

Second Edition

**GUIDE TO THE
STRING SEXTET
OCTET AND NONET
LITERATURE**

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The Chamber Music Journal

Table of Contents

Introduction and Preface	3
I. String Sextets for 2 Violins, 2 Violas & 2 Violoncellos	6
II. String Sextets for Other Combinations	17
III. String Septets	19
IV. String Octets and Double Quartets	20
V. String Nonets (Serenades)	25
Index	29

A Guide to the String Sextets, Octets and Beyond

By Raymond Silvertrust

Introduction and Preface

The main objective of this guide is to provide both professional and amateur chamber music players, as well as concert-goers, with a practical guide to the string sextet, octet and nonet literature. But it is a special type of guide which up until now has not existed in English; a guide which can be used as an aid to exploration of the wider world of chamber music, most of which, in my experience, is virtually unknown to professional musicians as well as the listening public. However, this guide is by no means a mere compilation or an encyclopaedia of works, nor is it an academic treatise which analyses how a composer actually wrote his music.

When it comes to string sextets and beyond, one is very unlikely to be able to attend a concert where even one such work is performed. And it is even more unlikely that an entire concert will be devoted to such works. If one is lucky enough to hear a string sextet or octet performed live, most likely it will be in a concert by a string quartet that has invited a guest violist and cellist or bassist to perform one work. The other two works on the program will be for quartet. The reason for this is, in part, because there are no permanent string sextets or octets. What is surprising is that when the extra cost of the additional players is factored in, that only one such work is played. This may be explained by the fact that permanent quartet ensembles do not wish to take the time to learn very many works which are not part of the string quartet repertoire. On occasion, however, perhaps at a festival, a group of players will be assembled ad hoc, and one will get the chance to hear an entire concert of sextets or less likely, octets.

So then, supposing a sextet or octet has been programmed, what will it be? There are only three sextets that one is likely to hear performed live. Two are by Brahms, his Op.18 and his Op.36. The third possibility is Dvorak's Op.48. And while it cannot be argued that the Brahms String Sextets are not among the very best, the same cannot be said for the Dvorak which only gets an outing, despite the fact that there are many better works, because it is by him. As for octets, generally an ad hoc group will be assembled, or less occasionally two string quartets join forces for the undertaking. And there is only one work you are likely to hear, the Mendelssohn Op.20 Octet. In decades of regular concert going in Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, Zurich, Amsterdam, London and Chicago, as well as sporadic attendance at several other places, I have rarely heard any other works performed live other than those mentioned.

In my guides to the piano trio and string quartet literature, I take issue with the fact that only a few works are regularly presented and with good reason. There are several permanent string quartet and piano trio ensembles and these are the two most commonly programmed ensembles at chamber music concerts. Hence, there are many opportunities to hear other than ultra famous works. But this is not the case when it comes to string sextets or octets. And I take no issue with the fact that only a few famous works are presented because there are so few opportunities to hear them performed live in concert. It makes sense to present one of the most famous.

So in reality, the only way that the chamber music player is going to become exposed to the literature for larger string ensembles, whether amateur or professional, is either by playing the works or listening to recordings.

If you are not at all familiar with the string sextet or octet literature, then by all means your first adventures should be to explore the sextets of Brahms and the Mendelssohn Octet.

Those who are already familiar with these works and who are looking for something new, something fresh and appealing, I hope will want to dip into the wider literature and it is for these players and listeners that this Guide is being written. There are many excellent works, some masterpieces in their own right, awaiting a hearing. Of course, not every rediscovered work by a little known composer is a masterpiece, but one must remember that not everything that even Dvorak wrote, and I include his string sextet in this category, is a masterpiece. The sad thing is that many marginal chamber works get performed simply because they are the work of composers who became famous by virtue of writing operas or symphonies, while a truly superb piece of chamber music by a composer, such as Reinhold Gliere or Joachim Raff, whose metier was chamber music, sits awaiting to be discovered.

There have been many composers posterity has forgotten whose music has literally been brought back to life through the efforts of devotees. For example, it seems incredible that Bach could have been consigned to oblivion at the start of the nineteenth century, yet this was the case, at least as far as public performance went. It took a Mendelssohn to get Bach's music back into the concert hall. In part, this was due to changing musical fashion and tastes. Schubert could not get his quartets or his symphonies published during his own life time and was virtually unknown for anything other than his lieder until 40 years after his death. After the First World War, literally dozens of 19th century romantic era composers, who were well known up until that time, were consigned to the dustbin of musical history in the wake of a strong anti-romantic sentiment. Judging from what commentators of that period have written, no Romantic composer's reputation was left entirely intact by this reaction. Mendelssohn and Schumann were downgraded while lesser luminaries such as Raff, Hummel, Herzogenberg, Kiel and Rheinberger to name only a few, were relegated to an existence in encyclopaedias and musical dictionaries. After the Second World War, the big names gradually bounced back but it was not until the 1960s, and almost exclusively thanks to the record industry, that the public was able to hear the music of other composers from the Romantic period.

It is not only the Romantics who, *en masse*, were consigned to the historical role of musical footnote, there are many fine composers from the classical period whose reputations were all but snuffed out as the decades passed by the sheer brilliance of Mozart and Haydn. For decades during his lifetime and after his death, the quartets and quintets of Franz Krommer were regarded as good as or even better than those of Haydn and the best after those of Mozart. The works of once famous classical era composers such as Paul and Anton Wranitzky or Karl von Dittersdorf to name but a few, were held in high esteem by men such as Beethoven. They all wrote several very charming works, some of which qualify as masterworks and which would be welcomed by listeners and players alike.

With regard to the more famous works, some of which I have already mentioned, little space is devoted to discussing them other than, in most cases, simply to mention their existence for the sake of completeness. Much has been written about these works, and there is little, if anything new, that I could add. With regard

to atonal and so-called experimental music, we must acknowledge that the listening public has now been exposed to it for more than a century and for those who wish to know the truth, the verdict is in. Despite many fervent supporters and committed performances by professional groups, great as they may be on paper to a musicologist or the student of music theory, these works are not an experience the average listener or player generally wishes to repeat. And for this reason, such works are not included in this guide. Why it has come to pass that so many composers felt that traditional tonality and melody should be abandoned is not a subject for this guide. But music goes on. Popular music continues to enthral, be it from India, America, Europe or Arabia. The music which most wish to hear is music that can be sung, music which is tuneful.

In authoring a guide such as this, the reader has the right to inquire as to the qualifications that the writer brings to his or her task. I have had the opportunity to play several times a week and perform chamber music for the past 40 years, mostly in amateur groups, but occasionally as a member of a professional or semi-professional ensemble. Along the way, I developed a love of the broader chamber music literature to which I was first exposed through the medium of phonograph records. To my chagrin, years of concert-going made clear that I was unlikely to ever hear such music performed live, either because the professionals did not know of the music or because the music was unavailable. When I realized this state of affairs, I undertook to obtain some of the music I had heard on disk so that at least I could play it. To this end, I began to search music stores, antiquarian dealers and libraries both in America and Europe. Later, I used my briefly held position as chamber music critic for a classical music radio station to further the cause of lesser known but fine chamber music by encouraging many of the groups passing through our city to examine them. I have, on occasion, sent copies of some of these works I unearthed to well-known ensembles currently performing. Additionally, I have served as the editor of and a frequent contributor to *The Chamber Music Journal* for more than 25 years and was the director of the International Cobbett Association for Chamber Music Research for a similar period or time.

Over the years, it occurred to me that a guide such as this was needed by players and possibly by listeners. Guides to chamber music have appeared from time to time, but have been little more than detailed analyses of a few famous works. In contrast, Cobbett's marvellous and mammoth *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* is just that, an encyclopaedia, not a practical handbook that the performer, whether professional or amateur, can rely upon in navigating the literature.

Despite the fact I recognized the need for a different kind of guide, I did not initially consider the possibility of undertaking it myself until a number of my chamber music friends and colleagues, after regularly hearing me complain such a book was needed, suggested I had the knowledge and experience and urged me to write it myself. To this end, I have been fortunate in having had the opportunity to play thousands of pieces of chamber music by several hundred composers and with a strange sense of foresight, I had in many instances made notes on the pieces played. I have also been fortunate in collecting a large number of little known works over the years through my searches. Finally, I have had the opportunity to hear many works that I would otherwise never have encountered through the medium of records.

As to the question of whether a work is a good one and deserving of attention, the answer unfortunately must be subjective. There is, as they say, no accounting for taste and intelligent men can differ on such things. Fashion and tastes change over time as well. My judgments as to the value of most of the works dis-

cussed obviously comes into play and I make no apology for them. At the same time, unlike late 19th century Viennese music critics, such as Eduard Hanslick, I do not consider myself a Tsar on the question of Musical Worth. Therefore, I have taken considerable pains to arrive at a composite judgment based not only on my own feelings but also the opinions of my fellow players and performers and in many instances the audiences in front of whom I have had the opportunity to perform. This fact has allowed me to be able to comment with some confidence on whether a given work might be well received by an audience or would be fun for an amateur group to read through or to work on.

Still, no one person is going to know it all and I make no claim to this. Even *Cobbett's Cyclopedia*, with its several hundred contributors, is incomplete. This fact, in and of itself, was enough to make me consider the hopelessness of what seemed a daunting undertaking and for a long time, I thought of abandoning it. However, upon reflection I concluded my ultimate goal was to broaden the general public's knowledge of chamber music and to rescue as many unjustifiably ignored works as I knew about. It is hoped this guide will serve as a catalyst by informing chamber music lovers about the music.

When record collectors buy records from those companies offering new selections, they increase the chances that previously unrecorded works will see the light of day. When professional chamber music groups are urged by their audiences to present a wider offering of works from all periods, concert halls will be filled with the sounds of new and long-forgotten works. Inevitably, a by-product of this will be that music publishers will bring out modern reprints and publish new music which in turn will increase its availability among amateur players. (This is something which I have already undertaken by founding a publishing firm, Edition Silvertrust, which has, to date, made nearly 3,000 chamber works available) So it is with this goal in mind that I offer the reader this guide.

I had originally intended to try to include whether a work had been reprinted or generally available and or had been recorded in recent times, i.e. during my active musical life, beginning circa 1960. But works go in and out of print, sometimes quickly, as do recordings. And such information for those reading this guide years in the future would no doubt be next to useless. Nonetheless, if they have been available in recent times, there is a good chance, especially via the internet, that musicians and record collectors will be able to track down a copy of what they are looking for. As a reference resource, I think it is important to take the long view. More rediscovered works have been reprinted and recorded during the past 30 years (1988-2018) than at any other time.

While it is arguable that there is no point in discussing works which the player is unlikely to ever get a chance to play, I have, nonetheless, included many such works that I consider to be of merit and which I have found at antiquarian music shops. In my experience, if one is persistent, there is a good chance of finding out of print works. There is also the possibility of obtaining such works through university and national libraries. And now, there are several websites digitalizing and making available parts and scores of thousands of works which have never been reprinted.

I wish to briefly acknowledge all of those who have been of especial help to me over the years and without whom this work would not have been possible. Most of these individuals have been my fellow chamber music enthusiasts who joined me in playing through a huge amount of chamber music. Some professionals, some are teachers, and some introduced me to works which I had not known. I must begin with my son and daughter: Skyler Sil-

vertrust and Loren Silvertrust. Both are violinists and together, with an army of violists, cellists and bassists we had the chance to dive deeply into the literature for larger string ensembles. Among those who joined me on this adventure are Gordon Peterson, Morton & Lura Altschuler, Henry Coretz, Eric Eisenstein, Kathleen Tumminello, Richard Sherman, Jean Mielke, Thalia Collis, Kristen Wilkinson, Dr. Prof. Hugo Zeltzer, Willi Boskovsky, Walter Willinganz, Herman Essak, Thomas & Margaret Evans, Beverly Bloom, Girard Miller, Dr. Maurice Burke, Francis & Irene Peterson, Dr. Nicholas Cunningham, Dr. James Whitby, Eugene Chang, J. Steven Moore, Andrew Green, Sylvie Koval, Sally Didrickson, Tom Weyland, Siegfried Moysich, Carl Fox, Dr. Bernard Resnick, Mordy Rhodes, Lillian Cassey, Joseph Kirschner, Edward Torgerson, Darlene Rivest, Gunther Fonken, George Smith, Alan Garber, Gerda Bielitz, Beverly Kaushagen, Steven Spiegel, Rose Ross, Samuel & Paula Golden, Dr. Iris Cosnow, Frank & Paula Tachau, members of the Con Brio Quartet, Die Musikfreunde Quartet, The Melos Quartet of Stuttgart, The Hinman Quartet, the Larga Quartet and Quartetto Bel Canto.

*Raymond Silvertrust
Riverwoods, Illinois 2018*

Preface to the 2nd Edition

That there is a second edition is due to the generosity of Professor Carolyn Higbie who, of her own accord, approached me and graciously offered to correct all of the hundreds, if not thousands, of errors I left behind in my haste when hurriedly typing the first edition. Even though I proof read the first edition, proof reading your own work is a sure recipe for missing your errors. What's more, I must admit I am not a good proof reader. So, when Professor Higbie, a true chamber music enthusiast, contacted me, I jumped at her offer.

Finally, in addition to the correction of errors and confusing text in the first edition, I have added several new works which, at the time I wrote the first edition, I was either unfamiliar or had not had a chance to play or hear.

*Raymond Silvertrust
Mettawa, Illinois 2022*

Origins of the Modern String Sextet and Octet

When one speaks of the string sextet, generally one means a work for 2 Violins, 2 Violas and 2 Cellos. There are works for other combinations such as 2 Violins, 2 Violas, Cello and Bass or 3 Violins, 2 Violas and Cello but they extraordinarily rare and nowadays few take it upon themselves to play such rare works although I have included a few that may be of interest.

It is Luigi Boccherini who is generally credited with having composed the first string sextets, a set of six which were composed in 1776 and published four years later in Paris. Virtually no other composer from the classical era seemed interested in the form other than Anton Wranitzky who composed at least one such work. The string sextet had to wait until the 19th century and the romantic era to come into its own. As for the octet, though he may not have written the first, it can be said it was the Mendelssohn Octet, which if not the first, was the one that made the format for 4 violins, 2 violas and 2 cellos the standard.

I. The Standard String Sextet

Works for 2 Violins, 2 Violas & 2 Violoncellos

Georges Alary (1850-1928) was born in the French town of Aurillac. He studied composition under Saint Saens and Henri Reber at the Paris Conservatory, winning several prizes. He pursued a career as a conductor and teacher. He composed two works for string sextet. The first was his **Thème varié avec intermède, Op.17**, which dates from the mid 1880s. It is a work which is not difficult to play and sounds well. The substantial theme is tranquil and charming in the form of a country folk melody. A set of four engaging variations follow. His **String Sextet in F Major, Op.35** dates from 1890 and was dedicated to Brahms. It won him the prestigious Prix Chartier for chamber music in 1895. Like his earlier work, this work is straight forward, plays with little difficulty and sounds good. It certainly is a candidate for concert performance but not beyond amateur players. The opening movement, Allegretto, shows the influence of Brahms but through a French prism, so to speak. The dedication, which in and of itself and even more this influence, was rather extraordinary during the French impressionist period. The second movement, Kavatine, andante, is lyrical. This is followed by an Intermezzo, ben moderato. A relative and modern descendant of the minuet. A magnificent lilting finale, Allegro assai, tops off this fine work.



Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), the Italian cello virtuoso who spent most of his life in Spain working for the royal court, wrote six string sextets, not counting five others which he called Notturmi. These six, now known as Op.23, were published as a set in 1776 and have traveled under the opus number of 24, given to it by Boccherini's Paris publisher Sieber. Although not so titled in the modern Zanibon and Silvertrust editions, the sextets were, in the original, called sestetti concertanti, which gives us a good clue as to the style of their construction. As with string quintets, it might be said that Boccherini was more or less pioneering the form. If you are familiar with his more popular quintets, you will have some idea of what these works sound like. They are in concertante format, which for the most part means that one voice has the melody while the others are accompanying. However, with Boccherini, the accompaniment—unlike his German contemporaries—is interesting, both rhythmically and harmonically and not just the mere repetition of linked eighth or sixteenth notes. Also of note is the fact that all of the voices are treated more or less equally. That is to say, they are all given solos. The second violin part quite often is equal in difficulty to the first violin part and not infrequently rises to a virtuosic level, as does the part of the first cello. Nor does he forget the violas, which are regularly kept quite busy. Hence to make these sextets go, you need to have especially strong players on those parts. It must be admitted that there is a certain sameness to these works, at least to the extent that I would not want to spend an evening, as I once actually did, playing three of them. One is enough. I have played all six and cannot say one stands out from the rest. Each one has some pretty good movements, and each has some very average stuff. The melodies are gentle, with considerable subtlety, but not particularly memorable. As a listener, they are a perfect background for lying upon a divan and having a servant lower grapes into one's mouth. Boccherini's overall sonic signature is unique and for the most part, he does not sound like anyone else but himself. These sextets are certainly good to play from time to time as a divertissement. Modern editions are available from Zanibon and Silvertrust. If at this point, you are asking—well, why should I play these? The answer is because they are good enough to deserve it and because

all of the other sextets are from either the early, mid or late romantic period.



