



THE
CHAMBER MUSIC
JOURNAL

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

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The Piano Trios of Josef Foerster

Jiri Panek



Josef Bohuslav Foerster (1859-1951) was born in Prague and first studied with his father who was a leading organist and Professor at the Prague Conservatory. Foerster studied organ at the Prague Organ School and composition at the Conservatory. Upon graduation he took over from Dvorak as chief organist in one of Prague's leading churches. He was on friendly terms with all of

the leading Czech composers and was initially influenced by Smetana and Dvorak. He worked as a music critic in Hamburg after marrying the leading Czech soprano who was engaged at the Hamburg opera. In

Hamburg, he met and became close friends with Mahler as well as Tchaikovsky.

When Mahler left for Vienna, Foerster followed him and became a professor at the New Vienna Conservatory. After the formation of the Czech Republic in 1918, he returned to Prague where he taught for many years at the Conservatory. His music while initially influenced by Smetana and Dvorak, later changed as did musical styles, although he always remained a tonal composer.

After his first period, his works no longer could be considered nationalistic as he stopped employing the idioms of Czech folk music and adopted a more per-

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The Four Seasons for String Quintet By Felicien David

By Claudette Rigault

Felicien David (1810-1876) though widely known in his home country for his spectacular operas, filled with exotic music, elsewhere is virtually unknown. Born in the south of France in the town of Cadenet, his early musical education took place there, but much of what he learned was through self-study of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.



His father was an amateur violinist returned without fortune from the colony of Santo Domingo in 1790. He began studying music under his father's direction, but a year later, his father's sudden death left him orphaned and almost destitute. His singing voice earned him a position as a choirboy at the cathedral of Aix-en-Provence, thus ceasing to be dependent from his older sister who had taken him in after the death of his parents. He was given a sound musical education and by 1823, he began composing with a string quartet and violin concerto were produced that year. His teachers at the cathedral obtained a scholarship for him to study literature at a Jesuit college.

But after three years, drawn by his fondness for music, he left the college. Soon he found a position at the Aix theater as second conductor. He recognized this was a dead end and that to complete his music education he needed to go to Paris. He was able to do this after a wealthy uncle finally agreed to grant him an allowance. So, in 1830,

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The Septets Of Alexander Fesca

by Waltrude Westendorf



Alexander Ernst Fesca (1820-1849) was born in the German city of Karlsruhe where his father Friedrich Ernst Fesca, also a composer, was serving as music director

of the Ducal Court Orchestra of Baden. Fesca received his first lessons from his father and was considered a prodigy on the piano. He attended the Prussian Royal Conservatory in Berlin where he graduated with a degree in composition at the young age of 14 after which he enjoyed a career as a pianist and music director. Though he did not live very long, he composed a considerable amount of music. His chamber music includes six piano trios, two piano quartets and two septets for piano, winds and strings.

His **Septet No.1 in c minor, Op.26** dates from 1842. While Beethoven's Op.20 Septet for strings and winds became a model, as regards to instrumentation, for several composers who tried

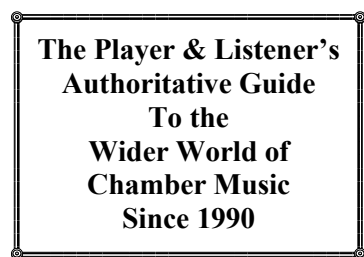
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The mission of the Chamber Music Journal is to disseminate information about non-standard, rare or unknown chamber music of merit.

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he traveled to Paris and submitted some of his compositions to Cherubini, then director of the Paris Conservatory. David latter wrote that at first Cherubini told him "You know nothing". However, despite misgivings, he offered David a place. David was forced to learn the piano and wrote, "The piano is a devilish instrument that has enraged me many times but the difficulties begin to ease and in a year, I will be able to say to myself a good pianist, not from the provinces, but from Paris: because there are a big difference." Cherubini's preferences and prejudices can also be found in David's writings who at this time wrote, "I like the Romantics-like Beethoven and Weber, that is to say new, original, deep like them., but certainly not the romanticism that one hears in Rossini or Auber, God forbid. "

