

# Charles Villiers STANFORD (1852-1924)

String Quartet No. 1 in G major Op. 44

String Quartet No. 2 in A minor Op. 45

String Quartet No. 6 in A minor Op. 122\*

(\*First Recording)

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

|   |         |                                    |              |
|---|---------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>String Quartet No. 1</b>   | [29:33] | <b>7</b> 3. Andante espressivo     | 7:47         |
| <b>1</b> 1. Allegro assai   | 6:02    | <b>8</b> 4. Allegro molto vivace   | 7:46         |
| <b>2</b> 2. Poco allegro e grazioso – Presto – Tempo I – Presto – Tempo | 5:22    |                                    |              |
| <b>3</b> 3. Largo con molto espressione                                 | 10:21   | <b>String Quartet No. 6*</b>       | [22:45]      |
| <b>4</b> 4. Allegro molto   | 5:08    | <b>9</b> 1. Allegro molto moderato | 7:27         |
|   |         | <b>10</b> 2. Lento espressivo      | 6:58         |
| <b>String Quartet No. 2</b>   | [26:41] | <b>11</b> 3. Allegro vivace        | 3:32         |
| <b>5</b> 1. Molto moderato – Più moto – Tempo I – Più moto – Tempo I    | 8:29    |                                    |              |
| <b>6</b> 2. Prestissimo   | 2:38    |                                    |              |
|   |         | ————— *First recording —————       |              |
|   |         | <b>Total recording time</b>        | <b>79:17</b> |

Recorded at St. Nicholas Parish Church, Thames Ditton on March 5 & 6, 2019

Recording Producer: Siva Oke      Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

Front cover: Study of female head (detail) by Edward Burne-Jones, 1889, red chalk. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

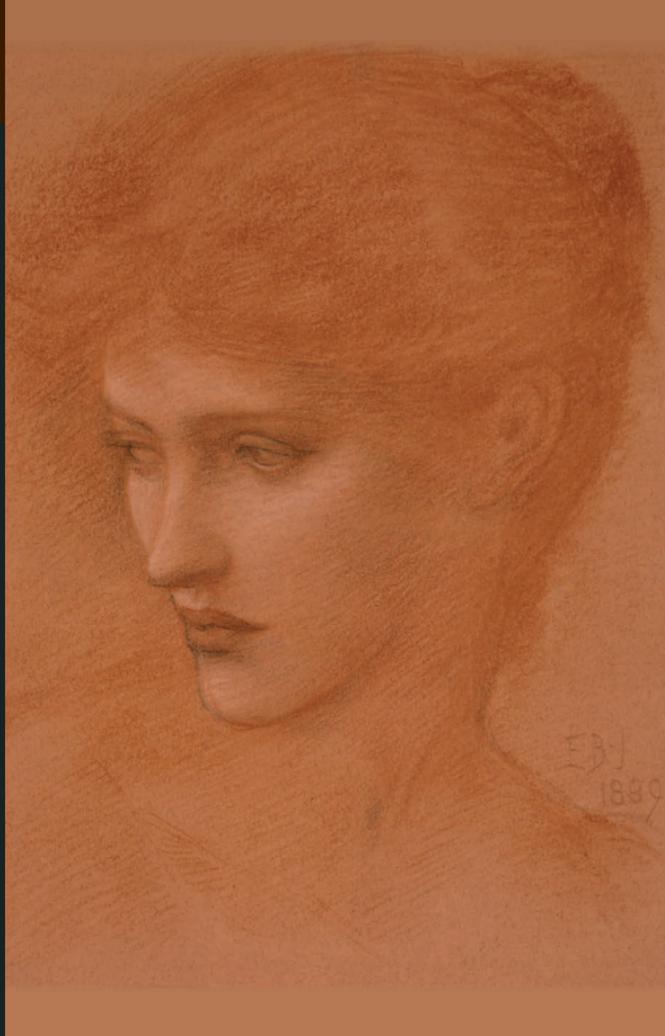
Design: Andrew Giles      Booklet Editor: Michael Quinn

# Charles Villiers STANFORD

String Quartets  
Nos 1, 2 & 6\*

\*First Recording

DANTE  
QUARTET



# Charles Villiers STANFORD

## String Quartets Nos 1, 2 & 6

Completed in August 1891, Stanford's **String Quartet No. 1 in G major, Op. 44**, was composed during a family holiday to Llandudno, a popular seaside resort for middle-class Victorians in North Wales. It was an ideal time for creativity and also some relaxation away from his considerable work pressures. In the previous June he had entertained Antonín Dvořák and his wife in Cambridge while the Czech composer received an honorary doctorate from the university. After Dvořák's visit, Stanford made final preparations for his oratorio, *Eden*, soon to be performed at the Birmingham Festival in October.

