



THE  
**CHAMBER MUSIC**  
**JOURNAL**

*The Essential Guide  
For Players & Listeners  
To The Wider World  
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***Moritz Kässmayer's  
Folksongs for String Quartet***

***The Chamber Music of  
Jan Levoslav Bella***

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Louis Spohr***

**Volume XXXIII No.1 / 2022**

**ISSN 1535 1726**

# The Chamber Music of Jan Levoslav Bella

By R.H.R. Silvertrust



Jan Levoslav Bella (1843-1936), for the first 76 years of his life was an Austrian, he spent his last 17 as a Czechoslovak, and today, he is posthumously a proud son of the Slovak Republic. He was born in the small town of Liptovsky St. Mikulas in what was then the Habsburg Empire. He studied both music and theology locally and was ordained as a priest in 1866. He then traveled widely in Germany where he was influenced by the music of Schumann and Liszt. In 1881, he left the priesthood and married, taking a position as City Music Director (Stadtkapellmeister) in Hermannstadt (now Sibiu, Romania), a town with a sizeable German population in what was then part of the Hapsburg Empire or Austria-Hungary. He held this position until he retired in 1921. Although, he is virtually unknown today, he was well-known and on friendly terms with many prominent musicians such as Richard Strauss, Liszt, Brahms, and Ernst von Dohnanyi, whose works he championed and performed.

Though the bulk of his compositions consist of choral music, he

did not ignore chamber music, writing four string quartets, two of which were often performed by well-known ensembles, and also a viola quintet. Virtually all of his chamber music, with one of two exceptions, was composed before 1890. Late in life, around 1930, he wrote a one movement Nocture or Notturmo for string quartet. He also wrote a short work for piano trio and some violin sonatas which are of no consequence and will not be discussed here. It can be said that Bella was attracted to the German neo-romantic school rather than the nationalism and dramatic naturalism of Smetana and Dvorak. His chamber music often shows the influence of Liszt and the so-called New German School, although it cannot be said to have followed the formula of program music in any way.

## The String Quartets

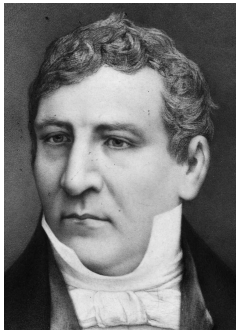
### String Quartet No.1 in g minor

His String Quartet No.1 in g minor dates from 1866 and is contemporaneous with Dvorak's earliest quartets and predates those of Brahms and Smetana. It was premiered at a concert with the

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## The Piano Trios Of Louis Spohr

By Robert Vogel



Louis Spohr (1784– 859) was baptized Ludewig Spohr, but as a youth was known by the modern German form of the name Ludwig. Spohr was born in German city of Braunschweig. Spohr's parents both loved music—his mother was a gifted singer and pianist, and his father played the flute. They encouraged him to study the violin. After studying with a series of nondescript teachers, he was fortunate to become a student of the virtuoso violinist Franz Eck and in 1802 accompanied him on a concert tour which took him as far as St Petersburg. Eck, who completely retrained Spohr in violin technique, was a product of the so-called Mannheim school, and Spohr became its most prominent heir. Spohr's first notable compositions, including his Violin Concerto No. 1, date from this time. Upon his return from Russia, he made a concert tour of northern Germany. He became famous after the important music critic Friedrich Rochlitz raved about his playing at a concert which took place in Leipzig in 1804. In 1805, he obtained the position as concertmaster at the court of Gotha, where he stayed until 1812, however he was allowed liberal time off to tour. In 1813, he traveled to Vienna upon his appointment as conductor at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna. During his 2 years in Vienna, he got to know and became friendly with Beethoven and often practiced chamber music with him at his home. Spohr later recounted in his autobiography how at one session when they were rehearsing Beethoven's Piano Trio, Op. 70 No. 1, 'The Ghost' at Beethoven's home that Beethoven's piano was out of tune and that Beethoven's playing was harsh or careless. After Vienna, Spohr moved on to Frankfurt and then finally in 1822 he served as director of music in the city of Kassel, a position he held until his death in 1859.