A considerable amount of **Alexander Borodin's** music is known to the general public although they may not know that it is his. Music from his Second Quartet, as well as from his opera Prince Igor and certain other pieces, have been used on several occasions in films and Broadway musicals. Even classical music fans know little of the man who composed such beautiful music other than the fact that he was a chemistry professor who dabbled in music. But even this is not entirely accurate. Born out of wedlock, Borodin (1833-87) was known to be the son of the Georgian Prince Luka Gedeonishvili. The Prince once remarked that while he had meant to marry Borodin's mother, he just never got around to it. Rather than naming the child Alexander Gedeonishvili, the boy was registered in the name of one of his father's serfs, one Porfiry Borodin, in what was then the standard practice. His mother, who was wealthy in her own right, was able to have private tutors educate the boy at home. At the age of 8, he showed an interest in music, and at one hearing could reproduce on the piano without having had lessons, what he had heard played a few hours before by a military band. His mother immediately engaged one of the band members to give him flute lessons. Later, Borodin taught himself the cello so that they could play chamber music. During this time he received some rudimentary composition lessons from local teachers. During the late 1850's he made two trips to western Europe. During the second of these, from 1859-62, he pursued post doctoral studies in chemistry at Heidelberg. Upon returning to Petersburg in 1862, he met Balakirev, Mussorgsky and Rimsky Korsakov. Under their guidance, he began composition in earnest but because he had never had a proper compositional foundation, he did not find composing particularly easy. Many of his works could not have been completed without the extensive help he always received from his friends, Rimsky Korsakov in particular. Most of Borodin's chamber music was composed during the early part of his life, especially during the years 1853-1862. Borodin, in later life, may not have taken these early works seriously and at least once referred to them as "petits péchés de jeunesse." Certainly, he made no effort to have these pieces published but nonetheless he did not make any effort to destroy the manuscripts which were used in performance on several occasions in various concerts. Sometime around the middle of the 20th Century, it became clear to Russian musicologists that many of these works are far better than mere amateur attempts.

This certainly applies to the **String Sextet in d minor** of which, unfortunately, only the first two movements survive. First published by the Soviet State Music Publishers in 1946, it is thought to have been composed during 1860 while Borodin furthered his chemistry studies in Heidelberg, where he divided his time between the laboratory and frequent chamber music evenings. Borodin himself referred to the Sextet as 'Mendelssohnian,' although this is not entirely apparent. Even though only the first two movements of this extraordinary piece have survived, the Sextet still stands as a tribute both to Borodin's musical imagination as well as his compositional skill. As such, it demolishes the argument often bandied about by Tchaikovsky that Borodin could not finish a measure without help from Rimsky Korsakov. While it is true that he did receive help, especially in his later years with the opera Prince Igor and also true that after his death, Korsakov and Glazunov did complete several works

which he had nearly finished, after hearing this Sextet—especially the first movement—it is impossible to maintain that Borodin was without substantial compositional talent. There are three separate themes in the first movement, Allegro. The first theme is quite sprightly. The second subject is richly textured and characterized by jumps of wide intervals. The tonal quality Borodin produces here bears more than a passing resemblance to Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir d'Florence* written some 30 years later. While in no way implying that this Sextet is the equal of Tchaikovsky's, one cannot but wonder if Tchaikovsky perhaps had heard the Borodin performed in concert. A beautiful third theme provides a contrast both in mood and tempo: The part writing throughout is not just good, but superb. Each voice is given very serious consideration and has many opportunities thematically. The interweaving of the theme from voice to voice is a tour de force. In 1860, no major composer had written a string sextet for more than 50 years. Brahms had not yet written his Op.18, nor Dvorak his Op.48. Only Spohr had tried his hand with his Op.140 and it is unlikely Borodin had come across it. The second movement, Andante, is quite short. It is based on a sad but fetching Russian folk melody given forth by the first violin: Three variations follow, each lovely. The use of pizzicato is remarkably effective. All too soon the movement and the Sextet end. One can only dream of the remaining two movements which are now lost. Even in its two movement form, every sextet party should make this work's acquaintance.



Hakon Børresen (1876-1954) was born in Copenhagen and studied with Johann Svendsen at the Royal Danish Conservatory. His opera, the *Royal Guest*, is widely regarded as the best early 20th Century Danish opera and he is generally considered one of Denmark's leading 20th century composers.

His **String Sextet, Op.5 in G Major** dates from 1901 and was dedicated to Edvard Grieg, who spoke highly about it. The opening Allegro moderato, *ma energico*, begins quite like Svendsen's own Octet, with a powerful, energetic and Nordic-sounding main theme. This is a very big movement, full of lovely melodies and at times unexpected and quirky rhythms. It is followed by an Allegro which, though not so marked, is a nicely conceived and somewhat genial scherzo. A sedate Adagio is characterized by very long-lined melodies. It is a rather reflective and introspective piece. The finale, Allegro molto vivace, opens in much the same fashion as the first movement. Both the first theme and second themes sound Nordic, and Svendsen's compositional technique can also, at times, be heard. But there are some original touches here and there. This Sextet, while not on the same level as those of Brahms or Tchaikovsky, is still a first rate work which deserves a place in the front rank of such pieces. It makes a nice addition to the scanty sextet literature. It is good to hear and fun to play.

Johannes Brahms' (1833-1897) two string sextets, **No.1 in B flat Major, Op.18** and **No.2 in G Major, Op.36** are among the very best ever written. As noted in my introduction, if you have not played any sextets, this is the place to start. They are perhaps his finest chamber music works, superior to his quartets and even his two string quintets. He seemed to need the extra voices. There is no point in me writing any more about these two sextets as pretty much everything which can be said has been in books and articles which are readily available. There are dozens of recordings.

Born in Sussex, **Frank Bridge** (1879-1941) learned to play violin from his father, and had much early exposure to practical musicianship, playing in theatre orchestras his father conducted. He studied violin and composition, the latter from Charles Stanford,



at the Royal College of Music. He later played viola in prominent quartets and was a respected conductor. When Frank Bridge's chamber music first appeared, it was a revelation to amateurs as well as professional players.

His **String Sextet in E flat Major** was begun in 1906 but was not completed until 1912. In those six years, his style had evolved considerably. By the time he came to complete the Sextet, his tonal universe had moved well beyond Brahms and was influenced by French impressionism. The first movement, Allegro moderato, opens with a majestic soaring melody which immediately establishes the character of the work. The music unfolds at a leisurely pace. Bridge relies more on the richness of the tonal texture rather than in contrasting tempi changes. The second subject is tender and romantic. The second movement, Andante con moto, consists of an expressive intermezzo followed by a lively scherzo in the minor. The finale, Allegro ben moderato, begins with a striking chromatic passage. Soon, he reintroduces material from the earlier movements but dressed up differently. This marvelous Sextet, though important in its own right, is important historically for its place among British chamber music works. It is post-Brahmsian and though it shows some influence of French impressionist ideas, is developed entirely originally in Bridge's own idiomatic style. It is without doubt one of the best early 20th century sextets, a work suitable to both professionals and experienced amateurs alike.



Ferdinand David (1810-1873) was born in the same house in Hamburg as Felix Mendelssohn, but one year later. The two became colleagues and friends. David studied violin with the famous virtuoso Louis Spohr. He served as concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under the baton of Mendelssohn and held the position of Professor of Violin at the Leipzig Conservatory. He was also the leader of a prominent string quartet for several years. Among his many famous students were Joseph Joachim and August Wilhelmj. His name has endured as the editor of several famous chamber music works as well as pieces for the violin. Among his compositions still in use are his *Advanced School of Violin Playing and Art of Bowing*.

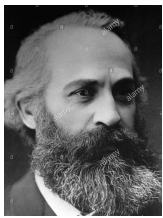
His **String Sextet in G Major, Op.38** dates from 1861. It goes without saying that he knew how to write for string instruments and the parts are not awkward. The work, in four movements, shows the strong influence of Mendelssohn. Unfortunately, it is, in my opinion, uneven in quality. The first movement, Allegro assai, though bustling, sounds rather busy and the thematic material is unconvincing. The first violin is given unnecessary virtuosic passages, somewhat awkward and not at all easy to pull off without varying the tempo. The second movement, Adagio, is a Mendelssohnian song without words featuring a nicely executed dialog between the first violin and first cello. The third movement, Allegretto grazioso e vivace, which sounds as if Mendelssohn himself could have written it, is nonetheless excellent and without doubt the most effective movement of the Sextet. The finale, Molto allegro agitato ed appassionato, is also pretty good but requires a virtuoso technique in several passages for an effective performance. While the Sextet certainly has its moments, it cannot be recommended for concert performance and comes off rather poorly by comparison with several works listed herein.

Alexei Davidov (1867-1940 sometimes spelled Davidoff or Davydov) was born in Moscow. His uncle Carl Davidov was a famous cello virtuoso, composer, and for a while, head of the St Petersburg Conservatory. Alexei pursued joint studies in mathematics and music, the latter at the St Petersburg Conservatory



with a concentration in cello and composition. He helped found the St Petersburg Music Society, but did not compose much, working primarily as a businessman.

His **String Sextet in E flat Major, Op.12** dates from 1905. He may have been inspired to write the Sextet by his uncle's string sextet of 1880 (see below). One wishes he would have composed more after hearing this work, which has many pleasing melodies, makes a good impression and presents no technical difficulties. The opening movement begins with an atmospheric Largo introduction, which leads to the main section Allegro energico, the rousing main theme to which has an interesting question and answer series of episodes. A more lyrical and lovely second theme follows and the coda reintroduces the theme of the Largo. The second movement is an agitated Scherzo with a nicely contrasting trio section. The third movement is characterized by frequent tempo changes. It begins with a religious sounding Largo, followed by an elegant Un poco mosso and then a passionate Piu mosso e agitato and then closes again with the Largo. The finale, Allegro, alternates between a energetic main subject and a more lyrical and graceful second theme. This is a work certainly worth playing. Suitable for both amateurs and pros who wish to perform it in concert where it will make a good impression.



Carl Davidov (1838-1889 sometimes Karl and Davidoff or Davydov) was born in the Latvian town of Goldingen (today Kuldiga). He attended Moscow University and then studied cello with the prominent cellist Carl Schuberth in St. Petersburg, who recommended he attend the Leipzig Conservatory, then considered the best in the world. There, he studied with Friedrich Grutzmacher and became principal cellist of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra before returning to Russia and pursuing a career as a touring virtuoso, teacher and composer.

His **String Sextet in E Major, Op.35** dates from 1880 and was dedicated to the famous violin teacher Leopold Auer, a professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Despite the fact that Davidov was a virtuoso, the cello parts are not treated in any special fashion and are not anymore difficult to play than one would expect in a standard sextet. Although he was a Russian national, his family were ethnic German Jews and his outlook, especially after studying in Leipzig, was that of the German Romantic movement. The opening Molto Allegro, has for its main theme a broad and impressive subject with an attention-grabbing rhythm. A second melody is more lyrical. A very effective Allegretto, resembling an intermezzo, begins the second movement. It is full of charm and the pizzicato accompaniment in the cello is noteworthy. Several tempo changes follow, keeping the listener's interest. Next comes a superb Adagio which could be styled a romance. A fugue appears in the middle. The powerful finale, Molto vivace brings Mendelssohn's bustling movements to mind, but it is not without its lyrical moments. This is a fine work which should appeal to amateurs as well as professionals.



Ernst von Dohnanyi (1877-1960 Ernő Dohnányi in Hungarian) is generally regarded, after Liszt, as Hungary's most versatile musician. He was active as a concert pianist, composer, conductor and teacher and must be considered one of the chief influences on Hungary's musical life in the 20th century. Certainly, his chamber music is very fine, with most of it being in the masterwork category. Yet, sadly and inexplicably, it has virtually disappeared from the concert stage. Dohnanyi studied piano and composition in his native Pressburg (Bratislava) before entering the Budapest Acade-

my. His first published work, his Piano Quintet No.1, was championed by no less an authority than Johannes Brahms. Upon graduating in the spring of 1897, Dohnanyi embarked on a dazzling career as a concert artist, often playing in chamber ensembles. Later, he also devoted considerable time to teaching and conducting.

Dohnanyi's **String Sextet in B flat Major** was one of the pieces the 17 year old submitted as part of his entrance examination to the Budapest Music Academy. He had completed it in 1893. Dohnanyi later revised it in 1896, after two years of study with his composition teacher Hans Koessler. In 1897, he entered the Sextet for the Chamber Music Prize in the Royal Hungarian Millennium festivities which celebrated the founding of Hungary. It did not win, although he did win the Symphony Prize and the Overture Prize. Still not satisfied with the result, he revised the Sextet once again during 1898-99. It begins with an Allegro ma tranquillo. This is a big, spacious and at times genial movement, but the one thing it is not, is tranquil. The promising opening theme, first stated by the two cellos, is dark, brooding and mysterious. When it is restated by the higher voices, it becomes more vibrant and less mysterious. The second theme is brighter and lovely, and has a Schubertian quality to it. As the movement progresses, one hears the hand of Brahms, which rests somewhat heavily upon the composer. The instruments are very well handled and the part-writing is quite good. The fleet, short second movement, Scherzo, Allegro vivace, is Mendelssohnian in nature, light and airy. Certainly Brahms never wrote anything like it. The trio, is a rich string chorale, darker and quieter in nature, and provides excellent contrast. After the return of the scherzo, surprisingly, there is a highly lyrical and passionate second trio led by the cellos. This is truly an outstanding movement, perfect in every way. The third movement, Adagio quasi andante, is rather sedate and seemingly inspired by late Beethoven. The first cello is given the lead on several occasions to state the more poignant melodies. The writing is generally rich and quite dense, but at other times is almost ethereal. The first theme to the finale, Animato, reminds one of a Mendelssohnian or Schumannesque march. The second theme is, at first, lighter, but it blossoms forth with some tonally advanced writing, more typical of Dohnanyi's middle period. Certainly worth your attention.

The **String Sextet in A Major, Op.48** of **Antonin Dvorak** (1841-1904) is among the top four sextets performed and recorded. (the other three being the two Brahms sextets and Tchaikovsky's Souvenir d'Florence) Much has been written about it and you can read it elsewhere. Acknowledging that taste is individual and subjective, it is my considered opinion that his sextet does not belong in this elite group and would not be there had he not become one of the most famous composers of the 19th century. It is not a bad work, but the melodic material cannot compare with his Op.97 String Quintet, his Op.81 Piano Quintet and his late string quartets. Of course, you should play it or listen to it and make up your own mind.



Eduard Franck (1817-1893) was born in Breslau, the capital of the Prussian province of Silesia. He was the fourth child of a wealthy and cultivated banker who exposed his children to the best and brightest that Germany had to offer. Frequenters to the Franck home included such luminaries as Heine, Humboldt, Heller, Mendelssohn, and Wagner. His family's financial position allowed Franck to study with Mendelssohn as a private student in Dusseldorf and later in Leipzig. As a talented pianist, he embarked upon a dual career as a concert artist and teacher for more than four decades during the course of which he held many positions. Although he was highly regarded as both a teacher and

performer, he never achieved the public recognition of his better known contemporaries such as Mendelssohn, Schumann or Liszt. As fine a pianist as the first two and perhaps even a better teacher, the fact that he failed to publish very many of his compositions until toward the end of his life, in part, explains why he was not better known. Said to be a perfectionist, he continually delayed releasing his works until they were polished to his demanding standards. Schumann, among others, thought quite highly of the few works he did publish during the first part of his life. Like Brahms, Franck wrote two string sextets.

String Sextet No.1 in E flat Major, Op.41 was published in 1882. In this sparkling work, we are never far from the influence of Franck's great teacher and inspiration, Mendelssohn. This influence shows itself not only melodically but also in the lightness of touch which Franck employs. It stands in stark contrast to the heavy, full-bodied sextet writing of Brahms. Here, we find clarity of line and a surprising weightlessness, especially for an ensemble two thirds of which are lower voices. Yet at the same time, Franck often but not always differs from Mendelssohn in how he makes the most of the sonic possibilities of a large ensemble. The opening theme to the first movement, Allegro, is genial and somewhat relaxed. But slowly tension is built, primarily by means of the rustling notes which are passed from voice to voice. A very Mendelssohnian technique. The quiet second movement, Andante, ticks along peacefully until the first violin brings forth a melody of extraordinary beauty. Next comes a lively and energetic scherzo, followed by an exciting finale, Presto, which is filled with élan and fetching melodies. This is a first rate work which would go well with the heavier Brahms sextets.

String Sextet No.2 in D Major, Op.50 was not published until after the composer's death with the result that the proofs were not carefully checked and it was printed with serious errors, including missing measures. I found this out by playing it from a copy of the original and I wondered if as a result whether it was ever performed. The Second Sextet, though it shows some of Mendelssohn's influence, has much less than the first. The opening Allegro is spacious and written on a large scale. The elegiac second movement, Adagio molto espressivo e sostenuto, is truly superb. The third movement, Allegro, is a masterful scherzo which starts heavily but evolves into an elves dance. In the finale, Franck presents a tribute to Mendelssohn, but this cannot take away from the fact that the music is highly effective. Another first rate sextet to investigate and easier to play than Brahms.



Niels Gade (1817-1890) was born in Copenhagen and began his career as a concert violinist, later taking a position with the Royal Danish Orchestra. Mendelssohn, who was much impressed by and premiered Gade's First Symphony, invited him to teach at the famous Leipzig Conservatory. After Mendelssohn's death in 1847, Gade was appointed director of the Conservatory and also conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra.

In 1848, he returned to Copenhagen when war broke out between Prussia and Denmark. In Copenhagen, Gade became director of the Copenhagen Musical Society and established a new orchestra and chorus. He was widely regarded as Denmark's most important composer from the mid-Romantic period. He taught and influenced several Scandinavian composers, including Edvard Grieg, Carl Nielsen and Otto Malling. His own music often shows the influence of both Mendelssohn and Schumann. Try as I might, I have never been able to get real excited about Gade's chamber music. It certainly is not bad, it is all right, well-put together and so on, but it's the thematic material that fails to impress.