His first mature essay in the genre, the Op. 44 Quartet was written quickly. Much of it was composed within a week, the last movement was finished on 22 August. A second string quartet, the Op. 45 in A minor (the first of three quartets in that key), clearly intended to form a counterpart to Op. 44, was also completed in Llandudno. Four days after the completion of No. 1, the first movement of No. 2 was already composed, and the next two movements were finished by 1 September. The Finale, on the other hand, was written during a stay with his old Cambridge colleague, Percy Hudson, at Gilling Rectory in North Yorkshire. Here, during the Hovingham Festival, the last movement was finished on 25 September.

For Stanford we know that he considered the string quartet as a great test of any composer's ability. It may have been for this reason therefore that he delayed composition in the form until he was just shy of 40. As a young violinist in Dublin, he had undoubtedly become acquainted with the Classical repertoire of Mozart and Haydn and he must have known the works of Mendelssohn (who is a clear influence in his orchestral writing for strings) and Schumann. An affinity for more transparent textures makes Stanford's quartet style somewhat more athletic and vivacious than Brahms's heavier palette.

One can also detect, from his love of song and folksong, an inclination towards lyricism, especially in the central movements. Stanford also took his lead from the quartets of Beethoven, a fact borne out by the citation of several examples in his treatise *Musical Composition* of 1911. As remarked in this much-consulted work, there were abundant possibilities for contrapuntal resourcefulness and chordal luxuriance not possible on the piano; more importantly, "the vital importance of putting down as accurately on paper the degrees of force, variations of tone, bowings, slurs, *legato* and *staccato* marks, and changes of time". Such assiduousness is evident from Stanford's own manuscripts which show a care and neatness for this most exposed of genres.

The opening of the Op. 44 – a prominent melody for the first violin, a duet of flowing quavers in the second violin and viola with punctuative *pizzicato* crotchets in the cello – epitomizes Stanford's approach to the idiom. The second group consists of several thematic strands – a broad melody initiated by the cello

though continued by the first violin, a dotted figure which becomes increasingly more prominent, and an imitative figure – all of which feature prominently in the expansive development, though to close the exposition Stanford gives us a reprise of the Neapolitan harmony from the transition and, somewhat reminiscent of Mozart, a brief reprise of the opening idea. The development and recapitulation reveal a considerable intellect in terms of thematic variegation.

Moreover, Stanford's innate instinct for drama surfaces not only at climaxes but also at points of tonal catastrophe, notable instances being the re-appearance of the second subject (in C minor) and further becalmed interpretation of this material in D flat, an event which transforms the development's more agitated disposition into one of tranquillity. An impression of developing variation also permeates the recapitulation, most notably in the extended coda where expositional 'memories' and developmental transformations continue to reveal the intellectualism of Stanford's musical thought.

Taking his cue from the variegational rondo form in Brahms's Second Symphony, Stanford's repeats of the rondo theme presents a different 'version' of the opening idea, while two 'trios' (marked *Presto*), interrelated by common material, differ in their metrical treatment. A broad, generous diatonic melody, so abundant in Stanford's mature instrumental works, occupies a central place in the slow movement. On its return he adds an equally sonorous countermelody in the viola, the added texture of which provides a platform for the second subject's impassioned climax. This movement, profoundly affecting

in its pathos, is one of Stanford's most powerful and earnest essays and rivals those later masterpieces of the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies. A gigue-like spirit infuses the fugal opening of the finale and the contrapuntal demeanour of this movement is disrupted only momentarily by the longer note values of the second subject (though even here the gigue rhythms continue to pervade the background). It is a movement for virtuosos and was no doubt written with the accomplishment of Richard Gompertz's Cambridge University Music Society Quartet (which included Haydn Inwards, Emil Kreuz and Charles Ould) in mind.