He was kept busy by his conducting duties, solo concertizing tours, teaching and composing. He produced more than 150 works with opus numbers, in addition to a number of nearly 140 works without such numbers. He wrote music in all genres: Symphonies, concertos and chamber music, including some 36 string quartets, four double quartets for two string quartets, seven quintets, a string sextet, an octet and a nonet as well as five piano trios.

Spohr is credited with having invented the violin chinrest, about 1820. He was also

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## Folksongs for String Quartet by Moritz Käsmayer

by Waltrud Graebner



Today, and probably for the last 100 years, Moritz Käsmayer (1831-1884) and his music lay in oblivion. Although he wrote a symphony and five string quartets as well as a string quintet, it was his humorous and contrapuntal folksongs composed for string quartet which brought him considerable fame during his lifetime. These appeared in 13 separate volumes, each containing four folk songs from different nations or parts of Austria. Composed between 1853 and 1880, they range from Op.14 to Op.41. Though composed some 20 years earlier, the first volume did not appear until 1873. They were not all published until after the composer's death in 1885 by the firm of Adolf Schlesinger. By the end of the First World War, they were out of print. But then sometime shortly after World War II in the 1950s, the publishing house of Robert Lienau, which had taken over Schlesinger, reprinted all 13 volumes. These have been out of print now for quite sometime although it is possible, here and there, to come across one of two volumes that Lienau reprinted. Fortunately, the editors at Edition Silvertrust, collected all 13 volumes and have made them available once again. What's more, you can hear soundbites of these very interesting and original works on their website [www.editionsilvertrust.com](http://www.editionsilvertrust.com).

Käsmayer was born in Vienna where he spent his entire life. At the age of 12 he entered the

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## The Piano Trios of Louis Spohr *continued from page 2*

a significant conductor, being one of the first to use a baton and also inventing rehearsal letters, which are placed periodically throughout a piece of sheet music so that a conductor may save time by asking the orchestra or singers to start playing "from letter C", for example. In the 1830's Spohr bemoaned his lack of ability on the piano and said that he would gladly trade a year's salary to be able to play the piano well. Sometime during the late 1830's he undertook a rigorous course of study of the instrument and by the 1840's had become a good, if not great, pianist. The main result of this was that he was able to compose chamber works with piano, such as his piano trios.

Piano Trio No.1 in e minor, Op.119, which Spohr subtitled Concertante, was completed 1841 and created a sensation upon its premiere. Critics wrote that it had no parallel from Beethoven through Mendelssohn either in its construction or use of instruments. This was because Spohr, as a violinist and quartet player, had an intimate knowledge of the abilities of the string instruments. He was able to write for them on an equal basis and even do such things as giving the cello the real bass while the left hand of the piano played an octave above, something no composer before him had ventured to do. Perhaps more than his other trios, this one with its wistful pathos is an expression of Spohr's personality. This is especially prominent in the first theme of the opening movement, Moderato. A march-like second theme precedes several bravura passages. In the broad and lyrical second movement, Larghetto, Spohr presents only one theme but gives it several contrasting settings. The Scherzo which follows especially impressed critics with what we might now call its jazzy syncopation, which in some ways anticipates Slavonic dances. The finale, Vivace, combines a fiery main theme with a more relaxed second subject.

Piano Trio No.2 in F Major, Op.123 dates from 1842 and of his five trios is written on the largest scale. The first movement Allegro moderato begins with a powerful opening phrase which leads directly to the chromatic first theme. The second theme demonstrates an example of imaginative scoring. The Larghetto which comes next is one more remarkable in the literature. The cello with only the piano for a soft accompaniment, in its lower registers, sings a sad and forlorn theme. The violin's entrance briefly creates a moment of tension before moving on to the lyrical second theme. Then comes a Scherzo with a haunting leisurely dance-line melody. By contrast, the trio section is bright and sunny. The finale, Vivace, begins in the minor with a promising theme which quickly dissolves into rushing triplet passages which create considerable excitement.

