

CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD (1852-1924)
String Quartets Nos 5 & 8 (First Recordings)

JOSEPH JOACHIM (1831-1907)

Romance Op. 2 No. 1
from Drei Stücke für Violine und Klavier

SOMMCD 0160

DANTE QUARTET Krysia Osostowicz & Oscar Perks *violins*
Yuko Inoue *viola*, Richard Jenkinson *cello*

STANFORD

String Quartet No. 5 in B flat, Op. 104
(In Memoriam Joseph Joachim)

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|---|--|-------|
| 1 | 1. Allegro moderato | 9:09 |
| 2 | 2. Intermezzo –
Allegretto (sempre molto teneramente) | 5:53 |
| 3 | 3. Adagio pesante | 10:52 |
| 4 | 4. Allegro moderato | 8:57 |

JOACHIM – Romance Op. 2, No. 1

Krysia Osostowicz, *violin* · Mark Bebbington, *piano*

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| 5 | Andantino | 4:29 |
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STANFORD

String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 167

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|---|---------------------|------|
| 6 | 1. Allegro moderato | 7:50 |
| 7 | 2. Allegretto | 4:45 |
| 8 | 3. Canzona – Adagio | 7:15 |
| 9 | 4. Finale – Allegro | 7:45 |

Total duration: 67:12

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CHARLES VILLIERS
STANFORD

String Quartets
Nos 5 & 8

DANTE
QUARTET



CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD

String Quartets Nos 5 & 8

The genre of the string quartet formed a significant part of Stanford's sizeable output as a composer. Eight substantial works span a period of 28 years (1891-1919) during which time he published four of them (Nos. 1, 2 3 and 5), all with German publishers, and four (Nos. 4, 6, 7 and 8) remained in manuscript. It is perhaps an indication of the earnestness with which Stanford approached the string quartet - all his works reveal an intellectual gravity in their 'big-boned' designs - that he did not attempt a work in the genre until he was almost thirty-nine years old. Almost certainly he regarded the string quartet as an immensely 'exposed' genre in which, even more than the symphony, the composer's powers of thought in absolute music were nakedly presented, devoid of instrumental colour and the hiding-place of instrumental colour or luscious texture. Indeed, in his later years, when Stanford began to inveigh outspokenly about the degeneracy of musical modernism, the quartet became for him a symbol of classical purity and compositional sanity, a fact evidenced in the last two quartets. In addition, the quartet undoubtedly served as an aesthetic link with an artistic world from which Stanford drew his principal inspiration and energy, a world which had been enriched by his mentor, Joseph Joachim. Joachim had been a visitor to the Stanford home in Herbert Street during the 1850s and 1860s, and the young Stanford, a budding violin student of R. M. Levey (violinist at the Theatre Royal), would avidly follow the 'Classical Quartet Concerts' in which Levey and Joachim

played together. Later, as a prominent musician at Cambridge, Stanford did much to encourage quartet playing. Initially he did this through the foundation of a student quartet at Trinity College, known as the 'First Stanford Quartet', but later, as he moved into the first phase of his maturity, he revelled in the visits of Joachim who performed annually for the Cambridge University Musical Society (CUMS) chamber concerts and in London at the Monday Popular Concerts at the St James's Hall. On many occasions they played together for the CUMS chamber concerts and Joachim was a frequent visitor to the Stanford home in Hervey Road.

The connections between Joachim and Stanford cannot be underestimated. It was through Joachim's influence and direction that Brahms's First Symphony was first given in England (at Cambridge) in March 1877. On many occasions the two men played together for the CUMS chamber concerts and concerts with the London Bach Choir. It was also through Joachim that an entire concert of Stanford's music was performed in Berlin in January 1889 which included the Suite for Violin specially written for his friend. It was also through Stanford's influence that Cambridge celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the violinist's first public appearance in 1839 by way of a dinner in Caius College, Cambridge and a special chamber concert. Joachim later returned the compliment by putting forward Stanford's name as an honorary member of the Beethoven-Haus and election to the Königliche Akademie der Künste in Berlin. Last but not least, besides the Suite for Violin Op. 32, Stanford dedicated his Piano Quintet Op. 25 to Joachim and his String Quartet No. 3 Op. 64 to the Joachim Quartet. Then, in August 1907, came the news of Joachim's death in Berlin. Deeply saddened, Stanford paid tribute to his old friend by conducting Joachim's *Elegiac Overture*

at Leeds and the *Kleist Overture* at the Royal College of Music. His most personal tribute, however, was reserved for his String Quartet No. 5 Op. 104 in November 1907 which bore the dedication 'In memoriam Joseph Joachim'. It was first performed at a Leeds Bohemian Chamber Concert on 4 March 1908 before its London premiere at a Broadwood Concert the following day. Its first continental performance was given by the Klingler Quartet in Berlin a week later. 'The work is not meant to be sad (except the elegy in the 3rd movement),' he explained to Herbert Thompson of the *Yorkshire Post* in a letter of 28 February 1908. 'He [Joachim] was not the sort of man whose memory could be associated with sadness: at least not to me.'

