

THE MAGGINI STRING QUARTET

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Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet in E flat, op.55 no.3, Hob.III:62

Edmund Rubbra (1901-1986)
String Quartet No.3 (1963)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
String Quartet No.14 in D minor –
Death and the Maiden

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1. Vivace Assai; 2. Adagio Ma Non Troppo; 3. Menuetto; 4. Finale – Presto.

Joseph Haydn was born in the village of Rohrau in 1732, the son of a wheelwright. Trained at the choir school of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, he spent some years earning a living as best he could from teaching and playing the violin or keyboard, and was able to learn from the old musician Porpora, whose assistant he became. Haydn's first appointment was in 1739 as Kapellmeister to a Bohemian nobleman, Count von Morzin. This was followed in 1761 by employment as Vice-Kapellmeister to one of the richest men in the Empire, Prince Paul Anton Esterhazy, succeeded after his death in 1762 by Prince Nikolaus. On the death in 1766 of the elderly and somewhat obstructive Kapellmeister, Gregor Werner, Haydn succeeded to his position, to remain in the same employment for the rest of his life.

In 1764, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, a great lover of music, completed "the Hungarian Versailles", his monumental palace of Esterháza located south-east of Vienna in the Hungarian plains. Its magnificence was counter-balanced by its being built on top of a swamp, its humidity, its "vexatious, penetrating north wind", its distance from Vienna and the obligation of the musicians (Haydn, as Kapellmeister, excepted) to leave their wives and families behind for many months.

Despite all this, Haydn had assumed command of an increased musical establishment. Here he had responsibility for the musical activities of the palace, which included the provision and direction of instrumental music, opera and theatre music, and music for the church. For his patron he provided a quantity of chamber music of all kinds, particularly for the Prince's own peculiar instrument, the baryton, a bowed string instrument with sympathetic strings that could also be plucked.

In the palace, Haydn blossomed as a composer as he stated he was "forced to become original" yet, from 1779, his reputation spread throughout Europe, he was lauded in the Austrian capital of Vienna and, from 1790, in London. This was consequent on the death of Prince Nikolaus in 1790, when Haydn was able to accept an invitation to visit London, where

he provided music for the concert season organized by the violinist-impresario Salomon. His reputation had been huge in that city since about 1782, leading to the invitations to visit, compose and be lionised there.

A second successful visit to London in 1794 and 1795 was followed by a return to duty with the Esterházy family, the new head of which had settled principally at the family property in Eisenstadt, where Haydn had started his career. Much of the year, however, was to be spent in Vienna, where Haydn passed his final years, dying in 1809, as the French armies of Napoleon approached the city yet again.

Haydn lived during the period of the 18th Century that saw the development of instrumental music from the age of Bach and Handel to the era of the classical sonata, with its tripartite form, the basis of much instrumental composition. The string quartet itself, which came to represent classical music in its purest form, grew from a genre that was relatively insignificant, at least in its nomenclature, the Divertimento, into music of greater weight, substance and complexity, although Haydn, like any great master, knew well how to conceal the technical means by which he achieved his ends. The exact number of string quartets that Haydn wrote is not known, although he listed some 83. The earlier of these, often under the title Divertimento, proclaim their origin and purpose. The last quartet, opus 103, started in 1803, remained unfinished.

The string quartets of opus 55 form the second three of a set of half a dozen quartets dedicated to the violinist Johann Tost, a man who led the second violins in Haydn's orchestra at Esterháza from 1783 until his departure for Paris in 1788, although he is mentioned as Music Director for the Seipp theatre company in Pressburg (the modern Bratislava) in the previous year. In Paris he sold for publication the six quartets of opus 54 and opus 55 and two new symphonies, transaction that seem to have caused some trouble. He had in any case, during his time at Esterháza, suggested a lucrative scheme for pirating compositions belonging to the Prince.

Tost later returned to Vienna, and in 1790 married a housekeeper in the service of Prince Esterházy, becoming a prosperous cloth-merchant. Nine years later we hear of his approach to the composer Louis Spohr (1784-1859) with a suggestion that he buy exclusive rights over his chamber music compositions for a period of three years, so that frequent performances, particularly of chamber music, would allow him entry to the best houses in Vienna, where Spohr's chamber music might be performed, and facilitate business contacts when he travelled. Spohr agreed to the proposal and the sliding scale of fees offered, rising according to the number of instruments written for. The immediate result was two string quartets and the Nonet.

The third and last of the opus 55 quartets, in B flat major, opens with all four players in unison, before each takes his own harmonic path. The E flat Adagio (slow movement) allows the first violin ornate decoration in its central section. It is followed by a cheerful Minuet and Trio and a dashing final movement.

Edmund Rubbra (1901-1986) **String Quartet No.3 (1963)**

The Northampton-born musician Charles Edmund Duncan Rubbra composed both instrumental and vocal works for soloists, chamber groups and full choruses and orchestras. Despite his parents not being professional musicians, they encouraged him in his music, and there was music in the family: his mother had a good voice and sang in the church choir, his father played the piano a little, by ear and one of his uncles owned a piano and music shop. This uncle was of practical help: he lent the family a new demonstration upright piano, and

he, and prospective buyers would come to Rubbra's house, where he would demonstrate the quality of the piano by playing Mozart's 'Easy' Sonata in C to them. If the sale went through, the Rubbra family was given commission, and a new demonstration piano took the place of the sold one. Edmund he attended a Congregational church and played the piano for its Sunday School. He also worked as an errand boy whilst he was still at school, giving some of his earnings to his parents to help with their finances.