On leaving the Conservatory, David was caught up in the Saint-Simonian movement, for which he became a great enthusiast. The Saint-Simonians held music to be an important art, and David wrote much music for them, including a number of hymns. After the suppression of the movement in 1832, David joined with some fellow Saint Simonians and traveled to the Middle East. This also proved a source of strong inspiration, leading eventually to his greatest success, the symphonic ode *Le désert* of 1844. Returning to Paris in 1833, he wrote a number of romances, and chamber music, including three piano trios and four string quartets

Félicien David's *Les Quatre Saisons* for String Quintet--24 charming and elegant pieces, six for each season, are full of enchanting melodies. These were called respectively *Soirées de Printemps*-The Evening Concerts of Spring, *Soirées d'Été*-The Evening Concerts of Summer , *Soirées d'Automne*-The Evening Concerts of Autumn and *Soirées d'Hiver*-The Evening Concerts of Winter

Les Quatre Saisons came into being because a violinist friend of David's, Jules Armingaud, who gave regular Thursday evening chamber music concerts (*soirées*), encouraged the composer to bring something for his quintet to one of these evenings. David did so. Armingaud was so delighted that he insisted David bring more. David then hit upon the idea of composing six works for each season's evening concerts. Hence, there were six works for the *Soirées de Printemps* or Spring Evening Concerts and so forth for each season. *Le Quatre Saisons* was composed over the two year period of 1842-1844. When Mendelssohn invited David to visit him in Germany in 1845, David brought the manuscripts of *Le Quatre Saisons* with him and showed them to Mendelssohn, who was delighted by them. These charming works were intended for intimate evening chamber music concerts in the salon. They were originally written for a quintet of two violins, viola, cello and bass. But to increase sales, David's publisher insisted on a 2nd Cello part in lieu of bass and David made the parts so that they can be played by either group.

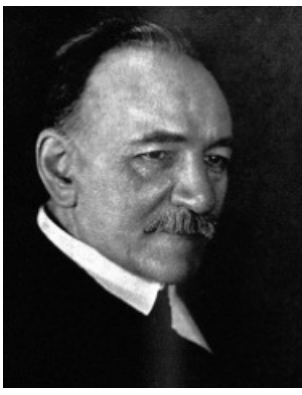
You can hear soundbites of several of the pieces from each season by visiting the website www.editionsilvertrust.com

The Piano Trios of Josef Foerster

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sonal and mystical style. He composed in most genres and left a considerable amount of chamber music including five string quartets and three piano trios

Foerster's **Piano Trio No.1 in f minor, Op.8** dates from 1883 although it was not published until 1890. Dvorak, who was at its premiere, praised it lavishly. It was dedicated to Edvard Grieg and it is for this reason that one can at times hear Nordic harmonies. This is a noteworthy work which deserves a place of honor in the concert hall. The opening movement, *Allegro*, has for its main theme a somewhat Hungarian melody, but which, nonetheless, is quite original. The development section is quite cleverly done. The second movement, *Allegro con brio*, which serves as a kind of scherzo is dominated by its sharp rhythms while the lovely trio section makes for a fine contrast with its appealing melody. A deeply felt and warm *Adagio molto* follows. The finale, *Allegro con brio*, has considerable swing to it, especially the lyrical theme. This last movement does make technical demands on the players, but it should be noted that these are by no means beyond the abilities of competent amateur players. This is a first rate piano trio, which belongs in the concert hall but is not beyond competent amateur players.



Piano Trio No.2 in B flat Major, Op.38 dates from 1894 shortly after his wife's premature death. The trio along with his Second Symphony were dedicated to her memory. Unlike the symphony the piano trio does not have outbursts of drama, pain or despair but rather a more measured and poeticized grief. Its structure does

not conform to the standard three movement pattern of fast--slow--fast, but instead has two fast movements and then is concluded by a slower, elegiac one. Given the "message" of the trio, this layout is entirely logical. In the first 2 movements, *Allegro energico* and *Allegro molto*, the mood is bright and optimistic, telling of his

early happiness. The second movement in particular is a brilliant and lively scherzo which sets the stage for the onset of the grief which is to follow. The introductory solo passage in the cello is reminiscent of Smetana's approach in his First String Quartet. The mood is gloomy but tinged with a sophisticated sense of resignation. This is a powerful piano trio which undoubtedly belongs in the concert hall where it would be sure to triumph, but it is well within the ability of amateur players who should not miss the chance to play.