Piano Trio No.3 in a minor, Op.124 was also completed 1842. The dramatic opening of the Allegro moderato, begins with a theme of pathos. This is immediately followed by a highly romantic theme. In the second movement, Andante con variazione, Spohr chooses a fine folk ballad for his theme, which proves capable of withstanding the wide-ranging treatment it is given. The Scherzo which comes next is of the sort in which Spohr was a master. It might be called the flip-side of the Mendelssohnian scherzo with its elves and fairies. Spohr's scherzos are haunted and tend to feature ghosts and ogres. The contrasting trio is more ethereal. The finale, Presto, seems to take up where the Scherzo leaves and begins with a haunted "march of the goblins." Full of exciting and bizarre twists and turns, it provides an excellent conclusion to what is one of Spohr's very best chamber works.

Piano Trio No.4 in B flat Major, Op.133 dates from 1846. It is generally lighter in mood than his other piano trios. The opening Allegro has for its main subject a flowing, dance-like theme, untroubled in character. For his second movement, Spohr substitutes a stately Minuetto for what, by that time, would almost certainly have been a scherzo. What is perhaps surprising are the sudden capricious interruptions. The third movement, Poco adagio has the character of a noble hymn. The finale, a playful Presto, is a sparkling affair. Spohr called it a Sprudelsatz—a bubbling movement—because the music just bubbled forth from his pen effortlessly, while he was taking the cure at Carlsbad Spa with its bubbling springs.

Piano Trio No.5 in g minor, Op.142 was composed in 1848. The opening movement, Allegro vivace, is filled with urgent, march-like themes. In contrast, the themes of second movement, Adagio, are calmer and filled with nobility. A restless Scherzo follows. The finale, Presto, opens with dramatic ascending passages and its flowing undercurrent creates an even greater sense of restlessness than the opening movement, although the lyrical second theme serves to relieve the tension created by the opening section.

# Moritz Kässmayer's Humorous and Contrapuntal Folksongs for String Quartet

Conservatory of der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde where he studied composition with Simon Sechter and Gottfried von Preyer. Sechter, of course, was one of the most famous, if not the most famous composition teacher of the 19th century having taught the likes of Franz Schubert, Anton Bruckner Henri Vieuxtemps, Franz Lachner, Eduard Marxsen (who taught Brahms), Anton Door, Sigismond Thalberg, Adolf von Henselt, and Anton de Kontski. He studied violin with Georg Hellmesberger und Joseph Böhm both famous violin virtuosos and teachers. After graduating from the Conservatory in 1847. He freelanced for several years until he was able to obtain a place in the first violin section of the Vienna Philharmonic. A few years later he obtained the position of Director of Ballet Music for the Court Opera and the in 1873 until his death of a heart attack, he served as a member of the Vienna Court Orchestra.

Because Kässmayer chose to title his works humorous and contrapuntal, they often have not been given the credit they deserve. They are quite clever and original. And while today, no one laughs at performances of Mozart's Musical Joke and other humorous works from the 19th century as our modern sense of humor is far from that of those times, we can still appreciate what the composers did. However, Kässmayer's contemporaries, such as Brahms and the famous critic Eduard Hanslick, expressed their admiration of his work in the strongest terms. Kässmayer chose the folksongs he worked with carefully. Most of them have humorous lyrics and were at the time quite well-known. This no doubt heightened the results he was able to get. Those of familiar with the German language will quickly realize that the words to the Austrian and Viennese folksongs are in local dialect, i.e. the vernacular and not in Hochdeutsch, i.e. proper German. So without further ado, I will discuss briefly each of these 13 sets of folksongs.