The first performance of the Op. 44 took place in Newcastle on 22 January 1892 played by the CUMS Quartet. Stanford was unable to be there to hear it but he heard Gompertz and the quartet perform the work in Cambridge on 17 February. It was given its London premiere at a Monday Popular Concert at St James's Hall on 27 November 1893 with Lady Hallé, Alfred Gibson, Kreuz, and Alfredo Piatti where it gained the approbation of Bernard Shaw. Dedication of the Op. 44 was made to the Newcastle Chamber Music Society.

The **String Quartet in A minor, Op. 45** was dedicated '*freundschaftlich*' ('in friendship') to Gompertz whose character appears to be enshrined in the arabesque-like writing for first violin in the slow movement. Its premiere was given by Gompertz and the CUMS Quartet at the Prince's Hall in Piccadilly on 13 February 1894. This work also appealed to George Bernard Shaw who enthusiastically described it as "a genuine piece of absolute music, alive, with

feeling from beginning to end, and free from those Stanfordian aberrations into pure cleverness which remind one so of Brahms's aberrations into pure stupidity". (One has to remember that Shaw was one of Brahms's severest critics.)

Further performances of the work followed at the Musical Guild (an important promoter of British chamber music at the end of the 19th century) by Gompertz at a Monday Popular Concert and Lady Hallé. A work of more vivid contrasts and extremes, the Op. 45 exhibits a marked disparity between the sinewy counterpoint of the first movement's opening idea (which occurs ritornello-like throughout the movement) and the more poetic second subject in F major, the submediant. Both these ideas, in different semblances, inhabit the rest of the work in an imaginative cyclic manner.

The invigorating, rhythmically vibrant Scherzo, marked '*Prestissimo*', is a thoroughly Beethovenian affair, brilliantly scored for the quartet. The slow movement, like its counterpart in Op. 44, is a deeply felt, emotional essay in which all the players of the quartet are provided with demanding roles in keeping with the passionate reworking of the first movement's material. From this more introspective world we are launched into something more entirely extrovert with the 'Eastern European' aura of the finale's irregular opening theme which Stanford may have intended as tribute to Dvořák. A buoyant, sprightly idea, it provides a brusque foil to the sonorous second subject (in F major, like the first movement) which owes something of its texture and melodic shape to Brahms.

The **String Quartet No. 6 in A minor, Op. 122** was composed rapidly at the end of August 1910 during a fishing holiday at the George Hotel at Chollerford, Northumberland (the hotel still survives today), overlooking the River Tyne and not far from Hadrian's Wall. It was a retreat from the hubbub of London which he used from time to time in the summer months together with his Irish confrère, the eminent baritone Harry Plunket Greene (also a keen fisherman and author of a book on fly fishing, *Where the Bright Waters Meet*). The work was probably first performed during the fifth series of Thomas Dunhill's Chamber Concerts at the Steinway Hall, London during the spring of 1911 (although Dunhill's concerts typically pursued the brief of giving the second or third hearings of a new British chamber work). After this, the work fell into neglect and remained unpublished (it is recorded here in an edition prepared by Jeremy Dibble). In 1980 it was exhumed by Carl Pini and performed at the Bracknell Festival of English Music by the London String Quartet on 20 July of that year.

The sinewy opening idea of the first movement conveys a restless demeanour, reinforced by the turbulent passages of semiquavers which increasingly pervade the highly contrapuntal texture. A more relaxed duet for the second violin and viola, showing to faces of moroseness and (when transferred to the first violin) exultation forms the second subject. For the development, however, the sense of restiveness returns with greater intensity becalmed only with the recapitulation of the first subject. The second subject presents the same modal fluctuation though with more rhythmical energy and this sense of agitation continues in the

extended coda which, by recalling the turmoil of the developmental phase, rises to a passionate climax. Marked '*Molto Allegro*', the first subject is worked out to the point of obsession until only its salient motivic feature – the E and F which heads the idea – remains. At this point the initial tempo returns and the final gestures of the movement, in A major, are dedicated to yearning recollections of the second subject. Cast more unusually in ternary form (a scheme normally reserved for the Scherzo or dance movement), the second movement's opening and closing sections are characterized by the lyricism of the Irish air in a warm and consoling F major (Stanford marks his first violin '*con calore*'). Throughout his beautifully shaped, protracted melody, Stanford shows a mastery of control, not least in the touching tonal diversion to the Neapolitan, G flat, from which his recovery to the tonic, at the theme's registral apogee, seems effortless.