His **String Sextet in E flat Major, Op.44** dates from 1865. Like many of his other chamber music works, it plays well, sounds good and has reasonably good part-writing for all. It can

certainly be recommended to amateurs as it presents no technical problems, but it is too weak for the concert hall. Personally, if you have access to either of the Franck Sextets as well as several others mentioned in this guide, I would not recommend it. But if you only have the 2 Brahms sextets available and a copy of the Gade laying around, then by all means play it.



Louis Glass (1864-1936) was born in Copenhagen. He was almost an exact contemporary of Carl Nielsen and like Nielsen was a student of Niels Gade. However, Glass also studied at the Brussels Conservatory where he became enamored of the music of Cesar Franck and Anton Bruckner, both of whom stylistically influenced his writing. For several years, he was one of

Denmark's leading concert pianists until a paralysis in one arm made him retire from the stage. He then devoted himself primarily to composing. He composed in most genres and wrote several chamber music works of worth.

His **Sextet in G Major, Op.15** dates from 1893. The powerful opening movement, Molto allegro marcato, begins in a rather turbulent fashion and starts off as a quick restless and thrusting march. Tonally, it is interesting that there is much, especially the treatment of the attractive second theme, which reminds one of early Nielsen. But in view of the fact that Nielsen had only just begun to compose, perhaps it might be that Nielsen was influenced, during this period, by Glass rather than the other way around. They were both active and living in Copenhagen at the same time. The coda is quite dramatic and exciting. The second movement, Andante con moto, begins in a quiet and reflective mood and, though it occasionally rises in volume with the promise of drama, remains primarily a peaceful idyll. The following Scherzo begins in the same turbulent and thrusting style as the first movement, however, almost immediately, Glass adds some quite original and exotic tonal color which creates an entirely different mood. The trio section provides excellent contrast and is full of pathos. The finale, Allegro giocoso, has none of the angst or anger of the earlier movements. Somewhat jolly, its use of syncopation is quite effective. There are quite a number of themes, including the main theme from the first movement, which one traverses before coming to the effective but somewhat orchestral conclusion. Highly recommended to both professionals and experienced amateur players.



Reinhold Gliere (1875-1956) today is primarily known for his symphonies, ballets and operas, however, he was also a composer of superb chamber music, most of it written early in his career during the dying days of the old Russian empire. One can hear the influence of Sergei Taneyev, Anton Arensky and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, all of whom he studied with, as well as that of Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and Liadov. He wrote three very fine string sextets.

String Sextet No.1 in c minor, Op.1 was published in 1902. The opening Allegro begins in highly dramatic fashion with a unisono passage in all the voices. The main theme is truly impressive and is followed by a warm, appealing lyrical second subject. The writing is full of excellent effects. The spirited second movement, Allegro vivace, is a playful perpetuo mobile. The Andante which follows has a broad, song-like melody with ostinato accompaniment. The faster and quite dramatic middle section provides fine contrast. The finale, Allegro vivace, also begins in unisono fashion, the main theme is characterized by its powerful dance rhythm. This work presents no special technical difficulties and is highly recommended to amateur players and is strong enough to withstand performance in the concert hall.

String Sextet No.2 in b minor, Op.7 dates from 1904. This is also a work which can be recommended for concert performance. Gliere shows here that he is even more of a master of his material, The first movement begins with a short atmospheric Andante and is followed by an Allegro marked by its rhythms and rich themes. The development is full of surprises and the coda is extremely fine. The second movement, an Andante, has a noble folk tune for its main theme, in some ways reminiscent of the famous Andante cantabile of Tchaikovsky's first string quartet. In the middle, there is a dramatic, agitated section. The spirited third movement, a Vivace, is very Russian sounding indeed, its appealing melodies are made even more impressive by the effective use of dynamics. The finale, an Allegro, opens with a dance-like main theme and is followed by a magnificent contrasting subject. Superb compositional technique is found in a powerful fugue and effective prestissimo coda. In all a stronger work, and perhaps not surprisingly so, than his first.

String Sextet No.3 in C Major, Op.11 dates from the following year 1905. It is packed with a treasure chest of wonderful musical ideas. The writing is so powerful it approaches the orchestral in nature. It is a work with which every friend of chamber music should become familiar. The joyful themes to the opening Allegro are inspired by Russian folk melody and reminiscent of the tonal coloring of Borodin. The lyrical, elegiac and emotionally charged second movement, Larghetto, is an excellent example of Gliere's technical mastery. The singing quality of the strings approaches that of the human voice. The third movement, Allegro, is a very Russian scherzo, with folksong melodies, alternating with ever faster dance episodes. The superb finale, Allegro vivace, begins in festive fashion. It is here in particular that the brilliance and richness of the tone Gliere elicits approaches the orchestral in its intensity. This is one of the real jewels of the sextet literature and it is this one I would add to the must-play list along with those of Brahms. It does not present any extraordinary technical problems and is very grateful for all.



Heinrich Hofmann (1842-1902) was born in Berlin and studied there at the Neue Akademie der Tonkunst with the Theodor Kullak and Siegfried Dehn. At first, he embarked upon a career as a pianist and teacher. However, by the late 1860's, his operas and his choral and orchestral works began to achieve great success and for the next two decades, he was one of the

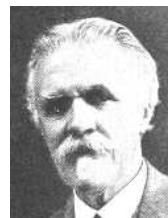
most often performed composers in Germany and much of Europe. Success came at a price. Although hailed by some critics, such as Hermann Mendel, as a of real talent and one of the most important emerging composers of his time, many others, jealous of his rocketing success or determined to protect their favorites (such as Eduard Hanslick was of Brahms), derided him for his "fashionable eclecticism". While his works broke no new ground, on the other hand, they were masterfully conceived, beautiful and well-executed. This is especially true of his chamber music.

His **String Sextet in e minor, Op.25** was composed in 1874. It shows the influence of both Mendelssohn and Wagner. Finely written and with no real technical difficulties, it is certain to make friends of both players and listeners with its appealing melodies. Players will appreciate its wonderful treatment of all of the instruments, which have grateful parts to play. The first movement, Allegro appassionato, features two bold but lyrically melodic themes which are cleverly developed and presented. The second movement, Adagio, is an elegiac romance. The third movement, Vivace, is a scherzo with an appealing middle section. The finale, an Allegro, not only features an effective fugue but has a charming Irish folk tune for its second subject. Good enough for concert performance, it should not be missed by amateurs as well.



Joseph Holbrooke (1878-1958) was born near London in the town of Croydon. Both his parents were musicians and his early lessons were with his father. He was sent to the Royal Academy of Music in London and after graduating worked as a pianist and conductor, all the while composing. Eventually his big works for orchestra and chorus and his operas brought him a measure of fame, however, after the First World War, he and his works fell into obscurity. He composed a considerable amount of chamber music, most of which is of a high quality and awaits rediscovery.

His **String Sextet in D Major, Op.43** was completed in 1902. It had to wait two years before it was performed. A printed score did not appear until 1924, but no parts were printed at that time. The few performances since that time were made off of copyist's parts of the score. And when, the parts were eventually published, they were not printed but were off of clean handwritten copy made by a copyist. The opening movement begins with a slow, ominous introduction, Adagio espressivo e molto sostenuto that then leads to the main section, which is upbeat, jovial and occasionally rather intense. The middle movement, Andante mesto, has the subtitle 'Unhappy Childhood', which though it begins in a somewhat melancholy manner, does not really convey very much unhappiness. There is a quicker middle section which is altogether more positive. The finale, Molto vivace, is full of energy, thrusting and powerful and with a strong triumphant atmosphere. This is a very worthwhile work and a handsome addition to the string sextet repertoire. It would do well in concert and should be considered by experienced amateurs.



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. 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.

His **String Sextet in B flat Major, Op.92** indubitably sounds like the work of a young man, but at the time it was composed, he was seventy six years old. d'Indy's style underwent a considerable change in the years following his retirement and move from Paris to the south of France. Here, he composed a series of works which are straight forward, youthful in spirit and generally bright and gay in mood. The Sextet is in the form of a suite. The opening movement, Entrée en Sonate, begins with a bright, formal introduction. The main part of the movement is based on three different melodies which are closely related in mood and thematic material. The second movement, Divertissement, is a brilliant scherzo. It begins energetically, full of forward motion, but without warning is interrupted by a striking interlude, made spooky by the use of harmonics and ponticello. The third movement, Thème, Variations et Finale, begins with the statement of a slow, somewhat diffident melody. Several ingenious and finely contrasting variations follow. Here is an important addition to the

Sextet repertoire, a bright and attractive modern French work, which should win friends among both professionals and amateurs.



Julius Klengel (1859–1933) was born in the German city of Leipzig. He came from a musical family. His father was a keen amateur player and his grandfather was a composer. For several years, no less than 7 members of the Klengel family played in the famous Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. A gifted cellist, Julius Klengel enjoyed a career as a soloist, orchestral player, teacher and composer.

He served for more than 40 years as the principal cellist of the LGO and also became a professor of cello at the Leipzig Conservatory. Among his many students were Emanuel Feuermann, Guilhermina Suggia, Paul Grümmer, Gregor Piatigorsky, and William Pleeth.

Klengel composed his **String Sextet, Op.60** in 1924. It is not surprising that a man entirely familiar with classical and romantic works, with long service as a string quartet player, produced a string sextet, with such a wealth of a appealing ideas. Certainly, it would do well if given concert performance. It also should not be missed by amateurs as it poses no insurmountable technical problems. One of the many excellences of the work is the fact that none of the movements is long-winded. The first movement, Allegro pathetico, is really magnificent, full of real passion and rhythmically interesting. The second movement, Andante is in Lied form, filled with noble, lyrical melody. Next comes an original sounding Scherzo with Slavic tinges. Particularly noteworthy here is the pizzicato accompaniment in the second cello. The fleet-footed finale, Allegro, is jovial and quite effective. The only knock against this work is the fact that he composed in 1924 and not in 1890 which is what it sounds like.



Hans Koessler (1853-1926) was a master composer who wrote some of the most outstanding music that you have never heard. Koessler was born in the town of Waldbeck in upper Bavaria. He studied organ and composition with Joseph Rheinberger in Munich, holding a number of positions in Germany before moving to Hungary to become Professor of Organ, Composition and

Choral direction at the Music Academy of Budapest in the early 1880's. He stayed there until his retirement in 1908. Bartok, Kodaly, Dohnanyi, Leo Weiner and Imre Kalman were all among his many students and he was widely regarded as the finest teacher of composition in Austria-Hungary during the 1890's and the first part of the 20th century.

Without doubt, the best unknown late romantic string sextet is his **Sextet in f minor** which dates from 1902 and unfortunately has never received the attention it deserves. It is multi-faceted and highly original throughout, beautiful sounding and grateful to play. The opening movement begins with a very atmospheric Adagio non troppo introduction which is followed by a gradual transition to the tempo of the main section, Allegro. This movement is packed full of lovely melodies. Koessler follows this up with a Hungarian Scherzo and a very melodic trio section. The slow movement, a warm-blooded Adagio, has Schumann for an antecedent. The Finale, Allegro con brio, is no ordinary finale. It makes incredibly clever use of counterpoint in presenting its high-spirited and at times humorous themes. This is a work not to be missed.

Egon Kornauth (1891–1959) was born in the town of Olmütz in Moravia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He studied cello and piano attending the Vienna Conservatory where he studied composition with Robert Fuchs, Guido Adler, and Franz Schmidt. After teaching music theory at Vienna University from



1919, Kornauth embarked on an international career as pianist, accompanist and conductor. In post-war Austria, Kornauth became director of the Salzburg Mozarteum.

His String Sextet in a minor, Op.25 bears the dedication, *To the memory of the year 1918-1919*.

It is in three movements, straight forward and not at all hard to play from the standpoint of technical difficulties, however, it does require due care by experienced ensemble players, and especially to intonation. It can certainly be recommended for experienced amateurs and concert performance. The first two movements were composed during the summer of 1918, while it looked like Germany still had a chance to win the First World War. The finale was composed the following year by which time Germany had not only lost the war, but its Monarchy had been dissolved, and chaos reigned throughout the country. The opening movement, Allegro, allegro assai, is full of energy but the mood is agitated, dour and at times morose. The second movement, Andante, is in the form of a song without words. It is lyrical and calm. In the finale, Allegretto, there is no sense of what has happened to Germany, rather, the main theme is uplifting, almost celebratory. Perhaps, Kornauth who was in his late 20s at the time he wrote the Sextet, was glad to see the Wilhelmine era disappear.



Erich Korngold (1897-1957) was born in the Moravian city of Brunn then part of the Austrian Habsburg Empire (today Brno in the Czech Republic). He grew up in Vienna where his father was a music critic for one of Vienna's leading papers. Recognizing his son's extraordinary talent, Korngold's father took him to see Mahler when the boy was nine. Mahler declared him a

genius and other noteworthy musicians such as Humperdinck and Richard Strauss held that he was the greatest child prodigy since Mozart. Mahler saw to it that Korngold studied with Vienna's best teachers—Robert Fuchs, Hermann Grädener and Alexander Zemlinsky. Korngold became one of Europe's leading operatic and instrumental composers as well as conductors and subsequently served as a professor of composition at the Vienna Conservatory. In the 1930's he was invited to Hollywood and thereafter became one of the leading film composers of his time. After 1946, he left the film industry to concentrate on composing absolute music.

Korngold's **String Sextet in D Major, Op.10** was completed in 1915 and premiered two years later to great acclaim with critics calling it the finest such work since Brahms. The style is post Brahmsian late romantic. In four movements, Korngold's operatic talent is foreshadowed almost immediately in the very lyrical and romantic first subject. A calmer melody serves as the second theme. The second movement is an Adagio. It is tinged with sadness and introspection but it is not funereal. Next comes an Intermezzo which in many ways recalls the days of Golden Vienna at the end of the 19th century. The rousing finale alternates between a sense of urgency and a mood of jubilation. There is no question that this Sextet is a masterpiece, one of the very finest in the literature which deserves a place on the concert stage. It must be admitted, however, that it is a work beyond the reach of all but the most experienced of amateurs with excellent technical ability.



Arnold Krug (1849-1904) was born in Hamburg. He began his music studies with piano lessons from his father, who was a music teacher. Later, he was sent to the Leipzig Conservatory where he studied with Carl Reinecke and then went on to Berlin, where continued with Friedrich Kiel and Eduard Franck. After completing his studies, he taught in Berlin before

returning to Hamburg where he remained for the rest of his life.

His **String Sextet in D Major, Op.68** was known as the "Prize Sextet" because Krug won the Stelzner Prize for chamber music with this composition. Alfred Stelzner was an inventor of two instruments--the Violotta and the Cellone--which he believed would create a revolution in composing for string instruments. The Violotta, tuned an octave below the violin, was said to fill the gap between the viola and the cello. The Cellone was a big cello, tuned two octaves below the violin, or a fourth below the cello, and meant to fill the gap between the cello and the kontrabass. Stelzner vigorously promoted his instruments and sponsored competitions. One such competition was sponsored by the Dresden Conservatory in 1896, the competition in which Krug won his prize. The Prize Sextet was originally for 2 Violins, Viola, Violotta, Cello and Cellone, but the publisher of the work wisely hedged his bets and produced an edition for the standard combination of 2 Violins, 2 Violas and 2 Cellos. The Sextet clearly belongs in the front rank of such works and is well written from start to finish. The themes are skillfully presented and the work is quite sonorous. The first movement, Allegro, begins with a short but powerful introduction which gives the impression of storms ahead. Instead, the main melody is quite genial and broad. Later, Krug cleverly weaves the introduction into the second theme and uses it as part of the coda. The second movement, Adagio tranquillo, is characterized by a calm, deeply felt melody, which is interrupted by a urgent and highly dramatic middle section. There is no scherzo, but the lively first theme to the finale, Allegro, seems to fill this gap. A quieter and more lyrical second theme provides excellent contrast. The Sextet deserves concert performance and can certainly be recommended to amateurs.



Max Lewandowsky (1874-1906) was born in the German city of Hamburg. Despite the fact that he was, though not famous, a fairly well-known performing musician, conductor and composer within Germany and England during the last five years of his life, very little information about him is available. He is thought to have studied piano with Arnold Krug and possibly Hans von Bülow in Hamburg and most likely studied composition as well with Krug and perhaps with Josef Foerster and Gustav Mahler. Other sources suggest he may have studied composition with Heinrich von Herzogenberg at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. What is known is that he performed as a pianist and served as a conductor in both Berlin and London. It is also known that several of his works from chamber music, to symphonies to vocal works were performed both in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Although he seems to have been most active in Berlin, he died in his home town of Hamburg in a boating accident.

His **String Sextet in c minor, Op.5** dates from 1904. The opening movement, Allegro assai, literally begins with a bang. The main theme which is immediately introduced is dramatic and riveting, full of forward thrust. A genial second theme is more lyrical and relaxed. The lovely second movement, Andante sostenuto, is a cross between a romantic serenade and an intermezzo. Next comes a nervous Scherzo, allegro molto vivace, in the tradition of Mendelssohn. It is coupled with a slower, lyrical and quite appealing trio section. The finale, Allegro moderato ma energico, begins with a lugubrious but very powerful march-like theme, which quickly picks up speed and forward motion. A languid second subject provides excellent contrast. This is a first rate work, an excellent addition to the string sextet literature. It is sure to make a strong impression in the concert hall and should not be missed by amateurs as it presents no technical problems.