## Volume I Four German Folksongs, Op.14

The four German folk songs in Volume I are

1. Muss i denn zum Städtele 'naus / Must I leave the little town
2. Es war einmal ein Zimmergesell / There once was a carpenter,
3. Das schwäbische Brünnele / The little Swabian spring
4. Mein Herz ist im Hochland / My heart is in the highlands, which is based on a poem by the Scottish poet Robert Burns. You may recognize Muss i denn zum Städtele 'naus, a song of farewell. It became quite famous and received many different settings.

## Volume II Four Bohemian (Czech) Folksongs, Op.14a

The four Bohemian songs in Volume II are

1. Sil jsem proso na Souvrati / I was sowing millet,
  2. Horo, horo vysoká / Mountain, mountain, you are so high
  3. Kdyz jsem plela len / When I was weeding flax
  4. Pod dubem, za dubem / Beneath the oak tree.
- You may recognize Sil jsem proso na Souvrati, a famous Czech folk tune which Smetana used in the finale to his piano trio.

## Volume III Four Styrian Folksongs, Op.15

The four songs from the Austrian province of Steiermark are

1. Wildschütz'n Liad / The game poacher's song
  2. Mein Tog / My Day
  3. Der Freier / The easy girl
  4. Im Nasswalder Holzschlag / Felling trees in the wet forest.
- The words to Mein Tog are quite humorous--My day only has three hours, three hours and not more---a good one, a bad one and the third that is so-so.

## Volume IV Four German Songs, Op.16

The four German songs are

1. Und ich geh bei der Nacht / And I go by the night
  2. Das zerbrochene Ringlein / The broken little ring
  3. S'Zeiserl is krank / The tiny child is sick
  4. O du lieber Augustin / Goodness, it's you dear Augustin.
- You will probably recognize O du lieber Augustin, one of the most famous folk songs in the German language. It tells of the aftermath of the 1679 plague epidemic in Vienna. Augustin, a beloved drunk, who used to go round the city playing his bagpipes, while drunk fell down in the street and passed out. Mistaken for dead, he was thrown in a pit with other dead bodies. The next day he awoke, and finding himself unable to get out of the pit, began to play his bagpipes. The suspicious Viennese thought they were hearing his ghost, but eventually rescued him.

## Volume V Four Hungarian Songs, Op.27

We do not know the names of the four Hungarian folk songs in Volume 5. For some reason, Kässmayer did not list them as he did in all of the other volumes. Perhaps he only knew the melodies which could be heard in most any of the cafes of 19th century Vienna. The words, most likely since they were folksongs, would have been in Hungarian, a very difficult language few Austrians ever bother to learn. There are 3 quick folksongs and one very emotional and sad folk song, which features, perhaps parodies, the traditional off-beat rhythm so typical of sad Hungarian folk songs.

## Volume VI Four German Folksongs, Op.29

The four German folksongs are

1. Ach, wie ist's möglich dann / Oh, how is it possible
  2. Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten / I don't know what it means
  3. Was kommt dort von der Höh / What comes there from on high
  4. Ist mir alles eins / It's all the same to me.
- You will probably recognize Was kommt dort von der Höh. Brahms used it in his Academic Overture. It is one of the most famous traditional German student songs.

## Volume VII Four Austrian Songs, Op.30

The four Austrian songs are

1. Ich bin liederlich / I'm slovenly
  2. Ei, ei, ei, sagt mein Wei / Oh dear oh dear said my wife. She goes on to say, "shall I cook noodles, but I have no salt and butter,"
  3. Was ist denn da gescheh'n? / So, what's happened?
  4. Was ich beim Tag verdien' / What I earned by day
- The words to Ich bin liederlich are quite humorous: "I'm a slob, your a slob, we're a couple of bums" Beethoven used this popular folk tune in his Op.110 piano sonata, and both Paul Wranitzky and Mauro Giuliani used it in various compositions.

