This is true even of the "Quatuor brilliant" Op.11. I am sure amateurs would enjoy playing some of Romberg's quartets if they were more readily available. The best set to me is Op.59, where, apart from the first movement of No.1, there is no excessive first violin predominance. There is an organizational plan in this set, for the themes of the finales of Nos 1 & 2 are combined with a new theme for the finale of No.3 (this is illustrated on the title page of the first edition). Interestingly that of the finale of No. 1 is also found in the finale of Op.2 No.3. There are other reasonably good quartets for instance Op.30 and Op.5. One of Andreas Romberg's Flute quintets (Op.41 No.1) is published by Wollenweber.

The quartets of Bernhard Romberg [1767-1841] Andreas' "brother", (actually his cousin but they were frequently referred to as "Les Freres Romberg"), are also pleasantly tuneful but they suffer from the need for two virtuoso players, as there is always a prominent cello part as well as violin 1. They cannot be said to be in the "concertans" style as violin 2 and viola are rather neglected. I do not think they would be effective in the concert hall and for amateurs the cello difficulties are an obstacle. He wrote eleven quartets in all. Haydn considered the Rombergs to be talented and he encouraged them, but they were already over 30 when he met them. They had published a few works under joint authorship and presumably had some compositions in their portfolio, which they showed to the Master. I wonder if the quartets listed under Romberg in Ellsler's catalogue were not in fact Bernhard's Op. 1 rather than those of Andreas' as imputed by Landon.

It remains to comment on the two remaining composers. Edmund von Weber [1766-1828] was a pupil of Haydn. I have not seen his set of quartets. When Spohr visited Bern in 1816, Edmund Weber was director of music and Spohr commented that, while he was a good theorist, he was a weak violinist and director. The Johan Wikmanson [1753-1800] set has been republished with extensive notes. Although Wikmanson, a Swedish composer, may have intended to dedicate them to Haydn, the Haydn dedication was arranged posthumously, apparently in the hope that the quartets would then sell better in Europe. Haydn

was pleased with the dedication. The republication is a welcome addition to available chamber music from the period. All three quartets are well written and enjoyable to play, but the second in e minor seems the best and has been recorded. [Ed. All three were recorded on *Musica Sveciae LP MS 402-3* and rereleased on CD]

### Conclusion:

Haydn's successors included a substantial number of composers, who expressed their indebtedness by dedicating string quartets to him. Knowledge of these works helps one see the immense originality and power of Beethoven in a truer perspective. These composers at times displayed originality, but none of their works has really succeeded in maintaining a permanent place in the musical repertory. Pleyel's duets for two violins are still used at times for teaching and by now a number of his other works have been republished. However Andreas and Bernhard Romberg probably came closest. Andreas' "Lied von der Glocke" Op.25 remained in the repertoire until the end of the 19th century, while some of the latter's cello sonatas, duos and concerti have remained continuously in print since the time of their composition.

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### In Memoriam

It is with regret that we report the death of Mary Sanks, former member of the Board of Advisors.

## Diskology: Wilhelm Berger & Vincent D'Indy

It is an incredible pity that the chamber music of Wilhelm Berger [1861-1911] is so little known. Everything that I have played of this composer's is absolutely first rate, no ifs, ands, or buts. His **Piano Quintet in f minor, Op.95** is no exception. Masterpiece is not a word to be bandied about lightly, but of its genre, this work qualifies. Berger, who was born

in Boston but taken to Germany at the age of one studied with Friedrich Kiel [see our last issue], who was considered the best teacher in Germany at the time.

Berger composed the Quintet in 1904 and dedicated it to the world famous Bohemian Quartet. It shows the unmistakable influence of Brahms, but it

is no mere pale copy of that composer. The opening *Allegro non troppo ed energico* is massive and breathtakingly broad in conception, lasting nearly 20 minutes but its leisurely captivating themes hold the listener throughout. The *Poco Adagio* which follows is also a big movement. The part writing is very fine  
[continued on page 6]

## Wilhelm Berger's Piano Quintet & The String Quartets of Vincent D'Indy

and his total mastery of compositional technique is apparent. If anything the movement is rather too peaceful ending inaudibly. The third movement, *Molto Vivace*, is an excellent scherzo which goes well beyond the limits of Brahms into the realm of post-Brahmsian Romanticism. The concluding *Allegro moderato e con brio* again is a very big movement lasting nearly 15 minutes. [The Quintet itself takes nearly an hour to perform] But one never gets the feeling that there is too much, or that this is a composer who did not know when to stop. This is simply a work on a very grand scale, much like a Mahler symphony.