This is certainly true of the buoyant first movement, typified by the almost Beethovenian energy and organicism of the first subject, the breezy lyrical expansiveness of the second, and the intricate contrapuntal development that emerges after a 'Beethovenian' bar of silence. Indeed, the sophisticated involution of Stanford's developmental phase merges into the extensively recomposed first subject so that it is only with the arrival of the second subject that we feel the unequivocal return of the tonic (B flat). In the coda, a singular feature of this movement (and the other three), Stanford included his own personal gesture, a motto 'quotation' from the opening bars of Joachim's 'Romance' from his *Drei Stücke für Violine und Klavier* Op. 2 No. 1 (c. 1850) which interacts with the memory of the first subject (which is itself derived from it). 'He played it the last time I ever heard him,' Stanford noted to Thompson; it was one of the violinist's favourite encore pieces. (Given the significant connection with Stanford's quartet, Joachim's 'Romance' has been included on this recording.) Instead of a brisk Scherzo, the

second movement is a 'Intermezzo' in G minor (a form Stanford often favoured as in the Quartet No. 1 Op. 44 and Quartet No. 3 Op. 64), marked 'sempre molto teneramente' as if to stress the affectionate nature of its style and feeling. The thematic ideas of both 'Intermezzo' and 'Trio' are derived from the opening material of the first movement, and both ideas latterly unite effortlessly with the 'Joachim' motto in the closing bars. The slow movement is, as Stanford described, an elegy, and is an essay of extraordinary intensity. Cast in the distant key of F sharp minor, one that is thrown into relief by the G minor which precedes it, Stanford skilfully links the two tonalities through his persistent use of Neapolitan harmony (which we hear at the very beginning). The elegiac disposition of this threnody gains even greater vividness in the anguish of the transition which follows the first subject. Here Stanford seems almost to anticipate the passionate sounds of Walton's First Symphony both harmonically and rhythmically; and, as a catharsis to the overwhelming sense of grief, the second subject is a theme of wistful regret (paraphrasing, surely, the ethereal second subject of the slow movement of Mozart's 'Hunt' Quartet K. 458 which the Joachim Quartet was known to play in its repertoire). In the development the sense of passion returns, principally in the form of a fugue derived from material from the first subject. Embarking from C# minor (another tribute, perhaps, to Beethoven's Op. 131), this elusively merges with other material from the first subject as a veiled recapitulation, though it is only with the return of the second subject that the tonic (as G flat major) is restored. However, with the coda which, as a *cri de coeur*, is accorded real structural and thematic importance here, the first subject proper returns along with an animated reprise of the transitional material, while the final word of acquiescent resignation is reserved for the 'motto' theme in its minor mode form. The sense of sorrow is

dispelled in the cheerful, optimistic finale in which Stanford paid a further tribute to his mentor through the quotation of another musical figure. Appearing at the conclusion of the first subject, initially in the viola, the idea was taken, as Stanford explained to Thompson, from 'the passage he always tried his fingers with before he went up on the platform; and it used to be a kind of signal at the [Monday] Pops that he had arrived from Germany when it was heard from below which all the public knew and smiled and got ready to yell when he came up. It gets higher up as the movement goes on.' Fittingly, in contrapuntal combination with this idea is the 'motto' theme which also forms part of the closing material of the second subject. Indeed, the 'motto', which appears at the end of the second subject, increasingly asserts itself throughout the movement. This is effected in connexion with cyclic references to both the first movement and the elegy, but, given the significance of the coda in the previous movements, there is also now an even greater sense of anticipation for its arrival at the close of the entire work. Here the 'motto', suitably reflective and valedictory in mood, occupies a more substantial space, bringing the work to a gentle and appropriately ruminative conclusion.