## Volume VIII Four Austrian Folksongs, Op.31

The four Austrian folksongs are

1. Wenn du willst a Bassgeig'n sei / If you want to be a bass fiddle,
2. Kein kreutzer Geld / No coins, no money
3. Nicht als Müh und Plag / Nothing but toil and trouble
4. Kinder, jetzt halt's eng z'samm / Now Children, stand close together.

The words to If you want to be a bass fiddle are also quite humorous: "If you want to be a bass fiddle, then fiddle for a dancing

# Humorous & Contrapuntal Folksongs for String Quartet by Moritz Kässmayer

bear. But the bear won't dance. He doesn't want to hear you."

## Volume IX Four Norwegian Folksongs, Op.33

The four Norwegian folk songs in Volume 9 are

1. Sag du nokke te kjerringe mi / Have you by chance seen my wife
2. Springlatt / Leaping (or springing) dance,
3. Rabnabryllup I kraakalund / The Ravens wedding in Kraakalund
4. Halling / A traditional folk dance.

While all of these folk songs were well-known in Norway, it was Edvard Grieg's arrangement of them first for piano and later for orchestra which brought them fame throughout Europe. Here, Kässmayer's settings are particularly humorous. The Ravens' Wedding rather than being a joyous affair sounds more like a funeral. And certainly one would never guess from the lively dance-like music that the title to the song was Have you by chance seen my wife.

## Volume X Four Viennese Folksongs, Op.34

The four Viennese folk songs in Volume 10 are

1. Was ist schwerer-Ein Pfund Federn oder ein Pfund Blei / What's heavier-a pound of feathers or a pound of lead,
2. Mein' Mutter hat g'sagt / My mother has said
3. Ui Jegerli! Die Schuldun! / Oh god! (oy vey) the debt!
4. Himmel-Kreutz-Sapperment! / Heaven-The Cross-My Goodness.

The words to Mein' Mutter hat g'sagt are quite humorous---"My mother says eating vegetable soup makes one beautiful. Is it true? I still don't know, I haven't tried it."

## Volume XI Four Viennese Folksongs, Op.36

The four Viennese folk songs in Volume 11 are

1. So geht's in der Welt / So goes the world
  2. Na, das is ein schöne G'schicht / Now that's a pretty story
  3. Der Fasching ist aus / Carnival is over
  4. Wenn's Morg'n widder regn't / If it rains again tomorrow.
- Na, das is ein schöne G'schicht (Now that's a pretty story) is actually a sarcastic Viennese way of say what a lie. You may recognize Wenn's Morg'n widder regn't, the words to which are "If it rains again tomorrow, the wool will be cheap, which pleases the wool weavers who must go to the wool market to buy their goods." The tune achieved considerable popularity and was even orchestrated.

## Volume XII Four German Folksongs, Op.37

The four German folk songs in Volume 12 are

1. Der Wirtin Töchterlein / The lady innkeeper's little daughter
2. Wer hat die schönsten Schäfchen? / Who has the prettiest lamb
3. Michel, nimm d'Sichel / Michael, take the sickle
4. Spinn' Lies'chen, Spinn' / Spin little spider.

The words to Der Wirtin Töchterlein are from the famous poem by Goethe and in addition to Kässmayer have been set to music by Carl Reinecke, Johann Reichardt and others. Wer hat die schönsten Schäfchen? is from a famous German nursery rhyme.