Mihály Mosonyi (1815-1870), who until he changed his name in 1859, was known as Michael Brand. Born in the Austro-Hungarian town of Frauenkirchen (Boldogas-szonyfalva), he



studied piano and composition with unknowns and learned what he did from studying the Viennese Classics along with textbooks by Anton Reicha and Johann Nepomuk Hummel. Up until 1859, he wrote in the German Romantic style.

The String Sextet in c minor dates from 1844, well before his Hungarian conversion and there is nothing Hungarian-sounding about it.

The big opening Allegro agitato begins in dramatic fashion with a gripping theme. Schubert and Beethoven seem to have been the models, tonally-speaking. However, it would be a mistake to consider it imitative. The music is quite fresh and original sounding. The part-writing also is quite good. The ensuing Adagio begins in an almost Mozartean fashion. Its main theme is very charming. What follows appears to be a set of variations, really finely executed. A first rate Scherzo, allegro comes next. It has some very interesting and briefly jarring tonalities. A canonic episode is also quite arresting. The middle section has some very original harmonic effects. The main theme to the finale, Allegro furioso, is not as captivating as the earlier ones, but the rhythmic drive serves as compensation. The powerful and highly dramatic coda is handled quite deftly. In all, this is really a first rate work. It's worth considering when composed, no well-known composer of the 19th century had yet to write a string sextet.



Per August Ölander (1824-1886) was born in the Swedish town of Linköping. His early music lessons were with his father, a violinist and parish organist. He attended the University of Uppsala and although he took some music lessons from the school's music director, it was not his main area of study. Because it was virtually impossible for musicians in Sweden during this

time to earn a living solely through music, like so many others, he supported himself by means of working in an entirely different area unrelated to music. He served for most of his life as a officer in the customs office. He did not ignore music altogether, working as a violinist and music critic. He played second violin in a prominent string quartet and may have had a few composition lessons from the first violinist but was largely self-taught as a composer. Hence, it was quite surprising when his opera Blenda won the first prize in the 1876 Royal Competition by acclamation; the jury was unanimous. He was not a prolific composer, writing just the one opera, a few other vocal works, a string sextet and several string quartets.

His **String Sextet in D Major** dates from 1850. It begins with a substantial and very beautiful Andantino introduction which leads to the main section, a lively Allegro full of fetching melodies. The second movement is an attractive Mendelssohnian Scherzo which is followed by a languid Intermezzo, showcasing the tonal qualities of the various voices, especially those of the cello and viola. The exciting finale, Allegro vivace, bursts out of the starting gate full of energy. Gorgeous cantilena melodies provide excellent contrast. This is a first rate string sextet, presenting no technical difficulties, from the time of Schumann and Mendelssohn which not only has wonderful melodies but also excellent part-writing, with solos for all.



During the last ten years of his life and for the three decades following it, **Joachim Raff** (1822-1882) was regularly mentioned in the same breath as Wagner, Liszt, and Brahms as one of Germany's leading composers. The experts and the public judged him to be the equal to such past masters as Mendelssohn, Schumann and Tchaikovsky. Incredibly, by the 1920's his music had all but disappeared from the concert stage. It seems virtually unimaginable that a composer whose talent was recognized and whose music

was admired by Mendelssohn and Liszt, could become a mere footnote, yet this is what became of Raff and his music for most of the 20th century. Only now is he being rediscovered to the delight of those fortunate enough to hear his music. He wrote a great deal of chamber music, and, in my opinion, much of it is very good indeed.

His **String Sextet in g minor, Op.178** certainly begins in a very promising fashion. The opening Allegro is quite exciting and has a beautiful main theme. It does require technically competent players to pull off the accompaniment which is full of rushing passages. The short but excellent scherzo which follows begins in a Mendelssohnian fashion and quickly turns into a wild tarantella interspersed with an equally wild Hungarian melody. The trio, with its guitar-like accompaniment in the lower voices, is particularly effective and quite original. A big slow movement, Larghetto, is a theme and set of variations. If Raff meant for this movement to be the showcase of the sextet, he miscalculated. The theme, though pleasant, is unexceptional. As for the variations, there simply are too many and while several of them are quite good, a number of weaker and less interesting ones are included. Though it is not a bad movement, it is rather too long. The somewhat Mendelssohnian finale is fairly short. It quickly establishes tension. The thematic material is average, which is somewhat of a problem since it follows the excellent material found in the first two movements. Although it is a shame that the best material comes first, there is much fine writing in the last two movements and the finale is both exciting and commendably short. Amateurs of good technical ability will certainly enjoy the work.



Max Reger (1873-1916) was born in the small Bavarian town of Brand. He began his musical studies at a young age and his talent for composition became clear early on. His family expected him to become a school teacher like his father and to this end he passed the necessary examinations for certification. However, before he landed his first teaching job, he met the eminent musicologist

Hugo Riemann, who was so impressed by Reger's talent that he urged him to devote himself entirely to music. Reger studied with him for nearly five years. By 1907, Reger was appointed to the prestigious position of Professor of composition at the Leipzig Conservatory. In addition to this, he was widely regarded as one of the best living conductors and organists.

The **Sextet in F Major, Op.118** is one of his late works which he finished in 1910. I would be the first to tell you that this is not an easy work to play. And, I realize that for many, Reger is an acquired taste. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that it is a very original and well executed work. The opening movement, Allegro energico, begins *ff* and literally explodes with tremendous power. It is followed by several other very interesting themes all of which are in one way or another based on the main theme. The second movement, a fast moving Scherzo, vivace is somewhat unusual with regard to its various modulations through which it passes. Reger is said to have been experimenting with a new idea. Today, after all of the works of the serial composers, it does not sound quite so daring to our ears. The center of gravity for the Sextet is its slow movement, Largo con gran espressione. This is music full of deeply felt emotion. It bears with it that transcendental sense one so often finds in the slow movements of Bruckner's symphonies. The finale, Allegro con moto, is of an altogether lighter nature relieving the religiosity of the preceding Largo. It is also a good movement but, following on the footsteps of such an outstanding and deeply felt movement, it does give the impression of being a little "light-weight", perhaps a term which is not entirely suitable to describe Reger's music. All in all, this is a very good sextet, but unless the players are quite strong sight readers, it's a good idea for everyone to have a look at their parts beforehand and if possible get a recording.



Prince Heinrich XXIV Reuss of Köstritz (1855-1910), was born in the Prussian town of Trebschen. The Reusses were a large old German noble family with several branches and literally dozens of princes called Heinrich.

There was even another Prince Heinrich XXIV, but he was "of Greiz", hence the need for the lengthy name. Our Prince Reuss after initially studying music with his father, who had been a student of Carl Reissiger, took a law degree. However, subsequently he devoted himself to music, studying composition privately with Heinrich von Herzogenberg who introduced him to Brahms. Although Brahms never formally gave lessons to Reuss, according to the prince he gave the young composer numerous suggestions and considerable help which as far as Reuss was concerned almost amounted to the same thing. Though not a prolific composer, he did pen six symphonies as well as a considerable amount of chamber music, including five string quartets, two string sextets, three piano trios, a piano quartet, a piano quintet as well as several instrumental sonatas. His style can be summed up as an amalgam of Brahms, Herzogenberg and to some extent Dvorak and Mendelssohn. His works were premiered to critical acclaim and were held in high regard for many years before disappearing from the repertoire after the First World War. He wrote two string sextets.

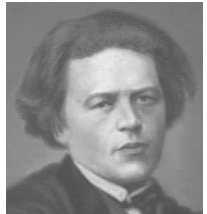
String Sextet No.1 in d minor, Op.12 appeared in 1899 and was dedicated to Herzogenberg. At the time I played this sextet, I did not know that he had written two such works. I assumed he had only composed one and had heard from friends how wonderful it was and that I must play it if I got the chance. I eventually found a copy of what turned out to be No.1 and played it. I was somewhat disappointed and could not understand the enthusiastic recommendations it received until I realized that he had written a second string sextet and that this was the one which had been recommended. To be fair, this sextet is a decent work. Its four movements are well put together. The opening Allegro vivace and Andante con moto, are serious and workmanlike, but the melodic material was not, in my opinion, very memorable. However the last two movements: a fleet Molto vivace which serves as a scherzo and the finale, an Allegretto with variations, are quite good and make a much stronger impression.

His **String Sextet No.2 in b minor, Op.17** is a first rate work of art which need not fear comparison of any even sextet, even those of Brahms. Completed in 1901, this is a piece which every chamber music lover should get to know. It is a work of superb craftsmanship which is tonally beautiful throughout and is comfortable to perform. The first movement, Allegro non troppo, has for its main theme a melody which resembles that of the form of a legend. The second subject is graceful and fresh and its appeal is heightened by the pizzicato accompaniment. The development shows that the composer is a master of counterpoint. The second movement, Andante con moto, is a deeply felt and atmospheric song without words, which charms by its simplicity. The main section of the Allegretto quasi andantino which follows calls to mind corresponding movements from Brahms Second Symphony and First Serenade but is certainly not imitative. There is a whimsical trio section and clever Vivace coda. The finale, Allegro ma non troppo e grazioso, shows, like Brahms, the composer's affection for Hungarian gypsy melody. Not only is this well done but the contrasting musette section makes a good impression as well. This is a masterpiece which belongs in the front rank of string sextets. Made for string players, it almost plays itself and is in no way technically difficult.

In 1876, **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)** composed his five movement String Sextet in A Major. The main theme of the opening Allegro vivace is extraordinarily nice. Korsakov must have thought so too because he repeats it way too many times.



Additionally, he could have done more to develop it. Despite this, there is much to admire here. The second movement, Rondo fugato, is from the technical standpoint, quite an achievement. The melodic material, though hardly above ordinary, is well-suited for a fugue and Rimsky creates a rather clever double fugue. Surprisingly, another quick movement, Scherzo, Vivace alla Saltarello, follows. The main theme is good, but again is repeated too often. The second theme is pedestrian. Korsakov makes up for this with his Andante espressivo. Here, the first cello is given the lead. It not only presents the hauntingly beautiful main theme, but also takes the lead in the very sophisticated development. The somewhat Russian-sounding finale, Allegro molto, though a bit thin melodically, is handled effectively. Not really strong enough for the concert hall, although the Andante espressivo could certainly be used as an encore, it can definitely be recommended to amateurs. It plays easily and presents no technical difficulties.



Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894) was one of the great piano virtuosos of the 19th century with a technique said to rival that of Liszt. He also gained renown as a composer and conductor. Rubinstein was one of those rare concert virtuosos whose contribution to music went far beyond performing. In 1862, he founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory and served as its first director. His efforts in developing Russian musical talent were perhaps the greatest of any single individual. Not only did he introduce European educational methods but he also established standards that were as rigorous as any conservatory in Europe. While Rubinstein's compositions were extremely popular during his lifetime, after his death, they were criticized because they showed "no Russian influence" and were viewed as derivatives of prominent European contemporaries, especially of Mendelssohn. However, this not entirely accurate. Although he was not part of the so-called emergent Russian national school as led by Rimsky Korsakov, it is not true that there is no Russian influence to be found in his music. This influence is just not as pronounced as in the works of Borodin, Mussorgsky or of Korsakov himself. Rubinstein was a prolific composer writing in nearly every genre. Chamber music figures prominently amongst his works. He wrote 10 string quartets, at least 5 piano trios, a string quintet and a string sextet as well as several other chamber works.

His **String Sextet in D Major, Op.97** dates from 1877. It is not an easy work to bring off and even the second violin part is devilishly difficult. The opening movement has several sections—Andante, Con moto, and Un poco animato. The main theme is appealing and charming but the development section seems almost too complicated and difficult to follow. The first subject of the second movement, Andante, is in the form of a simple song-like melody. It is interrupted by a highly dramatic and agitated middle section. In the next movement, Moderato, parts of the theme are thrown back and forth between the different voices. The finale begins with a powerful Andante introduction which leads to an exciting Allegro vivace, the main theme to which resembles a folk tune. This is big work and may make a lasting impression in the concert hall, but amateurs who are not of the highest technical caliber and excellent ensemble players should be forewarned, it is not an easy work. And in my opinion, unnecessarily difficult.

When most people hear the name **Peter Schickele** (1935-) they think of his creation, the infamous P.D.Q. Bach, his famous comedy parody of the Baroque. But Schickele, who was born in Ames, Iowa and trained at the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied composition with Roy Harris, Darius Milhaud and



Vincent Persichetti among others is a serious composer with over 100 works to his credit. His **String Sextet** in six movements dates from 1990. This is a completely tonal work. The first movement, Moderately fast, opens with a whiff of sound reminiscent of Brahms. Schickele writes that he had the Brahms String Sextet No.2 in mind when he began. But this is no mere copy of Brahms, far from it. There are all sorts of interesting effects. For example, there is the short, nervous second movement; a slow movement with American plains folk influence, then a fast-paced movement showing the influence of jazz, and then a lovely disembodied waltz movement. This is a magnificent work, a super work, but it requires super players.



Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) was born in Vienna. As a youth he studied cello and violin. His father's death, when he was a teenager, forced him to get a job as a bank clerk. He studied counterpoint and composition privately with the composer Alexander Zemlinsky but was largely self-taught. Schoenberg's **Verklärte Nacht** (Transfigured Night), originally for string sextet dates from 1899 and was later orchestrated by him in 1917. It is perhaps the best known of his works from his early period, before he eschewed traditional tonality. It was the orchestral version in which work achieved fame. In this setting, with the massed strings, there is a torrent of sound and tremendous power, however, though highly dramatic, it loses the sense of intimacy of the original. Schoenberg set to music Richard Dehmel's poem of the same name. The poem tells of a poignant conversation between two lovers, a man and a woman, as they walk through the moonlit woods on a cold, clear winter night. Tormented by guilt, the woman confesses that she had become pregnant by another man before she had met her lover. After sobbing, the woman falls silent. Her lover replies that because their love is so strong, the unborn child will become his. Redeemed by his love and forgiveness, the woman's heart is lightened. The lovers embrace, and as they continue their walk, the night takes on a transfigured aura. Played without break, the music mirrors the five sections of the poem: an introduction, which sets the scene in the shadowy forest; the woman's depressed trudge and anguished confession; the man's deep-toned, comforting forgiveness; the enraptured love duet in an optimistic major mode; and the ethereal apotheosis, representing the "transfigured night" itself. Dehmel after hearing a performance, congratulated Schoenberg on his marvelous rendering of his poem. It is a masterwork but requires players of a very high level technically and of ensemble experience.



Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942) was born in Prague. He began studying piano at the Prague Conservatory, and at the suggestion of Dvorak, who heard the boy play shortly before he died, recommended that Schulhoff move to Vienna to continue his studies, which he did for two years. Then on the Leipzig Conservatory where he studied composition with Max Reger. In Cologne in 1913, he was able to study privately Debussy for a brief period of time.

His **String Sextet** was begun in Dresden in 1920, but not completed until 4 years later. It is a profound work of four movements, and although not truly atonal, bears a certain kinship with Schoenberg's music. A three-note cell (C-D flat-G) is significant throughout the piece. The brooding mood of the work yields a bit in the second movement to a calmer cantilena, but the third movement, a fiendish 5/8 Burlesca is tense and riveting. The last movement is a more lyrical meditation upon earlier material. The

work was said to reflect the cynicism which infected Schulhoff's music after serving in the Austro-Hungarian army on the eastern front during World War I and then later as a prisoner of war. It is not an easy work to play and certainly not immediately ingratiating, nor was it meant to be, but it cannot be denied that it is powerful and effective.



Otto Siegl (1896-1978) was born in the Austrian city of Graz. He studied violin and composition at the Graz Conservatory, the latter with Roderich von Mojsisovics, and then in Vienna with Egon Kornauth. He worked as a violinist, conductor and held the position of professor of music at conservatories in Cologne and Vienna.

His **String Sextet, Op.28** dates from 1924. It is not traditionally tonal. Though most accurately described as atonal it is not part of the 12 tone school of Schoenberg and at times flirts with traditional tonality. Not at all an easy, in part because the time signature changes often, sometimes every two or three bars. It is an interesting but not particularly enjoyable work.



Louis Spohr (1784-1859 also known as Ludwig) was born in the German city of Braunschweig. From early childhood, he showed a great aptitude for the violin. He studied with the virtuoso violinist Franz Anton Eck in St. Petersburg and ultimately became one of the leading violinists in the first half of the 19th century. But he was also an important composer and conductor. Spohr wrote in

virtually every genre, not the least being chamber music. He composed some 36 string quartets, 7 string quintets, five piano trios, four double quartets and several other chamber pieces.

He was no longer young when he penned his **String Sextet in C Major, Op.140** in 1848. He was one of the few since Boccherini to have composed in this genre. Unfortunately, like so many of his works, we find that otherwise fine writing is marred with the insertion of passages of which he as player excelled but which do little to advance the music. The thematic material of the first movement is lovely though thin. Spohr tries to fluff it out by excessive reliance on trills which quickly becomes pretty tiresome. The slow movement is altogether better. The final two movements, a scherzo, in the form of a mazurka, and a presto, are actually cleverly combined into one movement. This is an enjoyable work, at times good, but certainly not great. Suitable for home music making but clearly not for the concert hall.



Vaclav Stepan (1889-1944) was born in the town of Pecky, near Prague, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His family moved to Prague when he was young and he studied piano and composition. The latter with Vizeslav Novak. An eye infection resulted in blindness in his right eye.