Stanford's final string quartet, No. 8 in E minor Op. 167 was completed on 25 June 1919, but was probably not heard during Stanford's lifetime. On 20 March 1968 it was first broadcast by the BBC and in November that same year it was performed by the London String Quartet at the Savile Club. It is a work that attests to Stanford's cleaving to the tradition of German chamber music, even though by this time, such an aesthetic was largely spurned in favour of a new modernity and a new sense of nationalism. In this regard the quartet, more sombre in disposition (though by no means lacking energy or drive), conveys a

mood of nostalgia and longing for a past époque in which artistic values seemed secure and unchallenged.

The first movement is a restless, introspective essay characterised by the undercurrent of syncopated triplets (and the all-pervading progression of I-IVb-I) in the accompaniment and a fragmented figure for the first violin. This yields to a more lyrical idea in the relative major, but before long the uneasy rhythms return to mark a development which, still restive, is becalmed at its centre. The recapitulation brings a surprise in the major mode, and though the lingering sense of agitation raises its head once again, it is to a more optimistic conclusion that the movement looks with the glowing E major of the second subject.

The pervasive I-IVb-I progression of the first movement, with its all-important third interval in the bass, is transformed into a motto-like I-VI-I figure at the movement's close, and this is reiterated at the beginning and end of the second movement. Like many of Stanford's later 'scherzo' essays, it is a more restrained affair. The movement, with its lighter textures, simple melodies, and good-humoured gestures, is clearly a more eccentric diversion, though it is here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the work as a whole, that Stanford shows his consummate understanding of the technical capabilities of the quartet, and, moreover, underlines just how technically demanding his works for this medium are for the players.

The 'Adagio', couched in C major, is subtitled 'Canzona' (a song), borne out by the melody (cast over a wide register) for first violin. Indeed, it is evident

from the outset, with the violin's opening G string and melodic interval over a ninth to the A appoggiatura that this essay is going to be an emotional affair and, not surprisingly, it is on this ardent gesture that Stanford plays. A detour to the minor mode brings a transformed reprise of material from the 'Allegretto', reminding us of the first movement's nervous demeanour, but this is dispelled by a return of the lyrical opening material in E flat major. Predisposed to use rhetorical gestures from opera (e.g. the slow movement of the String Quintet No. 1 Op. 85), Stanford marked the transition back to the tonic with a recitative-like passage for first violin which clearly attempts to re-assert itself, though it is to the darker hue of the viola that the reprise of the opening idea is restated in a magical texture of finger tremolandos and pizzicato. This is Stanford at his most romantically original and enchanting. The movement concludes with an emphasis on the opening appoggiatura, which dies away to nothing, a nostalgic thumbprint of many of Stanford's later adagios (such as the Sixth Symphony and Violin Concerto No. 2). The quartet ends with a movement redolent of Haydn's brilliant and breathless finales in which the sound of Irish folk music (Stanford 'going Fantee' as Shaw once described) is a vibrant component. Yet, despite the irrepressible and infectious sense of élan, it is to the uneasy shadows of the first movement that we return for the coda. Here the ghostly, troubled syncopations are restored in C minor, coloured this time by a genuine mood of sadness, and with the return of a more sanguine E major, the quartet, resigned in mood, ends on a hushed note, its plagal cadence reminding us finally of that I-IV-I germ that began proceedings.

Jeremy Dibble © 2016

DANTE QUARTET

Krysia Osostowicz – *violin*
Oscar Perks – *violin*
Yuko Inoue – *viola*
Richard Jenkinson – *cello*



Winner of the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society Award for chamber music in 2007 and a BBC Music Magazine Award in 2009, the Dante Quartet is one of Britain's finest ensembles. Founded in 1995, the quartet chose Dante's name to reflect the idea of a great journey. Renowned for its imaginative programming and emotionally charged performances, the Dante Quartet appears at the major UK festivals and music societies, broadcasts on Radio 3 and has also toured France, Germany, Spain, Holland, Poland, Finland and Japan. The quartet has made four highly acclaimed recordings for Hyperion, and for seven years held a residency at King's College Cambridge. Devoted to the core classics – including the complete Beethoven Quartet cycle – the Dante Quartet equally enjoys bringing to light new or neglected repertoire. Committed also to teaching, the Dante Quartet gives master classes in the UK and runs a high-level chamber music course in the South of France. The quartet has its own annual Dante Summer Festival in the Tamar Valley, in which they create new musical projects and collaborations, attracting young people to chamber music and building up an enthusiastic audience in intimate and beautiful surroundings.

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Further information about the Stanford Society
may be found at the Society's website:
www.thestanfordsociety.org

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