## Volume XIII Four German Folksongs, Op.41

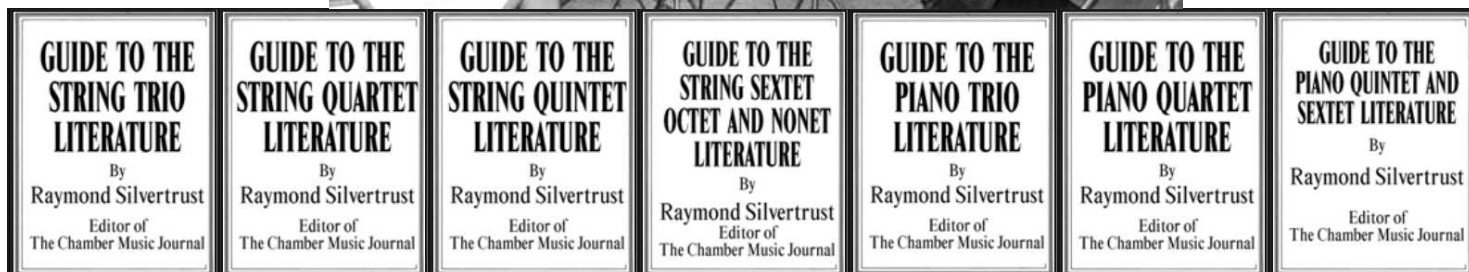
The German folk songs in Volume 13 are

1. Der Hans hat Stiefeln an / Hans has boots on
2. Wenn i in der fruah aufsteh' / If I get up early
3. Diue Grossmutter steht in der Kuchel und Flennt / Grandmother's in the kitchen blubbering
4. Regen, Regen Triופן, Buama muss ma schöpfen / Rain, rain drops, Tree you must scoop them up.

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famous Hungarian violin virtuoso Remenyi on first violin, Bella played the viola and the father of Ernst von Dohnanyi was on cello. Bella forgot about the work and did not hear it again until his 85th birthday in at a concert in 1928 when it was played in celebration of his birth. The opening movement, Grave allegro, begins with a short, deeply felt, somber introduction which leads to a yearning main section full of forward drive. The second movement, an impressive and gorgeous, funereal Adagio. The dance-like Scherzo allegro which comes next is a Central European relative of Schumannesque scherzo. The finale, Allegretto, has for its main subject a pleading theme which Bella quickly develops an energetic dance. This is the least known, if one can even say that since none are well-known, of Bella's quartets. It is a fine work, good for concert and also for amateurs.

#### **String Quartet No.2 in e minor**

String Quartet No.2 in e minor, sometimes subtitled The Hungarian, dates from 1871 and, for the time, is really quite forward looking tonally, with many very original ideas. The opening Allegro risoluto, as the movement suggests begins quite resolutely with a thrusting theme containing some very intriguing chromatic tonalities. The second theme is gentler and more lyrical but closely related to the first. The main theme of the second movement, a big Adagio, is a deeply felt, religious melody. The development section features some very original and exotic-sounding episodes. Even more exotic and original is the main theme to the Allegro scherzando which comes next. This is followed up by a wonderful Hungarian folk-dance. The finale begins with a highly emotive and charged Largo con moto-Allegro maestoso. It, too, has an urgent, Hungarian sounding melody for its main theme. Slowly, Bella masterfully builds both tension and momentum as the tempo increases. This is a very original-sounding quartet that belongs in the front rank of string quartets, a pity it has not entered the repertoire. It is a masterwork.

#### **String Quartet No.3 in c minor**

Bella's String Quartet No.3 in c minor dates from 1876. It was championed by the famous Bohemian String Quartet, one of the foremost quartets then performing in Europe, and as a result became fairly well-known during the last decades of the 19th century right up until the First World War. The opening movement, a thrusting Allegro, almost sounds as if it is starting in the middle of a phrase with an energetic downward plunging subject. The second theme is gentler and more lyrical. A calm Andante with a noble melody comes next. The lovely second subject, sung in the violin and underpinned by the cello, is notable for its moving accompaniment in the middle voices. The main theme of the Scherzo, which serves as the third movement, is presented in lugubrious fashion by the viola and cello, giving the impression of a lumbering, heavy-footed dance, but the gorgeous melody which follows is ethereal. The finale opens with a very lengthy and mysterious Grave introduction which very slowly builds to the main section, a spritely and gay Allegro. Another first rate work which can qualify as a masterwork. It goes without saying that it should be performed in concert but can easily be played by amateurs. Bella, an amateur quartet player himself, took great pains to make his chamber music eminently playable.