His **String Sextet, Op.11** dates from 1923. It is a tonal work most of the time. The time signatures and tempi change frequently. It is in one long movement and rather difficult to play. Certainly beyond all but the best amateur players. It is an original sounding work which would make a strong impression in the concert hall if presented.

Peter Tchaikovsky's Souvenir d'Florence, is one of the greatest works for string sextet. And like the two sextets of Brahms should be on every chamber music player's list to try. But be forewarned, it requires players of real technical accomplishment, a level or two above what those sextets of Brahms require. And the first violinist and first cellist, if not professionals, need to be of the highest technical ability to do a good job. Much has been written about the Souvenir elsewhere. It is justly famous and there is little if anything I can add here other than to recommend it to you.



Not long ago, the author of the jacket notes to a CD of Thieriot's chamber music wrote, "*One no longer knows the name Ferdinand Thieriot who emerged from the circle around Johannes Brahms...*" If it can be said that **Ferdinand Thieriot** (1835-1919) emerged at all, his emergence was brief, and for the most part, unnoticed, at least by English speaking musicians

and listeners. He is unknown to either the Groves or New Grove musical encyclopedias, and is not to be found in Baker's Dictionary. Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music, while producing a list of his chamber works, has but one sentence about him, which is in part misinformation: "German composer, pupil of Brahms and Rheinberger." Though he was an admirer and friend of Brahms, he was not a student of the great man. Thieriot did study with the same teacher in Hamburg that Brahms had: Eduard Marxen. Thieriot eventually followed Brahms to Austria where he first gained a reputation as a cellist. It was on Brahms recommendation that Thieriot was appointed Director of the Music Society of Steiermark in its capital Graz. Later, he held similar positions in Leipzig and Hamburg. Thieriot wrote a considerable amount of chamber music including an octet for strings and winds, a string octet, thirteen string quartets, a quintet for piano and string quartet, four piano trios, two piano quartets, a quartet for flute and string trio, and a quintet for piano and winds.

His **String Sextet in D Major** was called Op. Post. by his publisher. However, there is no indication that this is a late work but simply one which was discovered after the composer's death. In Thieriot's case, a huge amount of music was discovered in 1983, including 11 string quartets, this work and many others. It is in four movements, well-written with excellent part writing. But it suffers from a lack of memorable thematic material in my opinion. I would date the work from roughly 1885-1895, although tonally it could have been composed earlier. In the first movement, Allegro, we hear, at times, vague echoes of Mendelssohn. The melodies, however, are rather ordinary and nothing about themes stands out. The second movement, Intermezzo-Allegro vivace, again is well-written, and there is considerable forward movement, but the melodic material is weak. The Adagio non troppo which follows is the best movement of the work, but it cannot be classified as particularly fine. The middle section, however, is effective. The finale, Allegro vivace, is no different from the earlier movements—fine part-writing and a nicely constructed movement, tonally attractive but the melodic material is totally bland and unmemorable. Certainly not a candidate for concert and there are too many other works out there which are better and deserve your attention before this one.



Nicolai von Wilm (1834-1911) was born in the old Hanseatic city of Riga, today's capital of Latvia, but then part of the Russian empire. In the 19th century, Riga was still predominantly a German city and Wilm's family was ethnic German. He first learned piano and then studied that instrument as well as composition at the Leipzig Conservatory. Subsequently, he worked as a

music director in Riga and St. Petersburg after which he moved to Wiesbaden in Germany where he remained for the rest of his life. He was a prolific composer who wrote in most genres, but the bulk of his music was for piano, although he did not ignore chamber music writing several works for strings.

Wilm's **String Sextet in b minor, Op.27**, dating from 1882, is a nice work. Beautiful sounding and cleverly written, the sextet is light hearted in spirit. It opens with a Larghetto introduction which leads to the main section Allegro vivace. The first theme is a lilting melody. The main subject of the second movement, Andante espressivo, is of an elegiac nature, while the second melody is more exuberant with the aroma of the coffee house. Next comes

a fleet scherzo, Allegro molto, with a sweet melody in the contrasting trio section. The finale, Allegro con brio, is march-like and energetic. Not at all difficult to play, this is a work which can be recommended to amateurs, though not for concert performance.



Anton Wranitzky (1761-1820 Antonin Vranický in Czech) was born in the Moravian town of Neureisch in the Austrian Habsburg Empire, today Nové Říše in the Czech Republic. He was the younger half-brother of the composer Paul Wranitzky, who was the better known of the two, although both were in their time fairly well-known, especially in Vienna but also throughout

Europe where their music was often performed. Anton's first music lessons were from Paul. He studied philosophy in Olmütz (Olomouc) and subsequently from 1778 to 1782 jurisprudence and music in Brunn (Brno). After that, he followed his brother to Vienna, where starting in 1783, he took composition lessons from Mozart, Haydn and Georg Albrechtsberger. A talented violinist, he worked as a freelance musician until 1790 when he was hired by Prince Lobkowitz, the patron of Haydn and Beethoven, and eventually became Kapellmeister or Music Director of the Prince's orchestra. In 1807 he became the orchestra director of the Imperial Court Theater and in 1814 he became conductor in the Theater an der Wien. He knew all of the major musical figures in Vienna and was often engaged by Beethoven to conduct premieres of his symphonies.

His **String Sextet in G Major** has no opus number and is one of six such works composed around 1780, which probably makes it the earliest for such an ensemble after those of Boccherini which were written a few years before. It is worth pointing out that there is virtually no likelihood that Wranitzky ever heard any of Boccherini's sextets, and this one sounds absolutely unlike that composer. The style is that of the Mannheim School. The opening Allegro is rather orchestral sounding and could just as easily have been played by a string orchestra. The melodic material though pleasant is ordinary, the kind one hears in divertimenti designed to be talked over, at least nowadays. Next comes an Andante. What I said about the first movement also applies here. Lastly we have an Adagio, allegro finale. The adagio introduction really does little to make one anticipate the main section. Though pretty simple, and made trite by its 6/8 rhythm, the same criticism applies to the allegro. Other than for historical purposes, I cannot see any reason to play or to revive this work

II. String Sextets for Other Combinations



Jan Brandts Buys (1868-1939) 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. 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 works.

His **Sextet in D Major, Op. 40 for 3 Violins, 2 Violas and Cello** can be recommended both public performance and home music making. It is in no way difficult to play. It is well-constructed and finely written. The opening theme of the fleet first movement, *Allegro molto*, gives the music the feeling of a scherzo. The second theme is particularly effective. The rhythm creates a charming accompaniment and the whole movement is very artistically handled. The main subject of the slow, second movement, *Stoltz einherschreitend*, is a sweet melody which is eventually replaced with a funereal theme. The often syncopated music is full of rich and charming melodic touches. The Scherzo which comes next is in the form of an old Dutch sailors dance, rhythmically piquant and contrapuntal is quite cleverly done. The powerful finale, *Energico e tenuto*, makes for a superb ending. A first rate work. Edition Silvertrust created a second cello part as a replacement for Violin III so the work can, if desired, be played as a standard string sextet.



Ignacy Feliks Dobrzynski (1807-67) was the son of a kapellmeister to a Polish count who held much the same duties that Haydn did with the Esterhazys. Training from his father and experience with the count's orchestra provided Dobrzynski's early musical education. Later he went to the Warsaw Conservatory and studied piano and composition with Josef Elsner. While he achieved only moderate success in his native Poland, in Germany, his works were highly praised, and critical reviews in newspapers, such as those in the influential city of Leipzig, were very favorable. The Sextet is full of glorious melodies, inventiveness and originality. Hear it and you will wonder how such a work could fall into oblivion.

His **String Sextet in E flat Major, Op.39 for 2 Violins, Viola, 2 Cellos and Bass** was composed in 1845. It was premiered by the Leipzig Gewandhaus concertmaster Ferdinand David and his colleagues in 1849 to considerable acclaim. The first of four movements, a lovely *Allegro moderato ed espressivo*, is reminiscent of Spohr. The unusual Minuetto, *allegro* which follows begins as a fugue and only gradually transforms itself into a minuet. The trio section is a very attractive, sentimental waltz. The third movement, *Elegia, andante espressivo e sostenuto*, was said to have created the greatest impression upon audiences. It was known as *Homage a Kosciuszko*. It begins with a funereal dirge and has a brief stormy middle section. The finale, an energetic *Allegro*, is replete with fine melodic material. A solid work which amateurs will enjoy and perhaps deserving of a concert performance.

Felix Mendelssohn's string sinfonia or symphonies are not thought of as chamber music. But, in fact, they are. It is ironic that while none of these sinfonia as he called them were intended to be played by the massed string section of a modern symphony orchestra or even the size of today's chamber orchestra, that is the only way these works seem to be heard. The title of Sinfonia was given because of the style rather than the number of players he intended for the work. It is almost certain that Mendelssohn intended these works for a small group of players—five, six or

eight players, depending on the sinfonia, and not more. These lovely pieces were meant for home use and for musical soirees. The famous pianist Ignaz Moscheles, a friend of the Mendelssohn family and piano teacher of both Felix and his sister Fanny, reported on several evenings, where the Mendelssohns and a few friends performed these works at the Mendelssohn home. Among the twelve sinfonia, numbers seven, eleven and twelve were intended for six players, 2 violins, 2 violas, cello and bass. They are easy and fun to play and appealing.

Heinrich Molbe (1835-1915) was the pseudonym of Heinrich von Bach, a prominent Viennese lawyer whose three brothers—Alexander, Eduard and Otto—were nonetheless all better known than him. He was born in the village of Unterwaltersdorf in lower Austria outside of Vienna. His father, an important jurist, sent him, as he had the other brothers, to the University of Vienna to study law. Alexander, the eldest (b. 1813) and most famous of the four, served as Imperial Chancellor to the Emperor Franz Joseph from 1848-1850. Eduard entered the imperial civil service and was a governor of several Habsburg provinces while Otto became a composer and eventually director of the Mozarteum in Salzburg. Heinrich, while at the University of Vienna, studied composition privately, as did his brother Otto, with Simon Sechter, the famous professor of composition and theory at the Vienna Conservatory. Heinrich also entered the imperial civil service and briefly served as the Governor of the Fiume and Trieste Province, then in Austrian possession. Though he could claim to be a professionally trained musician, he apparently felt that being known as a composer would be detrimental to his legal and imperial civil service careers and hence composed under a pseudonym. He was a fairly prolific composer, writing nearly 400 works, including some 200 art songs and 140 chamber works.

His **String Sextet in D Major, Op.64 for 2 Violins, 2 Violas, Cello and Bass** dates from in 1897. It is a big work and can be warmly recommended, especially to amateur players. Molbe clearly had a gift for melody. The first movement, *Allegro con brio*, is jovial and full of good spirits and opens with a melody the equal of some of Schubert's best. The other themes are equally pleasing. The second movement, *Adagio non troppo ma molto espressivo*, is a lovely character piece. It begins with the cello and bass giving forth a mighty tune in their lowest registers, which moves bravely forward to the syncopated accompaniment in the other voices. It has tinges of a Chopin funeral march. As it dies out, a lovely, more optimistic section follows. Next comes an energetic but muted Scherzo with trio. In the finale, *Allegro molto vivace*, the composer makes considerable use of pizzicato. The main theme, which is full of energy, has an aura of magnificence about it.



Ignaz Pleyel (1757-1831) was born in the Austrian town of Rupperthal. He began his studies with Jan Baptist Vanhal and then with Haydn, who, along with Mozart, considered Pleyel extraordinarily talented. Mozart is said to have called Pleyel the "next Haydn" and Haydn saw to it that his star pupil's works, primarily chamber music, were published.

Pleyel's reputation quickly spread and he obtained the position of Kapellmeister (Music Director) at one of Hungary's leading courts. Later he moved to Strasbourg where he worked with Franz Xaver Richter and settled there. During the French Revolution, he moved to London but later returned to France and became a French citizen. In 1795, he founded a publishing firm which bore his name. It became one of the most important in

France, publishing the works of Beethoven, Hummel, Boccherini, Onslow, Clementi, Dussek and many others. In addition, he founded a famous piano manufacturing company which also bears his name. Pleyel and his music were quite famous during his lifetime. In England, for a time, his music was more popular than that of Haydn.

Pleyel's **String Sextet in F Major for 2 Violins, 2 Violas, Cello and Bass, Ben.261** dates from 1791. It was brought out by the publisher Andre as his Op.37. The date of the composition is significant because Pleyel, a student of Haydn, composed in the so called Viennese classical style pioneered by Haydn and Mozart and up until 1789, not in the concertante style founded in Paris and still favored by French composers. When he was appointed Kapellmeister of the Cathedral in Strasbourg, he was widely regarded by French revolutionaries with suspicion because he was an Austrian. It is said that he only escaped the guillotine by quickly writing patriotic Jacobin works and abandoning the style of Viennese composers of which he had been considered one of the leading advocates. He adopted the concertante style of the French and his Sextet, an interesting work on several counts, reflects this fact. The only string sextets written before this one were those of Boccherini composed some 20 years before. They were for 2 violins, 2 violas and 2 cellos. Pleyel's are the first which substituted a bass for the second cello, and one of the very few in this style. The work achieved considerable popularity and was often performed up until the mid 19th century when tastes changed. It begins with an Allegro, shimmering with colorful textures, followed by a lovely Cantabile. Then comes a Minuet with Trio and a Rondo with which the Sextet closes. Certainly good for amateurs, and only as a historical representative for concert.



The name **Jean Philippe Rameau** (1683-1764) belongs to one of the most important composers of the Baroque era, although his music is rarely performed live anymore. He was known for his operas, his compositions for harpsichord and his book on harmony, based on his **Pieces de Clavecin**, which were composed between 1724-1726. They were transcribed for three violins, viola and two cellos shortly after Rameau's death in 1768 by the French lawyer and composer Jacques Joseph Marie Decroix. A subsequent edition was made by Saint Saens in 1896. And it is in this version that they have survived.

They became known as the **Six Concerts for String Sextet**. Edition Silvertrust has reprinted the first of the set. It is for three violins, viola and two cellos. They created a second viola part from the third violin part so the work could also be played as a standard string sextet. It is in three movements: La Coulicam (thought to be the French transliteration of Kublai Khan), La Livri (a kind of tamborine, used in Turkish music of the time) and Le Vézinnet, which refers to a suburb of Paris. Though not originally for sextet, the fact that they were transcriptions by the likes of Saint Saens, makes them noteworthy and interesting as works from the Baroque for a string sextet.



Ernst Rudorff (1840-1918) was born in Berlin. He began his studies there with Woldemar Bargiel and then entered the Leipzig Conservatory where he studied with Ignaz Moscheles and Carl Reinecke among others. After graduating he pursued a career as a piano soloist, teacher and composer. He held positions at the Cologne Conservatory and the Berlin Hochschule. Among his many students were Wilhelm Berger and Leopold Godowsky. Most of his works were for piano.

His **String Sextet in A Major, Op.5 for 3 Violins, Viola and 2 Cellos** appeared in 1865 and was dedicated to the famous vio-

linist, Ferdinand David. It is his only work of chamber music, other than a few pieces for violin and piano. The Sextet is a grateful work to play and shows the influence of Schumann, whose chamber music Rudorff studied closely. It is superbly put together, and has extremely clear and transparent writing. It deserves concert performance and amateurs will also enjoy this tonally beautiful work. The first movement, Allegro, is a sweet and gentle idyll, whose main subject is especially impressive. The development, full of fine contrapuntal touches, is quite effective. The movement brings forth appealing melody after melody. Next comes an Andante, a delightful set of variations based on a simple lied-like theme. The finale, Allegro molto, begins with a rhythmically interesting theme and leads to a nicely executed fugal section. Edition Silvertrust who reprinted the work have provided a second viola part in lieu of the third violin so that it can be played as a standard string sextet if desired.



Hermann Suter (1870-1926) was born in the Swiss town of Kaiserstuhl. He studied with Hans Huber at the Basle Conservatory and later with Carl Reinecke at the Leipzig Conservatory. He worked as a conductor and teacher at the Zurich Conservatory. Later, he became director of the Basle Conservatory. His works show the influence of Brahms, Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler. Suter was not a prolific composer but the works that he produced were very well put together and first class. Mostly, he composed works for voice, however, he did not ignore chamber music leaving three string quartets and a string sextet.

His **String Sextet in C Major, Op.18 for 2 Violins, Viola, 2 Cellos and Bass** was composed in 1916. He achieves a surprisingly satisfying tonal result with this preponderance of lower voiced instruments. Superbly executed, it belongs in the concert hall. The writing is quite accomplished and on several occasions rises to an almost orchestral level. The first movement begins with a slow Lento introduction. It is in the free form of a fantasia. In it we hear the germ of what becomes one of the themes of the Allegro energico, which is noteworthy for its spirited writing and attractive lyrical themes. The second movement is a piquant and lively Vivace which serves as a scherzo. The beautiful Canzone which follows is a warm and deeply felt piece. The crowning glory of the sextet is its finale, Allegro vivo con spirito. It begins with a substantial, moderately paced, Poco sostenuto, introduction, which step by step creates a sense of suspense and expectation. Tension is released by the sudden bursting forth of the Allegro, a high spirited Swiss folk dance. Lifting lyrical themes are interspersed with whirling tarantella episodes. This movement alone is one of the finest in the literature. Edition Silvertrust has created a second viola part from the bass part so that the work can be played as a standard sextet if desired.

III. String Septets

This is an ensemble for which virtually no music has been written. I have been unable to find an explanation for this fact, but there you have it.