The Quintet, which to my knowledge is not available in modern reprint [originally printed by Kahnt in Berlin in 1905], is in the Maas Library. It is performed by the Verdi Quartet with Jost Michaels, piano on a Dabringhaus CD MDG 308-0506-2. It does not sound like it would be of any greater difficulty than Brahms' Op.34 or Dvorak's Op.81.

If one hears a French quartet in the concert hall at all, it is almost invariably the Ravel. And there are probably more recordings of it than all other French quartets put together. As for recordings, it seems that the Debussy, which though almost never performed live, is the standard accompaniment for the Ravel. It is perhaps understandable why one does not hear Debussy's quartet in concert, it being a pastel and reflective piece that is more suited to the intimacy of the drawing room than the modern concert hall. But the same cannot be said for the quartets of D'Indy.

Vincent D'Indy (1851-1931) was born of aristocratic stock. His musical talent was recognized by his grandmother who raised him and saw that he received piano lessons from famous teachers. Despite this, he was sent to law school in Paris. Instead, D'Indy, who was intent on becoming a composer, joined a Parisian orchestra as a timpanist to learn music "from the ground up." Both Massenet and Bizet were impressed by his early

compositions and encouraged him to show his work to César Franck. Franck did not share their enthusiasm and was reputed to have told D'Indy, "You have ideas but you cannot do anything." Apparently those ideas were enough, however, to convince Franck to show D'Indy how to do things, as he took the latter on as a pupil. Though D'Indy was to assimilate and be influenced by many different sources, Franck and his music left the most telling mark on him.

Wagner's work was also to have a great influence on D'Indy and he tried to adapt some of the German's musical ideas into the French musical idiom. D'Indy's reputation, during his own lifetime was considerable, having founded, in 1900, what was to become the most important music school in France after the Paris Conservatory--The Schola Cantorum. As director and the leading teacher his influence was worldwide and among his students were Honegger, Roussel, and Satie.

After Franck and Wagner, it was perhaps the work of middle and late Beethoven which was to exert the greatest influence upon D'Indy. [D'Indy is the author of the superb article on Beethoven's chamber music in Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey]

It must then come as no surprise that chamber music was for D'Indy serious business and a high calling. He did not attempt to compose a string quartet until he was nearly 40. Of his four string quartets **No.1 in D Major, Op.35** and **No.2, Op.45 in E Major** have recently been released on a Marco Polo CD 8.223140 and are performed by the Kodaly Quartet.

All four movements of Quartet No.1, which dates from 1890, begin slowly. This is an interesting quartet. Undoubtedly French, but not showing any great debt to Franck. The slow second movement, *Lente et calme*, is very poetic in its conception. The third movement, *Assez Modéré*, begins like an intermezzo but gives way to an atmospheric and modern

sounding scherzo. The finale, after its slow introduction, leads to a series of jaunty themes almost neo-classical in style. For its time, it is very forward looking and original, but surprisingly, it received great acclaim when premiered. Hailed as a masterpiece, Chausson wrote to D'Indy, "all France honors you."

To my knowledge there is no modern edition of the Quartet, first published by Hamelle in Paris. However, it is in the Maas Library and would be, in my opinion, a welcome addition to any quartet's repertoire. It appears to be of medium difficulty.

Quartet No.2, reminds one instantly of Franck's quartet in d minor. A four note motto is stated immediately, and emphatically in the slow opening. As in Franck's quartet, this gives way to a faster theme but the motto is restated, sometimes in variation, sometimes inverted. It is exciting but clearly derivative, although apparently, D'Indy meant it to be so as he intended to take Franck's work as a point of departure. The second and third movements are decidedly more original. The second movement *Très animé*, in 5/4 time is particularly fine. The finale, again is reminiscent of the Franck Quartet, but it is more advanced tonally if not technically.

Although this quartet was hailed as a masterpiece at the time of its premiere in 1898 both in France by such luminaries as Paul Dukas and in the U.S. by the noted critic, Philip Hale, I do not know if there is a place for it on the stage. On paper and theoretically, it apparently is masterly, but the outer movements constantly remind one Franck's quartet, despite certain original touches. Nonetheless, it is well worth hearing and I would imagine enjoyable to play. Perhaps my familiarity with the Franck Quartet has jaded my view. Listen for yourself. It too is of medium difficulty. Again, there is no modern reprint of the original Durand edition, but the Maas Library also has this work.