#### **String Quartet No.4 in B flat Major**

String Quartet No.4 in B flat Major dates from 1887. The first theme of the opening Allegro molto is quite original both melodically and rhythmically. The longing and tender second theme does have a Slavic quality to it. The Andante sostenuto which follows begins in a dignified fashion and also seems to have this same longing and Slavic tinge. The unusual development breaks the theme apart though lighter rhythmic passages. The opening to the scherzo, Allegro, briefly quotes the main theme of the open-

ing movement before taking off into a lilting waltz. Yet, from time to time, this quote interrupts the proceedings. The trio section consists of a lovely, gentle melody which provides fine contrast. The bright finale, Allegretto, begins in sprightly fashion with a catchy melody. The second subject is presented in canonic fashion. omplete mastery of technique. It is quite original sounding, full of fresh melodies and is a very polished composition. An excellent work, also highly recommended.

#### **Notturmo for String Quartet**

Not many composers were alive for their 87th birthday let alone still composing, which makes it all the more extraordinary that Bella was. The Notturmo dates from 1930. The manuscript bears the title *Nocturne for four stringed instruments*. Bella scholars claim this is because he did not wish to give the impression that he was writing a full scale serious string quartet but something lighter and shorter. He wrote it as a way of thanking his doctor, an enthusiastic amateur cellist, who had successfully treated him for an illness. It is a programmatic work and the manuscript bears a description of each of the three movements. The lyrical first movement, Moderato serio is subtitled A testament to the past. The second movement, Larghetto, is subtitled Melancholy and is a kind of sad fantasia. The finale, Allegro con modo, subtitled Gaiety, is in episodic rondo form. It quotes two popular Slovak folk tunes. The first is A Horse runs along the bank. The melody to the second, Good Night, My Love, is entrusted to the cello, his doctor's instrument.

#### **String Quintet in d minor For 2 Violins, 2 Violas & Violoncello**

Bella's String Quintet in d minor, which appeared in 1868 received high praise, It shows the hand of a composer who was on the cutting edge of the new developments of his own time. The opening movement, Allegro appassionato, begins softly with a yearning theme played over a tremolo which creates considerable drama. The lovely second theme, with its echoes of Schubert and Bruckner, quickly rises to an intense dramatic climax, before Bella develops it on a grand scale in the tradition of Schubert's late works. The second movement, a Scherzo, begins in a light and delicate fashion, its fetching melodies effortlessly moving forward like a skater over ice. It is followed by a contrasting trio section. The marvelous Adagietto which follows begins in canonic fashion. The heavy theme moves slowly and in a deliberate fashion and as it is developed we hear distant echoes of Schubert's Death & the Maiden Quartet, also in d minor. The powerful climax is approached in, what was for the time, a very modern fashion, anticipating Richard Strauss by more than 2 decades. The finale, Presto, begins somewhat pensively before the first violin breaks loose in a Hungarian flurry. A series of attractive and lyrical melodies successively follow on each others heels, the last being a particularly striking duo between the violins to a rhythmic accompaniment. This is a first rate work which does not sound like any of the other quintet from its time. It deserves to be in the repertoire, heard in concert and on the stands of amateurs.

All of the above works are really first rate. They are well crafted, with good part-writing and displaying a good knowledge of string instruments. His music is original-sounding and recognizable as his and not someone else's It deserves concert performance and should not be missed by home music makers if they are given the chance to play it. Up until the past decade, despite the fact that some of these works had been recorded, it was virtually impossible to obtain the sheet music. However, that has now been remedied and all of the above with the exception of the Notturmo can be obtained from Edition Silvertrust

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