Twenty five years separate Josef Bohuslav Foerster's



Piano Trio No.3 in a minor, Op.105 from his second piano trio. He began work on it in 1919 immediately after the death of his son in 1918 and completed it in 1921. By this time, his style had changed considerably from the music he was writing toward the end of the 19th century. Although the trio is written in a post romantic style, it is still entirely tonal. The moods are

mostly reflective and introspective. The opening movement, *Assai moderato, ma con ardore interno*, is complex in texture and polyphony, but the overall feel is elegiac. The middle movement, *Andante sostenuto* though lyrical, is quiet and meditative. Slowly tension rises to a dramatic climax before calm returns to close it. The finale, *Allegro risoluto*, begins in brusque fashion but with intense emotion which with its many dramatic climaxes conveys a sense of pathos. This piano trio is an engaging work which deserves concert performance.

It is truly a shame that these works have not entered the standard repertoire. Even in the Czech Republic, one does not often hear them. While Dvorak's *Dumky* Piano Trio is justly famous and often performed, his other efforts in this genre, in my opinion, do not match those of Foerster. It is, of course, hard to complain when even the piano trios of Smetana, Novak and Suk also languish.

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Jan Brandts-Buys Works for String Quartet

By Bastian van Cleve



Jan Brandts Buys (1868-1933) came from a long line of professional musicians. His father was an organist in the town of Zutphen in the Netherlands where Jan was born. They were a musical family and received important visitors to their home, including Henryk Wieniawski, Anton Rubinstein, Edvard Grieg, and Julius Röntgen. He studied at the Raff Conservatory in Frankfurt and in 1893 settled in Vienna where he got to know Brahms, who along with Edvard Grieg, praised his early works. His piano concerto won an important international prize and such famous artists as Lilli Lehmann often included his songs on the same program with those of Schubert. He was best known for his comic operas such as *The Tailors of Schonau* and *The Man in the Moon*, which gained considerable international acclaim. But he did not ignore chamber music, penning several works various ensembles.

His first work for string quartet was the **String Quartet in c minor, Op.19 dates from 1911**. The magnificent and somewhat dramatic main theme to the first movement, *Tempo Rubato*, is deeply felt and highly effective. The finely wrought thematic material is skillfully handled. The lovely *Intermezzo* which follows has an old-fashioned feeling aura to it. The third movement, *Ziemlich langsam*, with its artfully executed changes of tempo and mood, might almost be considered a theme, which is like a folk tune, and set of variations. The splendid finale, *Allegro ma non troppo*, combines joviality with lyricism. I can recommend this work, which has no great technical difficulties, for both the concert hall and home music making.

Though it has a higher opus number than the String Quartet, the **Suite in the Ancient Style for String Quartet, Op.23** appears to have been composed some three years before it in 1908. However, it is entirely possible that the Quartet was actually composed before the Suite but just published after it. The Suite is a work in a lighter vein and quite straight forward with no technical difficulties. It opens with a substantial *Praeludium* and is followed by a charming *Gavotte* with a *musette* for its trio section. Next is a warm and finely wrought *Arioso* which in turn is succeeded by a lovely *Menuetto* with trio. A fleet finale in fugal form

completes this fine work.

The Suite is quite interesting in that while "in the ancient style" usually means from the Baroque, Brandts-Buys combines several older styles, for example, the main section of the *Praeludium* which is entirely in the baroque style has a middle section which is late classical or early romantic.

Of the ten chamber music works Brandts Buys wrote, only the lovely **Romantische Serenade, Op.25** (Romantic Serenade), composed in 1905, was performed with any regularity before disappearing shortly after his death. This exquisite five movement work begins with a *Nocturne* in which the viola leads the others through this haunting but gorgeous movement filled with the sounds of the jungle at night. There is an almost Latin feel reminiscent of Villa Lobos in his Fifth Quartet. Then comes an *Alla marcia*, a slowish Berlin/Vienna salon march from the period just before the First World War. However, this is not 'soupy' sentiment run wild but a superb little gem, seriously written, perfect of its kind. The exotic middle section is particularly fine. The following *Serenade, Allegro molto vivace*, again gives the viola the leadership throughout as it plays a very lyrical theme to a frenzied accompaniment in the other three voices. It is altogether more modern sounding than the preceding two movements. Next is *Schmen, Allegro molto*. This very short scherzo, though it ends on a calm note, sends the strings buzzing about like insects expressing a kind of frantic angst. The last movement is also a *Nocturne*, very melancholy in feeling. The cello, which has up until this point been melodically used rather sparingly is given a big singing solo in the middle section. The music belongs on the concert stage and should be investigated by professional ensembles but will also give pleasure to amateurs as it presents no undue difficulties,