# The String Quartets of Vagn Holmboe-An Overview

classicism of Stravinsky, Hindemith and Toch. From the example of these composers, Holmboe developed an impeccable knowledge of counterpoint, balance and line, which is remarkably consistent throughout the whole of his oeuvre. His quartets all are masterful in their sense of balance in tension and release. Each has an episodic quality and a spontaneity in effect, yet formal structure is not found wanting in them. Holmboe is a master of developing a musical motive in a logical and consistent manner, unfolding each work in a way so convincing that one cannot imagine any other course for the work to take. Exact repetition is rare, as Holmboe finds it more interesting to vary his ideas when he restates them. In this respect, the author finds him superior to his great contemporary and colleague in quartet-writing, Dmitri Shostakovich. The Russian master's contribution to the quartet genre, however, is as great as Holmboe's and may even exceed it in melodic invention, but for this writer, Holmboe's body of work holds the greater interest. In many respects, Holmboe anticipates the skill brought to the genre by the Englishman, Robert Simpson who is probably his only living equal in both the symphony and quartet genres.

Holmboe utilizes special effects such as harmonics (notably a fine passage in the String Quartet No. 6), glissandi, *sul ponticello*, etc., sparingly. Where he does use these, he invariably achieves a convincing effect—one never feels that the device was used merely for its own sake. His skill at interweaving the four voices is not surpassed by any writer (including even Bartok,) of which this author is cognizant. Holmboe seems to prefer quiet endings to his quartets. The third quartet, for instance, ends with a short subdued movement which sounds almost like a postscript. In many of the quartets, one senses a dramatic arch in intensity, either within individual movements, or in some cases over the entire quartet. The fourth quartet, one of this author's favorites among the series (and surely one of the great quartets composed by anyone of any

century,) this arch is clearly heard. The dramatic opening on a unison D becomes a declamatory statement with underlying tremolo supporting energetic and heroic figures. These ideas are reiterated in the final, fifth movement, albeit there more optimistically and affirmatively conceived. The second and fourth movements also complement and reaffirm each other, the second movement being an exciting, perpetual-moto movement with *ostinati* thrown around the various instruments and the fourth movement being a subdued pointillistic exercise. Acting as the fulcrum for the entire work is the third movement, which is distinguished by sighing, almost sobbing, entries by each instrument in a quasi-fugal fashion.

Holmboe is a firmly tonal composer, which means his music has a certain accessibility denied to some of his contemporaries. This is not to say that his music is always easy to assimilate on first hearing; indeed, repeated hearings will provide ever-increasing rewards. Nor does it suggest that his music can always be pigeonholed into strict key centers, although some instances can be noted. The second movement of the third quartet, for instance, is a scherzo in 6/8 meter which seems more-or-less tonally centered on B. However, the first movement of that same quartet contains biting tonal clusters which deny the listener any firm tonal moorings. That Holmboe can juxtapose such tonal divagations with areas of tonal stability in a consistent and pleasing fashion is a testament to his skill as a composer. Much of his harmony is clearly derived from his skilled contrapuntal technique. Melodically, he often utilizes Bartok's technique of "filling in" a melodic line, that is, to use all of the chromatic pitches contained in the interval of, say, a perfect fourth, but not in chromatic sequence. Instances of extended passages in which one melodic instrument is set against three accompanying ones are not common, although they do exist. More often, melodic statements are tossed from one instrument to the other, or are overlapped in two or more voices.

In mood, he seeks contrast between vigor and repose, never residing, however, for too extended a time in one mood. He also occasionally conjures up Bartokian atmospheres, most notably in the octave writing of the central movement of the fourth quartet, which looks back to the mood of the Hungarian master's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta. In other instances, Holmboe can match Bohuslav Martinu at his most vigorous energetic level, but he avoids carrying an *ostinato* to the lengths that the Czech composer was famous for. Holmboe is fond of pizzicato, although he rarely utilizes it in all four instruments at the same time (although one notable exception is to be found in the seventh quartet). A more typical usage would be pizzicato in the cello accenting or commenting upon sustained arco lines in the upper voices

In summary, Holmboe's quartet writing has spanned his entire compositional career, which has now covered almost 70 years (as far as the author is aware, he is still active). It is significant, however, to note that he wrote seven quartets during his formative years before his official "No. 1" of 1949, by which time he was 40. Holmboe is an outstanding composer in every genre, but to this author's mind, his quartets are central to his output and contain (as indeed did those of many composers who wrote in the genre) his most profound thoughts.