The only string septet I am aware of is that of **Darius Milhaud** (1892-1974) He was born in in the French city of Marseille. He studied composition at the Paris Conservatory with Charles-Marie Widor and became a member of the so called "Les Six", a group of modernist French composer who were active during the first part of the 20th century. During the course of his long career, he frequently traveled abroad, sometimes for pleasure, sometimes from necessity. During the First World War, Milhaud served as secretary to the French ambassador to Brazil. During the Second World War, he moved to America during the Nazi occupation of France. The sights and sounds of the cultures which he saw always interested him. In his music, one often hears the sounds of Brazilian dances and American jazz, but also the then modern trends of French music during the 1910s and 1920s.

His **String Septet for 2 Violins, 2 Violas, 2 Cellos and Bass, Op.408** dates from 1964. It is noteworthy for its use of aleatory or chance music which occurs in the second movement entitled, "Etude in controlled chance." The instruments take turns in setting the time unit. Over this basic pulse, fast phrases must be repeated over and over for a prescribed number of seconds before the beginning of the next section. The other three movements are more traditionally constructed. The first movement is active and contrapuntal, in a sectional form based on two contrasting themes. The third movement is meditative, and is notable for exploiting the entire range of the string group. There are five different sections which present related ideas. The five sections are divided by interludes, each for a different solo instrument. The final movement forms an energetic conclusion, with the same two-theme approach as the opening movement. It is a curiosity, not something which is particularly enjoyable to hear, in my opinion, or to play. Listed here only because it was the only such work for this combination I know of. Perhaps there may be others hidden away somewhere.

IV. String Octets including Double Quartets

What you may ask is the difference between the so called standard string octet consisting of four violins, two violas and two cellos and the double quartet. The differences such as they are, are subtle. The personnel is exactly the same and to most listeners, and perhaps players too, one cannot immediately discern any great difference. The double quartet was the creation of the famous violinist and composer Louis Spohr (1784-1859) and it is to him we must turn to learn of the differences. In his memoirs, Spohr wrote that the idea of the double quartet came to him from his friend and colleague, the famous violinist, Andreas Romberg. Quite apart from a standard octet which works as one large group, the idea of the Double Quartet was to have two separate, but equally important groups which could enter into the most varied of relationships. He set himself the task of using two quartets in frequent contrast in the manner of a double choir and saving the combining of the groups into an octet for the climaxes of the work. Hence the alternating of presentation of the thematic material of the two quartets creates an ongoing dialogue and is crucial to the structure of the work. It also allows for an even greater use of tonal coloration than the standard octet. In line with this, Spohr specified that the seating arrangement for a double quartet had to be different from an octet. He decreed that the two quartets were to be seated opposite one another with the first violin and cello of each quartet sitting directly across from his counterpart.



Nikolai Afanasiev (also spelled Afanassiev, Afanasyev et. al. 1821-1898) was born in the Siberian city of Tobolsk. Other than violin and piano lessons which he received from his father, he had no formal musical training as none was to be had within Russia at that time. In his memoirs, he wrote that he learned the art of composition by studying the works of famous composers such as Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. He excelled as a violinist and at the age of 17 was appointed concertmaster of the Moscow Opera Orchestra. He subsequently toured Russia and Western Europe as a soloist before settling in St. Petersburg where he spent the rest of his life. Of the major Russian composers, only Alyabiev and Glinka predate him. While such composers as Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin later became known for establishing the so-called Russian National School of composition, i.e. using Russian folk melody, they were hardly the first. Afanasiev's music, and he wrote in virtually every genre, is filled with the melodies of Russian folk songs and the rhythms of Russian folk dances. Though he and his music are, to some extent, still known within Russia, today he is virtually unknown elsewhere, although his Quartet "*The Volga*" enjoyed a modicum of popularity for some decades during the last part of the 19th century, especially in Germany. Spohr's creation, the double quartet, did not grab the imagination of many composers, and few if any other than Afanasiev wrote for it.

His **Double Quartet in D Major**, subtitled "*Housewarming celebration*" dates from 1875. A play through of the work reveals that it does not follow the guidelines laid down by Spohr and is, in fact, more or less, except for its title, a standard string octet. From the opening bars of the first movement, *Allegro moderato*, it is clear that this is the creation of a Russian composer. The music is unmistakably Russian sounding. The writing gives the work a rather orchestral feel in great part. The second movement, *Allegro vivace*, is a scherzo and even more Russian sounding than the first movement, especially in the trio section. This is a very effective movement which is quite impressive, however, it requires very secure ensemble players. The third movement, *Andante sos-*

tenuto brings to mind the music of the Russian Orthodox Church. There is a rather impressive cadenza for the first violin toward the end of it. The finale, *Allegro non troppo*, is a wonderful, celebratory, jubilant Russian peasant dance, but it must be admitted that once again, the music borders for much of the time on the orchestral. That said, this is a work which is certain to be cheered by a concert audience and will give much pleasure to home music makers.



Woldemar Bargiel (1828-1897) was Clara Schumann's half brother. Clara was nine years older than Woldemar. Throughout their lives, they enjoyed a warm relationship. It was thanks to Clara, that Bargiel was introduced to both Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn. Upon the suggestion of the former and the recommendation of the latter, he was sent to study at the famous Leipzig Conservatory with two of the leading men of music: Ignaz Moscheles (piano) and Niels Gade (composition). Subsequently, Bargiel held positions at the conservatories in Cologne and Rotterdam before accepting a position at the prestigious Hochschule für Musik in Berlin where he taught for the rest of his life. Among his many students were Paul Juon and Leopold Godowsky. Besides teaching and composing, Bargiel served with Brahms as co-editor of the complete editions of Schumann's and Chopin's works. While Bargiel did not write a lot of music, most of what he composed was well thought out and shows solid musical craftsmanship. His chamber music—he wrote four string quartets, a string octet and three piano trios—represents an important part of his output.

Bargiel composed his **String Octet in c minor, Op.15a** in 1877. It can certainly be recommended for performance by professionals in concert. Additionally, amateurs, when they have a chance, should not miss the opportunity to play this octet, which not only sounds good but also presents few technical difficulties. Although Bargiel was clearly steeped in the classical masters, nonetheless, this is the work of a composer from the Romantic era and one who possesses a fine tonal palette. The work begins with a lengthy, elegiac *Adagio* introduction which leads to a magnificent *Allegro appassionato* full of wonderful writing. The lovely coda, with its cello melody, reminds one of Mendelssohn. The middle movement combines a short, religious-sounding, slow movement, *Andante sostenuto*, which is bound together with a bustling Mendelssohnian scherzo, *Allegro*. The main theme to the finale, also an *Allegro*, is based on a rustic folk dance. It is by turns stormy and gentle. A good work.



Certainly among violinists, **Max Bruch** (1838-1920) is fairly well known, but most chamber music players do not know that he wrote two string quartets, two string quintets, a string octet, a piano trio and eight pieces for clarinet, cello and piano. Nearly all of his chamber music was composed in his youth, while he was under the thrall of Mendelssohn and Schumann. The string quintets and octet were never published during his lifetime and the manuscripts were only rediscovered in the early 1990's. Their publication and recording generated much excitement and a gush of praise, which in my opinion was not particularly justified. The works have all been baptized by the publishers as op.post, largely because one prominent Bruch scholar has claimed that they were written when the poor fellow was nearly on his death bed at age 80. However, I wonder if this so-called expert has actually played the chamber works which were published during Bruch's lifetime

and written in his youth during the 1860s, to wit, his two string quartets opp.9 and 10 and his piano trio, op.5. I mention this because once you have played the above works and then play the so-called op. post. works, it is rather obvious that Bruch composed these works in his youth. If not, then one would be forced to conclude some 60 years later, his style had not evolved. But either a playing or hearing of his Eight Pieces, Op.82 composed around 1910, makes it eminently clear that his style did evolve. So what then is the explanation. The answer most likely is that Bruch returned to these works to edit and clean up what he had written as a young man but had chosen not to publish. And despite the fact that he returned to these works, it is also telling that he still chose not to publish these op.post. works while he had the chance. In all honesty, they are not great works and do not do the composer's reputation any good.

This includes the **Octet in B flat Major, Op.Post.**, which substitutes a bass for the second cello. The octet had started out life as a string quintet, one of three he had composed in his youth. In 1920 he arranged it for four violins, two violas, cello and bass, but the thematic material and the treatment, for all intents and purposes, remained the same. The work, in three movements, begins with a slow introduction, which leads to the main section *allegro moderato*. There is much bustle and sawing in an attempt to create an exciting and dramatic atmosphere. The middle movement is mostly lyrical with a march-like contrasting theme. The finale, *Allegro molto*, may have been intended to combine a scherzo and finale all in one. The thematic material is not weak or unattractive, to the contrary, it has considerable appeal and charm. Bruch did have a gift for melody. But it is not evenly divided, too much is to be found in the first violin part and the accompaniment is pedestrian, with much unnecessary thrashing about to no avail. Given that one is unlikely to have many opportunities to play octets, I cannot recommend that any time be wasted on this one.



Georges Enescu (1881-1955) is one of the better known composers of the 20th century. Today, he is mostly remembered as the composer of his two Romanian Rhapsodies for orchestra. What is not so well-known is that he was a child prodigy on the violin and also the piano and later on had a great reputation as a violin virtuoso and famous teacher of the violin. Yehudi Menuhin, among others, studied with him. He wrote a fair amount of chamber music but most of it is little known and rarely, if ever, performed.

His String **Octet in C Major, Op.7** was hailed as an amazing accomplishment for a young man of nineteen, and indeed it is. This epic work combines the musical language of the late romantic era with the emerging new language of polyphony. Enescu wrote that he set out to create a vast work and he later wrote it was quite hard for him to achieve what he had set out to do: *"No engineer putting his first suspension bridge across a river can have agonized more than I did as I gradually filled my manuscript paper with notes. This Octet, cyclic in form, presents the following characteristics: It is divided into four distinct movements in the classic manner, each movement linked to the other to form a single symphonic movement, where the periods, on an enlarged scale, follow one another according to the rules of construction for the first movement of a symphony. Regarding its performance, it is to be noted that too much emphasis should not be given to certain contrapuntal figures in order to permit the presentation of certain essential thematic and melodic elemental values."* The Octet was completed in 1900. The expansive main theme to the opening movement *Très modéré*, gives a clear indication that composer intends a work on the grand scale. The second subject is presented in canonic form. Enescu combines so-

phisticated melody with a touch of Romanian folk music. The explosive second movement, as the title clearly suggests, *Très fougueux*, is a massive fugue. The beautiful slow movement, *Lentement*, which follows is a mysterious nocturne. The finale, *Movt de Valse bien rythmé*, is an extraordinary and wild waltz which combines many of the themes of the earlier movements into a stunning synthesis. This is a masterpiece of the first order and should not be missed, but it must be admitted, it is not an easy work to play and is hard to sight read although it certainly can be managed by experienced amateurs. I highly recommend, however, that the players listen to the work and look at their parts prior to the octet session.



Niels Gade (1817-1890) was born in Copenhagen and began his career as a concert violinist. His career as a composer took off when Mendelssohn saw and later premiered his First Symphony. Mendelssohn must have been mightily impressed since he invited Gade to teach at the Leipzig Conservatory which he had founded. After Mendelssohn's death in 1847, Gade was appointed its director and also served as conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra. But in 1848, he returned to Copenhagen where he remained for the rest of his life, conducting and teaching. Not surprisingly, his own music usually shows the influence of Mendelssohn.

His **Octet in F Major, Op.17** dates from 1849. Cobbett, writing about the octet in his *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* says: *"There is romantic charm on every page. For such an addition to the limited octet repertory, musicians have reason to be grateful. It is the expression of a poetic nature."* He is, of course, entitled to his opinion, but I cannot agree and neither did Wilhelm Altmann, perhaps the most influential chamber music critic of all time who wrote: *"Gade's Octet does not make a particularly strong impression although it is clear, well-written, not particularly hard to play and not without appealing tonalities. However, its content is filled with fluff, the melodies are thin and leave nothing solid to hold onto."* To say that this is a very Mendelssohnian work is no overstatement, in fact, it might be an understatement. One could say it was written by an ersatz Mendelssohn who clearly did not possess the original's inspiration. Right from the opening notes of the first movement, *Allegro molto e con fuoco*, we hear the aura of Mendelssohn. The chromatically descending first subject is dominated by forward rhythmic drive. But basically there is nothing more than a lot of sawing. Gade substitutes forward motion for solid thematic material, perhaps in hopes of hiding how threadbare the melody is. The next movement, *Andantino quasi allegretto*, is a kind of slow Mendelssohnian intermezzo based on a sad folk melody. A lively scherzo, *Allegro moderato e tranquillo*, follows. The main theme sounds like a sailor's ditty. The dynamics are kept soft giving the music added charm. The finale, *Allegro vivace*, has the same flaw as the opening movement—very weak thematic material. In its place, Gade resorts to tricks to hide this problem, substituting running scale passages. I cannot in good conscience recommend this as an entry on your octet menu.



Reinhold Gliere (1875-1956) was born in the then Russian city Kiev. He began his musical studies there with the famous violin teacher Otakar Sevcik, among others. He then went to the Moscow Conservatory where he studied with Sergei Taneyev, Anton Arensky and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov. His reputation today rests primarily upon his symphonies, ballets and operas, however, he was also a composer of superb chamber music. His outstanding compositional technique was quickly recog-

nized by his teachers and he won several prizes for his early works, including his First String Sextet which took the prestigious Glinka Prize from a jury consisting of Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and Liadov. Gliere, himself, taught at the Moscow and Kiev conservatories for nearly 40 years. Among his many successful students were Khachaturian, Prokofiev and Myaskovsky.

The **Octet in D Major, Op.5**, composed in 1900, opens with a full-blooded Allegro moderato. Both the energetic and optimistic main theme and the calm but very melodious second theme are unmistakably Russian. The second movement, also an Allegro, is an elegant intermezzo. A soulful Russian melody serves as the middle section. The slow movement, Andante, comes third and features a very melodious subject which is first presented in a soft and calm fashion. During the rest of the movement, Gliere slowly builds tension along with the dynamic level, reaching a powerful climax just before the movement's close. The finale, another Allegro, sports two tonally rich main themes, each distinguished by a very colorful sound palette. The writing verges on the orchestral at many points, perhaps most notably in the powerful conclusion. Though completely different, in excellence it is on a par with the Mendelssohn and among the very best of octets. It is not particularly difficult, reads well and is grateful to play.



Karl Grädener (1812-1883, sometimes Graedener) was born in the German city of Rostock. He originally worked as a soloist and cellist in a well-known string quartet in Helsingfors (Helsinki). Subsequently, he served as music director at Kiel University, and a professor of voice at the Vienna Conservatory and finally as finally as a founding member and president of the Hamburg Musicians

Union. He composed in most genres, including a considerable amount of chamber music.

His **Octet in E flat Major, Op.49** dates from 1870, toward the end of his career. It was dedicated to the famous violinist Joseph Joachim. This is quite a good work, well-written with a sure feel for what string instruments can do, and the ability to produce a fine sound, not surprisingly as he served in a quartet for a decade. His themes are appealing and his use of modulation is particularly effective. The opening subject to the first movement, Allegro risoluto ma non troppo presto, is both striking and appealing. The second melody has both nobility and lyricism. The Adagio molto which comes next has for its main theme a deeply religious sounding melody. The dramatic and somewhat agitated middle section disturbs the mood before disappearing. A genial Scherzo with two contrasting trios follows. The finale, Allegro con fuoco, ma non troppo, begins energetically with a lively main theme, while a sweet lyrical second melody provides contrast. A short fugal section then leads to a brilliant coda. A good choice for concert as well as for experienced amateur players. About the same difficulty as the Mendelssohn.



Hermann Grädener (1844-1929) was born in northern German city of Kiel. His father Karl was also a composer and teacher. In 1862, Hermann entered the Vienna Conservatory where he studied composition and violin. He worked for a number of years as a violinist in the Court Orchestra and gained a reputation as a respected composer and teacher, eventually holding a professorship at the

Vienna Conservatory.

His **Octet in C Major, Op.12** was completed in 1881. It is a fine example of his considerable creative talent. At times somewhat symphonic in nature, it does not abandon true chamber music style. The magnificent, spacious melody of the main theme to the first movement, Allegro moderato, immediately captivates the listener. It is both lyrical and tender and then is followed by a

very appealing second subject and then a very interesting development. The next movement, Allegro non troppo, is more in the nature of an intermezzo than a scherzo with its harmonic changes and original rhythms. The second theme is particularly fetching. The next movement Lento is a theme and set of variations. The deeply felt theme is based on a sentimental folk melody. Here, the composer makes exceptionally fine and telling use of pizzicato. The tender second variation is extraordinarily well done and is followed by a wonderfully contrasting third variation. The opening theme to the finale, Allegro non troppo, ma con fuoco, is the equal of the magnificent main theme from the first movement. This highly energetic subject is complimented by a chorale-like theme which provides a very effective contrast. The work is original sounding, well-written and deserves a place on the music stands of amateurs and professionals alike. It is among the very best, the equal of the Mendelssohn or Gliere, a masterwork.



Gottfried Herrmann (1808-1878) was born in the German town of Sondershausen. He studied violin with Louis Spohr and composition with Moritz Hauptmann. He then pursued a career as an orchestra and quartet violinist, and conductor and then became music director of Lubeck.