The last work Brandts-Buys wrote for string quartet was his **Sicilian Serenade, Op.28** which appeared in 1917 for the concert hall where it will certainly be quite effective, especially as the last work on the program. Further to recommend it is the fact that it is not difficult to play presenting no unusual technical prob-

lems. He subtitled it ‘*Some cheerful music for unhappy musicians*’. Some Sicilian folk tunes can be found in the five concise, appealing movements, this is by no means overdone and at times little of Sicily is to be heard.

The opening Allegro appassionato has a certain earthiness or rustic quality to it. Next comes a sweet Lento ma non troppo in the form of a nocturne full of yearning. The third movement, a Presto, is fetching and has an interesting section in which it sounds as if a mandolin had joined the ensemble. The following Comodo ma burlesco is filled with good spirits and the elegant finale, Grazioso concludes this excellent work.

Of the four works discussed here, only the first, the String Quartet, is in a traditional format. And as I wrote, it certainly is a fine work deserving concert performance. That said, however, it is the last three works for which an even strong case for concert performance, not to mention the stands of home music makers, can be made. Each of these works is highly original and very appealing.

The Suite in the Ancient Style superbly updates the old Baroque movements. It would not be inaccurate to say that the work is in Neo-Baroque format.

Perhaps the most original of the lot is the Romantic Serenade. This is especially so in the movements in which the viola is given the lead. The effect is most striking not only because the thematic material is presented in the viola’s middle and lower registers, which gives it a very dark hue, but equally important is the superb accompaniment without which the music would not make the indelible effect that it does.

Equally impressive is the Alla Marcia, which at first could be dismissed as fancy salon music, but truly, it expertly evokes the aura of Pre First World War Culture in the capitals of the German speaking world. A world, which disappeared forever after the war.

Finally, we have the Sicilian Serenade. While perhaps not as much a standout, it does have a strong Italian flavor.

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The Piano Quartet of Georg Hendrik Witte

By R.H.R. SilvertrustGerion Vainberg



Georg Hendrik Witte (1843-1929) was born in the Dutch city of Utrecht. At age 16, he entered the Royal Dutch Conservatory in the Hague where he studied violin, piano, organ and composition. He then continued his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory with Ignaz Moscheles and Carl Reinecke for piano, and Moritz

Hauptmann and Ernst Friedrich Richter for composition. After teaching briefly in the city of Thann in Alsace, he tried to obtain a post in the Netherlands but there were none available. However, on the recommendation of Reinecke, Witte obtained the post of Director of the Music Society of Essen and eventually became Music Director of the city of Essen, serving as conductor of its orchestra and choir society.

Piano Quartet in A Major, Op.5 dates from 1867. No composer studying at the Leipzig Conservatory at the time Witte did (mid 1860's) could escape the influence of its founders Mendelssohn and Schumann who were held up by most of the professors there as musical gods to be emulated. Witte was no exception, howev-

er, his work is nonetheless original and fresh sounding. The Piano Quartet won him a prize at a prestigious competition, and it is indeed a fine work.

It opens with a Moderato assai introduction which leads to the very effective main section, Allegro con fuoco. The second movement, Sostenuato, has for its theme a somewhat melancholy subject on which a set of excellently contrasting variations are produced. Next comes an appealing Vivace which serves as a scherzo. There is a fetching trio section based on a folk melody. The satisfying finale, Allegro gioioso, features a magnificent fugal episode before the work is brought successful close. This is a good candidate for the concert hall and can be warmly recommended to amateur ensembles

One does not, unfortunately, get to hear piano quartets played live in concert and when one does, it is almost always the same one or two by Brahms and Dvorak. There are so many others out there deserving a chance and this piano quartet is one of them.