There is a fine series of recordings on the Danish Fona label of nos. 1-10 performed brilliantly by the Copenhagen Quartet. Connoisseurs of chamber music will want to seek out this deleted LP series. In addition, nos. 15 & 16 have been recorded by the same ensemble on Danish EMI. This disk, too, is lamentably out-of-print. The only three which are currently available on compact disk are nos. 1, 3 & 4, performed by the Kontra Quartet (also a Danish ensemble). The author has not heard these latter recordings, but the Kontra Quartet is a distinguished ensemble and they ought to be worth seeking out as well.



# The Chamber Music of Max Bruch

By R.H.R. Silvertrust

Certainly among violinists, Max Bruch is a well-known name, but most chamber music players do not know that he wrote two string quartets, a piano trio, two viola quintets, an octet and eight pieces for Clarinet, Viola and Piano. Within the past few years several of these have been reprinted, and in one case, printed for the first time. Hence a survey of his chamber music seems timely. [One viola quintet and the octet are yet to be published] Most of Bruch's chamber music dates from his youth, and this is the most likely explanation as to its uneven quality and the influence of Mendelssohn and Schumann to be found therein.

The **String Quartet No.1, Op.9** in c minor was just reprinted by Wollenweber [WW 83] and appeared on the shelves of the music stores [at least in Amsterdam and Vienna] early in 1995. It is curious that they did not choose to bring out No.2 which is, by far, a much stronger work. The first movement, *Andante-Allegro ma non troppo*, has a good introduction followed by a dramatic allegro but despite this, there is simply too much sawing for no good reason. The *Adagio* attempts to be a Mendelssohnian 'song without words' but is unremarkable. The scherzo, *Allegro molto energico* creates ensemble problems without being particularly interesting, although the trio is better musically. The finale, *Molto vivace*, clearly the best movement, sports a tarentella which is made into a fugue. Written in 1856 when Bruch was 18, the quartet can, by no stretch of the imagination, be said to be great music. I am reluctant to damn the music of so great a composer with faint praise, but the fact remains that this work, in my opinion, does not rise even to the rank of average and it is not, in the bargain, particularly easy to play from an ensemble standpoint.

The **Quartet No.2, Op.10** in E Major, written some four years later, is an altogether better work, unfortunately there is no modern reprint of the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of 1860 although happily, it

is in the Maas Library. It must be said at the outset that the key in which the quartet is written is the primary obstacle to an effective performance. The opening *Allegro maestoso* immediately establishes the great breadth of this fine though somewhat difficult movement to bring off. The part writing is excellent. The *Andante quasi Adagio* shows, especially in certain rhythmic passages, the influence of Schumann. The scherzo, *Vivace ma non troppo*, is an entirely original and powerful movement. The quartet is worth hearing or playing for this one movement alone. It opens with a driving syncopated theme in the lower two voices. This tremendous turbulence is dissipated in two different trios, one smooth and flowing, the other more angular and rhythmic. The finale, though good, has a rather florid first violin part and, from an emotional standpoint, is a bit of a letdown after the scherzo. All in all, Wollenweber should have reprinted this quartet. It deserves an occasional performance in the concert hall and in my opinion is the equal of all but two of Mendelssohn's seven quartets. I know of only one recording of the two quartets, that by the Quartetto Academica originally a Dynamic LP DS-4029 and now released on Dynamic CD CDS-29.

Edition Kunzelmann [GM 1352] has recently brought out the first publication of Bruch's **String Quintet [2 Violas] in a minor, Op. Post. (1918)** This work was clearly written in the composer's youth despite the date on the publisher's cover. Though filled with pleasing melodies, much of what was said about his first quartet could be said of this work. There is a lot of needless sawing and most of the thematic material is given to the first violin. Bruch does not make particularly telling or good use of the violas and one wonders why he needed two. As for the cello, it is merely there to complete the bass line. It must be said that this work is not a very noteworthy addition to the literature for viola quintet and cannot under any circumstances be compared favorably to those by say, George Onslow, Herman Koessler or Richard Perger.