His **Octet in D Major, Op.3** was published in 1864, but if the opus number and style are anything to go by, the work was composed at least a decade earlier. It substitutes a bass for the second cello. It is a big work of almost symphonic proportions and if it was composed around 1864, it could be considered old fashioned for the time, sounding as it does like something from the early Romantic era. Nonetheless, the melodic material is appealing. Strangely, the most fetching part of the first movement, Allegro brillante ma non troppo, is its development section. The movement is too long and often more in the realm of orchestral rather than chamber music. The second movement, Andante espressivo serio e marcato, has its moments. The thematic material is attractive although too much is given to the lead violin. A very effective Mendelssohnian Scherzo e leggero comes next. The finale, Allegro con fuoco ma non troppo, has a lot going for it and would have been more impressive if it had not gone on for as long as it does. Several cuts to both this and first movement would have perhaps qualified the work for an occasional concert performance. However, for amateurs, it is still a work worth considering.



Otto Malling (1848-1915) was born in Copenhagen. He studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Music with Niels Gade and Johan (J.P.E.) Hartmann. He worked as a teacher and composer and eventually became a professor and then director at the Royal Danish Academy. Among his many students was the composer Knudage Riisager.

That he is little known by chamber music players can be attributed to the fact that most of his compositions were for voice and or organ.

Malling's **Octet in d minor, Op.50** dates from 1893. It is in no way hard to play, very melodic, well-written and good sounding. It is tinged with Nordic coloring. The main theme of the first movement, Allegro appassionato, conjures the sea with its waves. It is followed by a charming, more lyrical second theme. The Scherzo which comes next, with its use of Nordic folk dance melody, is quite original. The energetic and powerful main section is interspersed by a gentle trio reminiscent of bagpipes. The third movement, an Andante, is a cross between an Intermezzo and Legend. The jovial finale is filled with powerful dance melodies and lyricism. This is a good work, fun to play and quite effective, although at times a little challenging for the first violin. It would do well with audiences if given in concert and can be recommended to amateurs.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) and his **Octet in E flat Major, Op.20**, need not detain us. It is the most famous of all string octets and is the only one you are ever likely to hear performed in concert. Much has been written about it elsewhere and I only have a few remarks to make, which I have not seen others comment on. Having played the work numerous times, I can, with complete confidence, state that Mendelssohn in the finale miscalculated. The work begins low in the registers of the cellos and if played by any but the best of professionals, sounds like a bunch of growling bears and not music. This said, the octet is a good work, but I think part of its claim to fame is the fact that Mendelssohn was all of 16 years old when he composed it. The most effective movement is the Scherzo. All in all, the thematic material is first rate and quite effective. If you are only going to play octets once or twice in your life, the Mendelssohn should, of course, be one of the octets you choose to play.

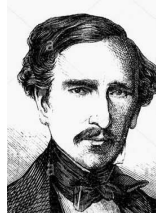
I would also note that several of his so-called string symphonies are in fact meant to be played as chamber music. The title of *Sinfonia* was given because of the style rather than the number of players Mendelssohn intended for the work. These lovely pieces were meant for home use and for musical soirees. The famous pianist Ignaz Moscheles, a friend of the Mendelssohn family and piano teacher of both Felix and his sister Fanny, reported on several evenings, where the Mendelssohns and a few friends performed these works at the Mendelssohn home. Some were intended for eight players, 4 violins—two firsts and two seconds, 2 violas, cello and bass. They are easy and fun to play and appealing.



During the last ten years of his life and for the three decades following it, **Joachim Raff** (1822-1882) was regularly mentioned in the same breath as Wagner, Liszt, and Brahms as one of Germany's leading composers. The experts and the public judged him to be the equal to such past masters as Mendelssohn, Schumann and Tchaikovsky. Incredibly, by the 1920's his music had all but disappeared from the concert stage. It seems virtually unimaginable that a composer whose talent was recognized and whose music was admired by Mendelssohn and Liszt, could become a mere footnote, yet this is what became of Raff and his music for most of the 20th century. Raff, who was born near Zurich, basically was self-taught. When he sent some of his early compositions to Mendelssohn, the master immediately recognized Raff's talent and arranged for their publication. Unfortunately, Mendelssohn died before he could help Raff much more. The young composer then approached Liszt who also took an interest in him and took him on as his personal secretary and copyist.

Raff's **String Octet in C Major, Op.176** dates from 1872 and certainly is one of the octets, especially in the case of amateurs, that is worth investigating. The triumphant opening theme of the Allegro, is rhythmically powerful, while the more lyrical second theme gives off an air of mystery. The second movement, Allegro molto, is a short and swift scherzo whose main theme has the propulsion and bounce of a fast horse ride. One is reminded of the scherzo of Schubert's String Quintet D.956. Then comes the exquisite and beautiful Andante moderato, which has the quality of a song without words. The finale, Vivace, is a tour d'force. No doubt inspired by Mendelssohn, it has an incredible forward momentum which assumes the quality of a moto perpetuo. The syncopated second theme, in the minor, barely slows down this exciting race to the finish line. The Octet has good part-writing and is not difficult to play.

Carl Schuberth (1811-1863) was born in the German city of Magdeburg. His father taught him piano and he studied cello with the famous virtuoso and teacher Friedrich Dotzauer. He pursued a career as a touring soloist. and eventually obtained the position of



solo-violoncellist to the Czar of Russia in St. Petersburg, where he also served as conductor of the Court Orchestra, music-director at the University and inspector of the Imperial Dramatic College. He wrote a considerable amount of chamber music.

His **Octet in E Major, Op.23**, which dates from 1848. It replaces the second cello with the bass. Not only are the first violin and first cello parts quite difficult, requiring players of professional standard, but the writing for the violas is difficult and uncomfortable to pull off. Nonetheless, there is much beautiful melodic material to be found in the octet, with several original touches. The work begins with a substantial upbeat Allegro. The second movement, Andante, is a song without words with a noteworthy and very charming part for the cello. The third movement, Allegro assai, is a spirited scherzo full of fire and the lovely trio provides marvelous contrast. The magnificent finale, Allegro furioso, lives up to its marking, fiery and operatic. Effective in concert to be sure, but not that easy for middling amateurs.



Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), one of the most famous Russian composers of the 20th century, needs no introduction. His **Two Pieces for String Octet, Op.11** were completed in 1925, while he was still a student. The first piece, Prelude, does not particularly grab the listener's attention, although it might have been considered experimental for the time, at least in

the Soviet Union. There is a lack of cohesiveness to it and really is little more than a series of moods. Perhaps his teacher, Glazunov, who tended to guzzle vodka during the lessons, was too blasé to say much or did not care. The second piece, Scherzo, is violent and full of nervous energy. It is doubtful that these works would have seen the light of day had they not been written by this great symphonist and composer of string quartets. Perhaps interesting, they are mercifully short.



Louis Spohr (1784-1859 also known as Ludwig) was born in the German city of Braunschweig. From early childhood, he showed a great aptitude for the violin. He studied with the virtuoso violinist Franz Anton Eck in St. Petersburg and ultimately became one of the leading violinists in the first half of the 19th century. But he was also an important composer and conductor. Spohr wrote in virtually every genre, not the least being chamber music. He composed some 36 string quartets, 7 string quintets, five piano trios, four double quartets and several other chamber pieces. The Double Quartet format--for 2 string quartets-- is not only unusual but is virtually unique to Spohr and must be ranked as his most important contribution to the realm of chamber music. In his memoirs, Spohr wrote that the idea of the double quartet came to him from friend and colleague, the famous violinist, Andreas Romberg. Quite apart from a standard octet which works as one large group, the idea of the Double Quartet was to have two separate, but equally important groups which could enter into the most varied of relationships. He set himself the task of using two quartets in frequent contrast in the manner of a double choir and saving the combining of the two groups into an octet for the climaxes of the work. Hence, the alternating presentation of the thematic material of the two quartets creates an ongoing dialogue and is crucial to the structure of the work. It also allows for an even greater use of tonal coloration than the standard octet. In line with this, Spohr specified that the seating arrangement for a double quartet had to be different from an octet. He decreed that the two quartets were to be seated opposite one another with the first violin and cello of each quartet sitting directly across from

his counterpart.

The **First Double Quartet in d minor, Op.65**, was written during the spring of 1823 and published two years later. The opening theme to the first movement, Allegro, is played in unison by both Quartet I and II. In general, Quartet II plays a subsidiary role. This theme, though employed in a variety of ways, appears far too often ruining its effect. The second movement, Scherzo, vivace, has an appealing main subject and the rhythmic accompaniment of Quartet II is finely intertwined. A serene though at times passionate Larghetto follows. The jovial finale, Allegretto molto, is quite lively. In modern times, this has become the best known of the four double quartets, but it is not the best.

Spohr's **Second Double Quartet in E flat Major, Op.77** dates from 1827. Although there are some brilliant passages for the first violin in Quartet I, especially in the warm and melodious opening Allegro vivace, Spohr took particular pains to treat both quartets more equally than he did in his first double quartet and overall, the style is less brilliant and more intimate. The second movement is a march-like Menuetto, quite classical in form with a wonderfully contrasting trio section which features a lovely duet between the violin and viola of the first quartet. The elegant third movement, Larghetto con moto, is a kind of theme with variations and features a striking pizzicato accompaniment in the second quartet. The jaunty finale, Allegretto, with several exciting, breathless sections, makes a strong impression. An altogether better effort than the first double quartet.

Spohr completed his **Third Double Quartet in e minor, Op.87** in 1833. It became the best known of the four double quartets in Spohr's lifetime and was often performed throughout the 19th and first part of the 20th century. Spohr and Joachim performed it together at a famous concert in London. The work begins with an Adagio introduction but the main part of the first movement is a lyrical, spacious Allegro. The first theme has a deeply felt sense of yearning while the second subject is calmer. The main melody of the second movement, Andante con variazione is divided between the two quartets and forms the basis of a lively dialogue between the two, full of dazzling passage work. An energetic Scherzo comes next. It has a Beethovenian aura to it, alternating as it does between forward drive and lyrical calm. A dainty trio provides good contrast. In the finale, Allegro, a vigorous optimism infuses the main subject which has a fiery march-like quality. The second theme has a hymn-like quality and makes an excellent compliment to the first. Certainly the equal of No.2, but lots of accidentals in all of the parts present a real challenge not to be ignored.

Spohr's **Fourth Double Quartet in g minor, Op.136** was his final work in this genre and dates from 1849. Of the four, this is probably the best choice for performance as well as the one amateurs should not miss the chance of playing as it poses less technical difficulties than his first three. In this work, Spohr shows his masterly handling of both quartets and how beautiful such an ensemble can be made to sound throughout. There is an elegiac mood to the opening Allegro which has appealing melodies and fine rhythmic treatment. A deeply felt, religious sounding Larghetto comes next. In the piquant Scherzo which follows, Spohr's beloved chromaticism is on display. The simple, calm trio section provides a fine contrast. The finale, Vivace, is particularly effective in its interplay between the two quartets. Probably the best of the four.



Johan Svendsen (1840-1911) gained a reputation as a rising star while he was still a student at the Leipzig Conservatory, where by general consensus he was regarded as one of the most talented students. Svendsen was born in Oslo and learned to play both the violin and clarinet from his father. From 1863 to 1867, he studied at the Leipzig Conservatory, at first violin with Ferdinand

David, but problems with his hand forced him to switch to composition, which he studied with Carl Reinecke. Afterwards, Svendsen worked primarily as a theater director and conductor.

To my mind, Svendsen's **Octet in A Major, Op.3** is a real potboiler—a rip roaring, fire breathing, guns a blazing Nordic saga. I think that there is a somewhat clichéd quality to the thematic material which is overused. Yet, I have always enjoyed playing this octet and audiences love it. It dates from his time at Leipzig and was composed in February of 1866. Talk about a work that sounds orchestral, this is it, especially in the opening Allegro risoluto ben marcato with its use of unison scoring and in the closing Allegro con fuoco. But it must be admitted that the use of Nordic melodies is effective and appealing although there is too much repetition of them rather than in the introduction of new thematic material. The most effective movement of this three movement octet is the middle movement, a theme and set of very clever variations. Go ahead and play it, it's not at all hard and you are almost certain to enjoy it.



Ferdinand Thieriot (1838-1919), wrote a great deal of chamber music, close to 30 works. Five years younger than Brahms, he was not only was born in Hamburg, but also studied with the same teacher, Eduard Marxein. The two knew each other from their Hamburg days and remained on friendly terms. After Hamburg, Thieriot finished his studies in Munich with Joseph Rheinberger and then moved to Vienna where his friend Brahms was instrumental in helping him obtain the position of Styrian Music Director in the provincial capital of Graz where he worked between 1870-85. Later, Thieriot held important positions in Leipzig and Hamburg where he remained from 1902 until his death. For the most part, Thieriot, like Brahms, remained true to the classical traditions which preceded him and took Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann as his models. Only toward the end of his life did he his work show some of the influence of the "New German Music" of Wagner and Liszt.

His **Octet in C Major, Op.78** is a relatively late work appearing in 1903 when Thieriot was 65. Probably not a candidate for the concert hall in part because it lacks the fire and depth of emotion which audiences like. On the other hand, its melodic material is often noble and charming and worthy of the attention of amateurs. In four movements, the opening Allegro is by turns powerful and lyrical. A religious-sounding Adagio follows and provides a fine contrast. Then comes a first rate and highly original Scherzo. The finale, after a short sad introduction, Mesto, bursts forth into a dramatic and thrusting Allegro con fuoco. This is a work which is grateful to play, sounds good, and not particularly difficult technically. In all, though no masterpiece, it is certainly a worthy addition to this scanty repertoire.

V. Nonets for Strings

The only work entitled string nonet of which I am aware is that of **Nicolai von Wilm**. There may be others, but they remain unknown to me. However, there are many works, most entitled Suite or Serenade which are really nonets for strings and which unfortunately are all too often played by the string sections of symphony orchestras or by today's oversized chamber orchestras. But these works, though they can be successfully played by orchestras, are chamber works which lose their intimacy and some of their beauty when played by larger ensembles. These works are usually for 4 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos and bass. Unless otherwise noted, you can assume that this is what is required.



Gyula Beliczay (1835-1893), sometimes known as Julius in German and English speaking countries, was born in the Hungarian town of Révkomárom (now in Slovakia on the Danubian border between Hungary and Slovakia). He studied engineering and music in Pressburg and Vienna and then pursued a dual career serving as chief engineer in the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Communications and composer. He studied music at the same time he took his engineering degree—piano with Carl Czerny and composition with Martin Nottbohm. His piano playing was admired by Liszt and Anton Rubinstein and his compositions were highly praised by contemporaries and performed all over Europe and even as far away as New York. He also was a sought after conductor and composition teacher and after retiring from his government position, he served as director of the Budapest Academy of Music between 1888 and 1892. His music shows the influence of Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann, but also of the Hungarian composers Mihaly Monsonyi and Ferenc Erkel. He wrote in most genres and numbers three string quartets, a piano trio, this nonet and several instrumental sonatas among his compositions.

His **Serenade in d minor, Op.35** for string nonet was composed in 1873 though it was not published until several years later. The first subject to the opening movement, Moderato ma non troppo, is the minor and reappears in each of the four movements. The rhythmic nature of the second theme also gives the music a distinct Hungarian flavor. An upbeat Allegro vivace comes next, but the contrasting trio risoluto once again creates an Hungarian tone. A highly romantic and lovely Adagio cantabile serves as the third movement. The finale, another Allegretto vivace, is a rondo, full of showy passages and even a superb fugue. This is a first rate work in every way, which illustrates Beliczay's compositional excellence. It will be sure to make a good impression in concert. Not at all hard to play it can also be warmly recommended to amateurs.



Edward Elgar (1857-1934) was one of the leading figures in what has come to be known as the "second English Renaissance" and he was the first English composer since Henry Purcell (d.1695) of truly international standing. But all of that still lay in the future when he wrote his Serenade. Elgar was a fine violinist, and spent most of his early career as a performer, but beginning in the late 1880s, he began to focus increasingly on composition.

The **Serenade for String Nonet in e minor, Op.20** is a much more smaller work, and seems to have been a revision of an earlier set of pieces he had composed in 1888. Much of his earliest orchestral music is light fare intended for small ensembles, but this is a much more substantial piece, in the tradition of the earlier Brahms and Dvorák serenades. Years later, Elgar described it

as one of his personal favorites. Elgar's background as a violinist allowed him to write particularly effective and idiomatic music for strings, and he described the Serenade—with tongue firmly in cheek—as "very stringy in effect." Dating from 1892-3, it is in three movements, beginning with wistful music marked Allegro piacevole (a "pleasing" Allegro). There is an underlying note of sadness in the main theme heard at the outset, and Elgar sets against this a more lilting middle section with brief solo turns for the principal violin. The long central Larghetto begins with an introduction that adapts ideas from the opening movement, but Elgar then introduces a gorgeous Romantic theme that is spun out in the same patient way as in his more famous "Nimrod" movement from the Enigma Variations. There is a brief contrasting interlude before this theme returns in the full orchestra. The movement ends in a whisper. The brief closing movement, Allegretto, returns to the Serenade's opening mood, but in a more dancelike character.



Arthur Foote (1853-1937) certainly was the equal of nearly any of his European contemporaries, but the fact that he was an American, at a time when American composers were not generally taken seriously, was without doubt an insurmountable obstacle to his achieving the reputation he deserved. Foote was born in Salem, Massachusetts and was the first important American composer trained entirely in America. His main teacher was John Knowles Paine, from whom Foote gained an admiration for and was primarily influenced by the leading Central European Romantic composers of the day, such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Dvorak and Brahms. If Arthur Foote's name is not entirely unknown, it is fair to say that his music is. This is a shame especially as far as chamber musicians are concerned. Foote's chamber music is first rate, deserving of regular public performance.