The touching, almost domestic glow of this music is counteracted by a more unsettled central episode, more breathless in its more curtailed thematic fragments accompanied by disconcerted lines of finger *tremolandi*. To begin with, this constitutes a secondary thematic contrast but the sense of stable tonality rapidly dissolves. After a climax in E major, the initial melodic fragments return (with an uncanny *pizzicato* commentary from the upper strings) which gradually transform into the more welcoming shapes of the 'Irish air'. Stanford's subtle transition back to F major is enacted with extraordinary legerdemain and its greater lyrical passion is conveyed by a more rhythmically active accompaniment (he was to use the same technique in the slow movement of his

Violin Concerto No. 2 some years later). After this impassioned atmosphere has dissipated, the closing bars are dominated by a memory of the secondary theme, marked '*col intimissimi sentimenti*', whose former sense of anxiety and disquiet has been expunged.

Stanford's finale, in A major, is without doubt a *tour de force*. A clue to its conflation of the Scherzo and last movement (in terms of character and mood) is given in the tempo marking '*Allegro scherzando*', but one can also sense this same subtle merging in the playful first subject, the quirky transition (with its dotted rhythms) and the euphonious, dance-like second subject in E major. Although the development appears to begin conventionally with a reworking of the first-subject material, it gradually becomes more contrapuntally complex as this material combines with that of the transition and the opening melody of the first movement. Although this density of counterpoint disperses for the recapitulation of the first subject, the preoccupation with eccentricity is retained (especially in the diverting pauses). After a thoroughly virtuoso restatement of the second-subject material in the tonic, the coda picks up where the development left off with an even denser combination of thematic ideas from the first and last movements. This also includes the second subjects of both movements in a more climactic and imposing context before the impetuous 'Scherzo' material of the opening carries us to a precipitous and breath-taking conclusion.

Jeremy Dibble © 2020

## DANTE QUARTET

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

The Dante Quartet was founded by Krysia Osostowicz in 1995, its name inspired by the idea of an epic journey. The quartet has appeared at all the major UK festivals and concert societies, as well as in many European countries, and also has a strong following in Japan. Recipient of many awards, including the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Chamber Music, the Diapason d'Or and the BBC Music Magazine Award, the Dante Quartet has recorded the quartets of Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Franck, Janacek, Kodaly, Smetana and Sibelius. The project of recording Stanford's complete string quartets for SOMM, most of them hitherto unpublished, has been embraced enthusiastically by the Dantes.

In the past couple of years the Dante Quartet has performed the complete quartets of Shostakovich as well as touring "Beethoven's Quartet Journey", an innovative Beethoven cycle in which the composer himself is brought to life by renowned actor David Timson with a script by Clare Norburn, drawing closely upon Beethoven's own writings.

Committed also to teaching, the Dante Quartet has worked closely with King's College Cambridge, and gives annual courses in England and France. The thriving Dante Summer Festival in the Tamar Valley ([www.dantefestival.org](http://www.dantefestival.org)), founded by the quartet in 2004, has helped to create a new audience for live chamber music and attracts visitors from all over the UK.

Oscar Perks plays first violin in the recording of Quartet No. 1.

SOMM Recordings would like to thank The Stanford Society and the Durham University Music Department for their generous financial support of this recording.



### THE STANFORD SOCIETY

The Stanford Society was formed in 2007 to promote greater interest in Stanford's life and music and to encourage and support performances and recordings of his music. The Society holds an annual Stanford Festival Weekend in a Cathedral City in the UK or Ireland. These Weekends have included performances of music by Stanford (including premiers of the Second Violin Concerto and Variations for Violin and Orchestra in orchestrations by Jeremy Dibble) and his students and contemporaries as well as talks, social events and Cathedral services.

Society members also receive regular newsletters with news and information about performances of Stanford's music and new recordings.

Further information about the Stanford Society may be found at the Society's website at [www.thestanfordsociety.org](http://www.thestanfordsociety.org) or by contacting Daniel Wilkinson, the Society's Honorary Secretary. His email address is [wilkinsondb@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:wilkinsondb@hotmail.co.uk).

We would like to thank the following members of  
The Stanford Society for their support of this recording:

John Covell and Constance Frydenlund  
Professor and Mrs. Jeremy Dibble · Dr. Colleen Ferguson · Dr. David Frankel  
Mr. and Mrs. David Colville · Dr. David Miller  
Mark and Laura Fisher · Charles Covell.