The **Piano Trio, Op.5** in c minor, despite the fact that it was written when Bruch was 16, shows far greater understanding of the instruments involved and of thematic writing than the first quartet. It opens with a tonally lovely *Andante molto cantabile* which gives way to an animated *Allegro assai*. In works with piano and strings, Bruch seems to have understood the relationship between the two very well and the part writing is nearly always knowledgeable and effective. In the finale, the beautiful opening theme of the *Andante* returns before giving way to a lively *Presto*. Though written by a student, this is no student work. It can withstand performance in the concert hall and belongs on a program where a short trio from the mid-romantic period is needed. It has not been recently reprinted but has been recorded on both LP and CD.

Perhaps the finest, and certainly the most singular, of Bruch's chamber works are his **Acht Stücke or Eight Pieces, Op.83 for Piano, Clarinet and Viola** [or cello]. Though Bruch also scored these works for piano, clarinet and cello or standard piano trio, having heard them in all arrangements, they are most effective in the original because of the viola timbre. In fact, the outstanding feature of the *Acht Stücke* is the way in which Bruch delves into the timbre of each instrument. One can hear the composer seeking to find the range which produces the greatest warmth and beauty of tone as well as providing striking contrasts of instrumental color. They are typical 'occasional' or 'character' pieces, the products of 19th Century European Romanticism, expressing a variety of moods and emotions each extraordinarily effective in its own way. Space limitations do not permit me to comment on each of these little jewels, but they are a joy to play and a pleasure to hear. The parts have recently been reissued by Simrock, the originally publisher. They have been recorded on LP, Crystal S-643

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# The Problem of Rating Chamber Music

be worthless? Certainly, from an education standpoint, I think not. To those who are unfamiliar with but interested in the wider chamber music literature, a guide to these works with ratings could be of tremendous benefit.

One might justifiably ask, however, if such an undertaking is not a work of art criticism. To a certain extent, the answer must be yes, especially where the evaluators are intent on separating what they consider to be masterpieces, and other top notch works from the average and the less than average works. Further, a rating method which is entirely based upon a scoring system that gives works an overall number by which they can be ranked against each other could easily be accused of being nothing more than subjective criticism masquerading in the guise of pseudo-objectivity.

Over the years, Bob Maas and I discussed this problem at some length. He and his redoubtable Palm Strings Quartet, already launched upon their adventuresome voyage through the chamber music literature, had begun a nascent rating project of their own. He agreed that an exclusively numerical rating system was to be avoided simply because, like it or not, subjectivity is built into any kind of rating, especially where artistic endeavor is involved. A better method, we thought, was the use of qualitative words, such as superior, masterpiece, average, easy, beautiful, astringent, moderately difficult and so forth.

One advantage of such a system would be the implicit acknowledgment to the reader of the subjectivity involved. Moreover, the goal of the rating, we hoped, would be to produce a body of work which could serve as a guide, companion and reference source to the literature and not some sort definitive pronouncement upon the worth of what was being evaluated, *a la* the celebrated Viennese music critic, Eduard Hanslick, or the critiques found in the famous *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in the 19th Century. As long as both the evaluators and those relying upon their



The Palm Strings Quartet (from left to right)  
Herbert Fiss, Robert Maas, Ann Edelson & Elizabeth Martin

evaluations keep this important point in mind, a rating system can be very useful.

Now the use of qualitative words rather than some quantitative method is all well and good, but if the only thing the evaluators and their rating system tell the reader is that this work is excellent and that one is less so or perhaps not good at all, then, of course, one is dealing entirely in subjective matters of dubious worth.

But picture a method in which one of the things rated is the difficulty of playing the work. Here we are on ground which, at first blush, at least seems less subjective than whether the melodies are beautiful. Naturally, the difficulty of a particular work in the eyes of those playing it is directly related to their ability. What one group struggles with another might find quite easy. But, here it is possible to insert some uniformity into the system.

Consider the self-rating system used by the Amateur Chamber Music Players in helping members to arrive at their relative

proficiency level. The method used takes a lot of subjectivity out of the rating.

For those of you unfamiliar with it, member players are asked to rate themselves as to their ability. In arriving at a rating, several works are set forth as Level One Difficulty works, for example, the string quartets of Haydn or Mozart. Similarly, more difficult works such as Beethoven's Middle Quartets or Brahms' Piano Quintet Op.34 are included in Level Two and so on. Among other things, members are asked how many works from the different levels they have played, whether they ever get lost while playing such works, and if they do, are they able to find their place again without having to stop. The thing to note is that a determination has been made by the originators of the rating system as to the difficulty of certain standard or well-known works which then allows them to make an almost objective measuring rod with which to rate the players. This particular method would do quite well in

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# The Problem of Rating Chamber Music

in evaluating the difficulty of works. To use it we must first reach a consensus. To this end, prior to beginning our rating efforts, a survey of the membership will be made asking them to rate a list of standard works as to difficulty. From this we will be able to produce a guideline that can be used by our evaluating groups.