His **Serenade, Op.25** was composed in 1891 and consists of five movements each with a title inspired by the baroque. The opening movement, Praeludium, an introductory form often used by Bach, though it sounds nothing like him. Instead, we find lush melodic writing showing, perhaps, some influence of Brahms. The second movement, Air, is in G Major and is clearly modeled after Bach's Air on the G string. Next comes a sprightly Intermezzo which features solos for cello and violin. In fourth place is a lovely Romanze. The finale is an upbeat, dance-like Gavotte.



Robert Fuchs (1847-1927) was born near the Styrian capital of Graz and attended the University of Vienna Conservatory studying with Otto Dessoff and Joseph Hellmesberger. By 1875, he himself was teaching at the Conservatory, eventually rising to the rank of Professor of Composition. He was one of the most famous and revered teachers of his time. Mahler, Sibelius, Hugo Wolf, Franz Schmidt, Alexander Zemlinsky, Franz Schrecker and Richard Heuberger were among his many students. The entry in Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music has this to say about Robert Fuchs: "*Fuchs was an extremely refined and cultured composer. He stood high in favor with Brahms who continually gave him warm recommendations to publishers. Together with excellent technical equipment, he possessed the gift for writing charming melodies.*"

At its premiere in 1874, Fuchs' **Serenade No.1 in D Major, Op.9** was highly praised and eventually became so popular that he wrote four more. They called him The Serenade Fox (Fuchs is fox in German). Unfortunately, these were virtually the only compositions of his which achieved fame, despite the fact that his

music was highly regarded by most of the day's leading musicians, including Brahms who almost never praised the works of other composers. Brahms wrote, "*Robert Fuchs is a splendid musician, everything is so fine and so skillful, so charmingly invented, that one is always pleased.*" The Serenade was dedicated to his fellow Schubert admirer, Nicholas Dumba, a wealthy industrialist, who had provided the funding to publish the first collected edition of Schubert's works. The two dominant features of the work are lyricism and quiet introspection. The first of five movements, the opening Andante, is light, elegant and charming throughout. Next comes a Minuet, rather quiet and subdued, hardly something that could be danced to. It is followed by a fleet-footed Scherzo, bright and cheerful. The Adagio which comes next is calm and meditative but without any hint of sadness. The finale, an Allegro, begins in a mischievous fashion dominated by its bumptious rhythm. A second contrasting theme is more lyrical. A wonderful work. Not hard to play, good for concert or home. As noted, his First Serenade was such a tremendous success that it convinced him to write a second in 1876.

Serenade No.2 in C Major, Op.14 was dedicated to Count Tamas Nyary a member of the Austro-Hungarian nobility and a minor composer in his own right. It is in four movements and opens with an Allegretto which begins with a gentle, upbeat march-like theme that dominates the entire movement. The emotional center of the Serenade is an expansive and sweeping Larghetto. The third movement, Allegro risoluto, is a energetic and resolute melody which Fuchs takes through several modulations. The finale, a Presto, is a whirling Italianesque tarantella in the tradition of Mendelssohn. Another very good choice.

His **Serenade No.3 in e minor, Op.21** dates from 1877 and was dedicated to the Empress of Austria, Elizabeth von Habsburg. The somewhat sad main theme of the opening movement, Andante sostenuto, titled Romanze, is first sung by the violas, cellos and bass. It is valedictory music, tinged with a sense of regret. The second movement, a gently lilting Menuetto, is characterized by a Viennese elegance. The main section of the third movement, Allegretto grazioso, is a bright, light-footed march. The exciting finale, Allegro con fuoco, alla zingarese, as the title suggests has gypsy themes. Perhaps this explains the dedication to Elizabeth, who loved all things Hungarian. Superb.

Serenade Nos. 4 and 5 involve wind instruments and were intended for a small orchestra.



Victor Herbert (1859-1924) was born on the English Isle of Guernsey of an English mother. Nothing other than the name of his father, August Herbert, is known. He may have been Irish, but most likely was German. Herbert grew up in the German city of Stuttgart and studied cello and composition at the Stuttgart Conservatory. Initially, he pursued a career as a solo cellist,

holding orchestral positions in Vienna and Stuttgart before moving to the United States to become solo cellist at the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York. While he continued to work as a solo cellist giving concerts for most of his life, in the States he concentrated on composing and conducting. For a decade and a half up until the First World War, he was perhaps the most famous composer of operetta in the U.S. with such works as *Babes in Toyland*,

His **Serenade, Op.12** was composed in 1884 while Herbert was still living in Germany. It is a beautiful, highly romantic and nicely written work for all of the parts. It is in five movements, four of which have titles. The first movement is entitled *Aufzug*, generally meaning, musically speaking, a parade march, and that

is exactly what the music sounds like, a bright, upbeat march. Next comes a Polonaise, which in some ways is more of a lively waltz than a traditional polonaise. The third movement, *Liebes-scene* (love scene) is, as one might expect, a highly romantic piece, full of lovely melody. It is followed by a Canzonetta, playful and charming. The finale has no title. It is by turns lively, jovial and lyrical. This is a first rate work which illustrates Herbert's compositional talent and gift for melody which is why this work was frequently performed. It will be sure to make a good impression in concert.



Richard Heuberger (1850-1914) was born in the Austrian city of Graz. He studied composition at the Graz Conservatory and later in Vienna with Robert Fuchs. He pursued a dual career as a composer of operas and operettas and as a teacher at the Vienna Conservatory. During his lifetime, his operas and operettas enjoyed great popularity, but today, he is virtually unknown outside of Vienna

where he is remembered for the music to his opera *The Opera Ball*.

Richard Heuberger's **Nachtmusik, Op.7** was composed in 1877 and published in two versions. One for two violins, viola, cello and bass and the other for four violins, two violas, two cellos and bass. It was in this later version that the work became better known. In four movements, it begins with a charming Allegretto with lovely and naïve melodies. The Allegro vivace which comes next is true classical Viennese minuet. The trio section sports a slower and warm, romantic melody. The third movement, an Andante, has the quality of a lullaby. The finale, Presto, is a rollicking, exuberant tune akin to a sailor's song. No great masterwork, instead light, entertaining music, well-written and fun to play.



Mieczyslaw Karłowicz (1876-1909) was born in the town of Vishneva, now in Belarus but originally part historical Lithuania and Poland, on his family's estate. He studied violin and composition at the Warsaw Conservatory, among his teachers was Zygmunt Noskowski and then later in Berlin with Heinrich Urban. He also studied conducting with Artur Nikisch. He pursued a career as a conductor and composer.

His **Serenade in C Major, Op.2**, which was composed in 1898, and premiered that year in Berlin was dedicated to his teacher Heinrich Urban. It is written in the style of the late romantic era. The first movement, entitled *March, allegro moderato*, is light hearted and playful, but really does not sound much like a march, except perhaps in its middle section. The second movement is a sentimental Romance, *andante con moto*, evoking a sense of nostalgia. A brief introduction gives no indication that what comes next is a graceful Waltz, *allegro moderato*. The finale is a rousing, upbeat Allegro. Though it was meant for nonet, Karłowicz's German publishers decided to entitle it for string orchestra, which it was not, although it has been performed this way, it sounds too heavy. It is a fine work which clearly illustrates Karłowicz's exceptional compositional abilities. It will be sure to make a good impression in concert but could also be enjoyed by amateurs.

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) was born on the island of Fyn (Funen) and eventually entered the Royal Danish Conservatory in Copenhagen where he studied violin and composition with the famous composer Niels Gade. He himself became Denmark's leading



composer during the first part of the 20th century.

His **Little Suite for Strings, Op.1** began life as a string quintet for 2 violins, viola, cello and bass. His teacher and mentor Niels Gade, when shown the score with its density of the writing, suggested that it would be more effective for a larger ensemble such as an octet or nonet. Nielsen reworked the quintet and added divided parts for the four upper voices so that it became a nonet.

The changes made were surprisingly minor and the Suite can still be played by a string quintet although without the fullness of sound of the second version. It was completed and published in 1888 as his Op.1, although he had already published a number of other works by this time. Nielsen's publisher, no doubt with an eye toward sales, insisted on the title Little Suite for Strings and not Nonet. An unfortunate result of this is that today we often hear it performed by the full string sections of symphony orchestras, for which it was never intended, rather than a string nonet or small chamber orchestra. The Suite begins in a serious vein with a dark and moody Praeludium. The graceful middle movement, Intermezzo, is full of good humor. It commences with a lilting waltz and then is followed by a more energetic dance section which has a vague Viennese quality to it. The finale begins with a short restatement of the gloomy Praeludium but soon the music takes wing, rushing into a high flying Allegro con brio of exciting exuberance. Though momentarily, a few storm clouds appear, the music sweeps forward to a triumphant conclusion. An absolute gem. Not to be missed if you get a chance.



Nowadays, **Carl Reinecke** (1824-1910) has been all but forgotten, an unjust fate for a man who excelled in virtually every musical field with which he was involved. As a performer, Reinecke was, during the mid-19th century, reckoned for three decades as one of the finest concert pianists before the public. As a composer, he produced widely respected and often performed works in

every genre running the gamut from opera, to orchestral to chamber music. As a conductor, he helped turn the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra into a group with few if any peers. As its director, he helped the Leipzig Conservatory become what was widely regarded as the finest in the world. As a teacher of composition and of piano, he was considered to have few if any equals. Among his many students were Grieg, Bruch, Janacek, Albeniz, Sinding, Svendsen, Reznicek, Delius, Arthur Sullivan, George Chadwick, Ethel Smyth, Felix Weingartner, Karl Muck and Hugo Riemann. In his time, Reinecke and his music were unquestionably regarded as first rate. Reinecke was born near Hamburg in the town of Altona, then in the possession of Denmark. Most of his musical training was obtained from his father, who was a widely respected teacher and author. Starting in 1845 at the age 21, he began concertizing across Europe, in the course of which he was appointed court pianist to the King of Denmark. Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt all were favorably impressed by him and helped him gain an appointment at the Cologne Conservatory. By 1860, Reinecke's reputation was such that he obtained a teaching position at the prestigious Leipzig Conservatory, which had been founded by Mendelssohn, and eventually rose to become its director. His reputation and excellence as a teacher can be attested to by the aforementioned list of famous students.

At the age of 74, Carl Reinecke wrote what is arguably the finest of his nine serenades. (six were for piano and 2 for piano trio) The **Serenade for Strings Op. 242** was completed by the early autumn of 1898 and published shortly thereafter. Upon its premiere it was received warmly by both the public and local critics. It consists of six movements: Marcia, Arioso, Scherzo, Cavatina, Fughetta giojosa and Finale. Each of the six movements is quite individualistic. The fourth movement, Cavatina in

is in 5/4 time. In the second movement, Arioso, we hear echoes of his first hero, Schumann. The subject of the Fughetta giojosa is presented in four parts and then inverted before morphing into a genial waltz. The Finale has for its main subject an appealing Russian folk melody. This was perhaps due to its dedicatee Duke Georg Alexander von Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who spent most of his life living in Russia, a talented cellist and music lover who maintained his own chamber orchestra. It also probably explains why there is a cello solo in the Cavatina.



Friedrich Robert Volkmann (1815-1883) was almost an exact contemporary of Wagner, however, he certainly did not tread the same path as his fellow countryman. Volkmann forever kept Beethoven in front of him as his model although he was later to fall under the sway of Mendelssohn and then Schumann. In his day, Volkmann and his music were highly regarded. Hans von Bülow, the famous conductor, noted that when Liszt had a stranger visiting him, for whom he wished to provide a superlative enjoyment, he played a Volkmann piano trio with Joachim the famous violinist and the cellist Cossmann. Volkmann's second piano trio was often mentioned in the same breath as Beethoven's Op.97, "The Archduke." High praise indeed for a composer whose works today are nearly all out of print. During his lifetime, Volkmann's music was not only considered the equal of that of Schumann or Mendelssohn but also more advanced. It was commonly recognized that Volkmann's music was the link between Schumann and Brahms. *Ars Longa, vita brevis* as the saying goes, but alas for Volkmann it was not only *vita brevis* but also *fama brevis*! Though born and schooled in Germany, (he studied at Freiburg & Leipzig), Volkmann, after a brief stint in Prague, got a job in Pest in 1841 and made friends among the large German community there. Though he went to Vienna in 1854, he missed Pest and moved back in 1858 where he remained for the rest of his life. He wrote three serenades which were among his most popular works and were often performed up until the First World War when he and his music, like those of so many other fine Romantic era composers, disappeared.

Serenade No.1 in C Major, Op.62, though originally for string orchestra, and it is normally heard in this version, soon after its publication in 1869, it began to be played and performed by string nonets which gave the work a whole new quality of charm and intimacy. It consists of four short character pieces which are mood pictures: *Maestoso alla Marcia - Un poco più lento, attacca: Allegro vivo attacca Andante sostenuto attacca Maestoso alla Marcia*. Tchaikovsky, who was familiar with the Serenade, writing in a prominent Russian musical periodical, called it an outstanding and superb work.

The **Serenade No.2 in F Major, Op.63** consists of four short character pieces which are mood pictures. In the last two movements, Volkmann gives subtitles, *Waltz* and *March*. It is a work full of charm.

Serenade No.3, Op.69 came out in 1871. It differs from the first two in that it is four a solo cello with string accompaniment.



Nicolai von Wilm (1834-1911) was born in the old Hanseatic city of Riga, today's capital of Latvia, but then part of the Russian empire. In the 19th century, Riga was still predominantly a German city and Wilm's family was ethnic German. He first learned piano and then studied that instrument as well as composition at the Leipzig Conservatory. Subsequently, he worked as a music director in Riga and St. Petersburg after which he moved to Wiesbaden in Germany where he remained for the rest of his life. He was a prolific composer who wrote in most genres, but the bulk of his music was for piano. However, he did not ignore

chamber music and besides this string nonet, also has a string quartet, a string sextet, a piano trio and several sonatas to his credit, all of which the famous music critic Hugo Riemann described as important works. Riemann noted that the String Nonet, for two string quartets and bass was the first and only nonet exclusively for strings, all previous nonets were for mixed ensembles of winds and strings.

The **String Nonet in a minor Op.150** may well be the only string nonet, so titled, ever composed. Certainly, the only one of which I am aware. Wilm's Nonet was published in 1911 shortly before his death. It was premiered to considerable acclaim but then disappeared. It is a fine work deserving of performance both in the concert hall and in the homes of amateurs. The opening movement, Moderato, ma appassionato, is a restless turbulent affair. Next comes a beautiful and deeply felt Adagio con sentimento. The third movement, Scherzo, molto vivace, has a Mendelssohnian flavor with a lovely contrasting trio. The finale, Allegro di molto, is full of verve and élan and makes a wonderful conclusion to this first rate work.

Index

Nikolai Afanasiev (1821-1898)	20	Johan Svendsen (1840-1911)	24
Georges Alary (1850-1928)	6	Peter Tchaikovsky (1841-1893)	15
Woldemar Bargiel (1828-97)	20	Ferdinand Thieriot (1835-1919)	15,24
Gyula Beliczay (1835-1893),	25	Robert Volkmann (1815-1883)	27
Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805)	6	Nicolai von Wilm (1834-1911)	15,27
Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)	6	Anton Wranitzky (1761-1820) (.....	16
Hakon Børresen (1876-1954)	7		
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)	7		
Jan Brandts Buys (1868-1939)	17		
Frank Bridge (1879-1941)	7		
Max Bruch (1838-1920))	20		
Ferdinand David (1810-1873)	7		
Alexei Davidov (1867-1940)	7		
Carl Davidov (1838-1889)	8		
Ignacy Feliks Dobrzynski (1807-67)	17		
Ernst von Dohnanyi (1877-1960)	8		
Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)	8		
Edward Elgar (1857-1934)	25		
Georges Enescu (1881-1955)	21		
Arthur Foote (1853-1937)	25		
Eduard Franck (1817-1893)	8		
Robert Fuchs (1847-1927)	25		
Niels Gade (1817-1890)	9,21		
Louis Glass (1864-1936)	9		
Reinhold Gliere (1875-1956)	9,21		
Karl Grädener (1812-1883)	22		
Hermann Grädener (1844-1929)	22		
Victor Herbert (1859-1924)	26		
Gottfried Herrmann (1808-1878)	22		
Richard Heuberger (1850-1914)	26		
Heinrich Hoffmann (1842-1902)	10		
Joseph Holbrook (1878-1958)	10		
Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931)	10		
Mieczyslaw Karłowicz (1876-1909)	26		
Julius Klengel (1859-1933)	11		
Hans Koessler (1853-1926)	11		
Egon Kornauth (1891-1959)	11		
Erich Korngold (1897-1957)	11		
Arnold Krug (1849-1904)	12		
Max Lewandowsky (1874-1906)	12		
Otto Malling (1848-1915)	22		
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)	17,23		
Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)	19		
Heinrich Molbe (1835-1915)	17		
Mihály Mosonyi (1815-1870),	12		
Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)	26		
Per August Ölander (1824-1886)	12		
Ignaz Pleyel (1756-1831)	17		
Joachim Raff (1822-1882)	12,23		
Jean Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)	18		
Max Reger (1873-1916)	13		
Carl Reinecke (1824-1910)	27		
Prince Heinrich XXIV Reuss of Köstritz (1855-1910)	13		
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov	13		
Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894)	14		
Ernst Rudorff (1840-1918)	18		
Peter Schickele (1935-)	14		
Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)	14		
Carl Schubert, (1811-1863)	23		
Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942)	14		
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)	23		
Otto Siegl (1896-1978)	15		
Louis Spohr (1784-1859)	15,23		
Vaclav Stepan (1889-1944)	15		
Hermann Suter (1870-1926)	18		