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their hands at such works, there were few examples of piano septets and none which was to serve as a model for any other composer. Hence, the instrumentation varied from composer to composer. The only notable examples of piano septets composed before Fesca's were those of Ferdinand Ries, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Friedrich Kalkbrenner and Ignaz Moscheles. Those composers were well-enough known and their septets enjoyed a degree of popularity which makes it possible that Fesca might have been familiar with one or more of them, but it seems unlikely that they influenced him since none of their septets shared the same instrumentation as his: Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, Oboe and Horn. This Septet is a substantial work and as was the custom entitled Grand Septuor. The opening movement, *Allegro con spirito*, begins with a powerful, unison statement of the main theme. It promises turbulence but more lyrical passages follow. At times, the piano is juxtaposed against the other six, now leading, now accompanying. At other times, it blends into as one of the group, and then sometimes it is given solo passages. The lovely second movement, *Andante con moto*, opens with a long, dreamy horn solo, to the soft accompaniment of the cello, bass and piano. Gradually the others join in. Next comes a fleet Scherzo, *allegro vivo*. The piano starts things off and then suddenly the rest join in. The music alternates between powerful thrusting episodes and softer and mysterious intermezzo-like passages. The treatment is quite fetching. The finale, *Allegro con fuoco*, also starts off unison with a thumping introduction which is suddenly interrupted twice by a baroque sounding oboe recitative. Finally, the oboe gives forth a very long-lined theme which is rather relaxed. But then the piano jumps and the music turns frantic and hard driving.

His **Septet No.2 in d minor, Op.28** was composed, if not immediately, then shortly after No.1 and also dates from 1842. It bears many similarities with the first and it must be assumed that both septets were commissioned by the same individual. For a start, the instrumentation of each is identical. The pattern of the movements is the same and the titles of the first two movements is identical. Like the First Septet, the Second is substantial work and as was the custom entitled Grand Septuor. The opening movement, *Allegro con spirito*, begins with a march-like introduction presented in unison. After developing the material further, a second more lyrical subject is introduced by the oboe. Toward the end is an unusual recitativ for the cello and bass. The fetching main theme to the slow move-

ment, *Andante con moto*, is entirely introduced by the cello in a lengthy solo over soft accompaniment. Eventually the others join in this dreamy, peaceful and pastoral idyll. The violoncello figures so prominently in this movement that one wonders if the commissioner was a cellist. Rather than a scherzo, as one might expect, Fesca inserts a minuet. This *Tempo di Menuetto*, is intentionally archaic, harking back not to Mozart, Haydn or the classical era but beyond to the time of Gossec with its formal, baroque style. Yet Fesca inserts several very imaginative ideas into this old form, including a brief Rossiniesque episode in the trio section. In the finale, *Allegro moderato*, the piano brings forth the lilting main theme, full of chromatic digressions. When the others join to create a powerful impression the character of the music becomes much more dramatic before Fesca retraces his steps.

Fesca's **Piano Quartet in c minor, Op.26** is a version of his Septet No.1 for Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, Oboe, Horn and Piano which was published in 1842 and made by Fesca. It is not clear if he made this version at the same time as the Septet. It seems probable that it was done shortly afterwards based on the fact that it was not published until 1844. The rationale for a second version would have most likely been premised on the fact that the Septet was not likely to be played very often, it being for an unusual ensemble, while piano quartets on the other hand, were quite popular at that time. I must say that it is a very successful arrangement. The piano takes on a somewhat larger burden than in the Septets but then that is to be expected.

Fesca's Piano Quartet No.2 in a minor, Op.28 is a version of his Septet No.2 for Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, Oboe, Horn and Piano which was published in 1842. This, too, is a quite successful arrangement.

It seems clear that Fesca lavished a considerable amount of attention to the piano quartet versions, essentially making them into more or less original works, not because the themes are different, but rather by the way they are handled by a small group. Further the removal of the winds is done quite cleverly with the cello taking up the slack for the missing bass and horn, the viola also takes some of the horn's material and the oboe is divided between the violin and piano. The sad truth is that most will not get a chance to play these fine works as septets but certainly if given a chance should try the piano quartets.