Dr. Cunningham, in his entertaining and excellent article (which appeared in the last issue of the *Journal*) suggests that melody, rhythm, harmony, development and inspiration be among the things considered. I would agree that all of these things ought to be included in one form or another, but should there be, for example, a separate category entitled "inspiration". Is there a better word, more clear and more precise? While a work which is uninspired is usually a boring work, works which are interesting may not always be inspired. Clearly, we must make every effort to find words, which though qualitative, are not so broad that they can mean almost anything at all. And we must be careful to use the words we chose in our evaluations properly and where necessary, specify what we mean by a word.

"Development" plainly illustrates this. "Development" can be a technical term used by students of music theory. I have read several critiques of works by music theorists in which the development section was mercilessly attacked as being "poorly worked out", i.e.: not conforming to certain rules of music theory. Nevertheless, when heard in performance, these development sections were tremendously effective and pleasing to hear. Then there are works which altogether dispense with the development section to great profit and effect. Do we give them a low rating for development or does the term mean something else. I am generally not thinking in music theory terms when I use this term and I do not think Dr. Cunningham was either.

Another important question to be settled is which categories or what things should be rated. Again, a survey of the membership

will be made so that nothing of importance is neglected. How many categories should there be? Recently, Dr. Cunningham informed me of a German scholar who is reputed to have a system for rating chamber music said to involve 32 separate categories! While I would like to see it, I can't imagine implementing any system so detailed. Perhaps this is only my American bias, impatient with the thoroughness of German scholarship.

Be this as it may, I think that in addition to the categories of melodic and harmonic beauty, rhythmic interest, and playing difficulty, the related category of ensemble should be added. While the notes themselves may not be hard to play, other factors may make ensemble nearly impossible.

And then there is the part writing. Violinists are frequently amazed I know virtually all of the Haydn and Mozart quartets by opus or Köchel number. Few cellists or violists, however, would be. As a cellist, I learned them out of self-defense for those not infrequent times when the first violinist would innocently suggest we play one of those quartets where the first violin part was wonderful but the cello part was nothing but a medley of rests and episodic interludes of playing the same note for 75 measures. Fiddle players, especially first violinists, rarely trouble themselves over the question of whether the viola or cello part is boring. They do not care if we are never given the melody, serves us right for not choosing to play the violin. But I digress...

This digression, however, serves to illustrate that part-writing is a very important area. It explains why most violists and cellists would rather play Haydn's Op.76 quartets than his Op.17.

Certainly, the style in which a work is written will be important to several readers. Is it in the tradition of the Viennese classics, does it sound like late Brahms or the early Romantics? This is a useful evaluation since many players

prefer to linger among works from a certain period.

The length of a work may also be useful to know, especially for those looking to perform. The question of whether a work deserves to be brought into the repertoire, or at least deserves an occasional airing on the concert stage is worth noting. Or is it, though charming, only suited to amateurs?

There are, then, between six to ten areas which could be profitably examined. We await your thoughts and suggestions so that we can formulate the categories upon which we will rate the works.

What about the actual mechanics of the rating. It is totally inadequate, although it has probably been the general practice of those who may have attempted it, to have but one group involved in rating a work. The more groups, within reason, we are able to have evaluate a work, the greater our chances of avoiding needless subjectivity. This will create a leavening effect which can be further refined as we come to know our evaluators' preferences and prejudices. Furthermore, the works must be played on more than one occasion. This takes into account that mood, usually bad mood brought on by stress or health, can radically influence a player's view of a new and unfamiliar work. It is difficult to be open-minded when feeling out of sorts. I cannot count the times I have brought out an unknown work for my reading quartet, which prefers nothing better than new territory, only to have it roundly attacked because someone is in a bad mood and has no patience. Then, a few weeks later, under more propitious circumstances, we try it again and it is hailed as a masterpiece.

The process of evaluation will be inclusive and not exclusive. We will encourage as many of the members as possible to become involved in this enjoyable odyssey. Please let us hear your ideas and suggestions.