Rubbra took piano lessons from a local lady and he began composing while he was still at school. One of his masters, Mr. Grant, asked him to compose a school hymn. At the age of 14, having mastered shorthand, he left school and started work for one of Northampton's many boot and shoe manufacturers. Later, he was invited by an uncle, who owned another boot and shoe factory, to come and work for him. The idea was that he would work up from the bottom of the company, with a view to ownership when his uncle, who had no sons of his own, died. Edmund declined and took a job as a correspondence clerk in a railway station. For which his shorthand was an ideal qualification. He also continued to study Harmony, counterpoint, piano and organ, working at these things daily, before and after his clerk's job.

Clearly a hard-working and musically-driven teenager, he wrote chamber music for local musicians, befriended the young William Alwyn, another Northampton composer and became fascinated by the Far East following a lecture by a Chinese Christian missionary, Kuanglin Pao. He was inspired to write *Chinese Impressions* – a set of piano pieces, which he dedicated to the preacher. Rubbra also benefitted from some self-made life-changing luck when, aged just 17, he decided to organise a concert in Northampton Library devoted entirely to Cyril Scott's music, with a singer, violinist, cellist and himself on the piano.

The minister from Rubbra's church attended the concert, and secretly sent a copy of the programme to Cyril Scott. The result of this was that Scott took Rubbra on as a pupil. Rubbra was able to obtain cheap rail travel because of his job with the railway, so he was able to get to Scott's house by train, paying only a quarter of the usual fare. After a year or so, Rubbra gained a scholarship to University College, Reading, where Gustav Holst became one of his teachers. Holst also taught at the Royal College of Music and advised Rubbra to apply for an open scholarship there. His advice was followed and the place was secured. Before Rubbra's last term at the Royal College, he was unexpectedly invited to play the piano for the Arts League of Service Travelling Theatre on a six-week tour of Yorkshire, since their usual pianist had been taken ill. He accepted this offer despite its meaning he missed his last term. This provided him with invaluable experience in playing and composing theatre music, that he never regretted and which stood him in good stead for his later dramatic work. In the mid-1920s Rubbra used to earn money playing for dancers from the Diaghilev Ballet. At around this time he became firm friends with Gerald Finzi.

In 1933 Rubbra married Antoinette Chaplin, a French violinist. They toured Italy together, as well as giving recitals in Paris and radio broadcasts. They had two sons, Francis and Benedict, with the marriage lasting into the late 1950s. Later, Rubbra married Colette Yardley, with whom he had one son called Adrian.

In 1941, Rubbra was called up for army service and the War Office asked him to form a piano trio to play classical chamber music to the troops. Rubbra was happy to oblige, and the "The Army Classical Music Group" was formed and later expanded to seven people. After the war, Oxford University was forming a faculty of music and invited Rubbra to be a lecturer there so, from 1947 to 1968 Rubbra was employed there, became a Fellow of Worcester Colleg, Oxford and continued performing with the army trio.

He was greatly esteemed by fellow musicians and was at the peak of his fame in the mid-20th century. The most famous of his pieces are his eleven symphonies. Although he was active at a time when many people, following Arnold Schoenberg, wrote twelve-tone music,

Rubbra decided not to write in this idiom himself. Instead he devised his own distinctive style. His later works were not as popular with the concert-going public as his previous ones had been, although he never lost the respect of his colleagues. Therefore, his output as a whole is less celebrated today than would have been expected from its sheer merit and from his early popularity.

Nevertheless, his star shone: his *Sinfonia Concertante* and his song *Morning Watch* were performed at the 1948 Three Choirs Festival and he received a request from the BBC to write a piece for the coronation of the present Queen. The result was *Ode to the Queen*, for voice and orchestra. On Rubbra's retirement from Oxford, in 1968, he did not stop working but took up more teaching at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and he did not stop composing. He died on 14 February 1986.

Edmund Rubbra's four quartets cover an even longer period of his creative career than the symphonies: the first version of the F minor Quartet goes back to 1933, before the First Symphony, while the Fourth dates from 1977 just before the last, one-movement Eleventh. The First pays tribute to Vaughan Williams, "whose persistent interest" in the original 1933 version led to a revision of the score in 1946, while the Fourth is dedicated to a younger master of the medium, Robert Simpson. In his essay on the chamber music in *Edmund Rubbra* (edited by Lewis Foreman; Triad Press: 1977) the late Harold Truscott even went so far as to call it "a key work in [Rubbra's] output, and in the revised version of 1946, one of the greatest string quartets I know". The Third, written in 1963, moves with a tremendous sense of purpose, and is a work of great nobility and expressive substance, and the same holds for the elegiac Fourth.

As Sir Adrian Boult once wrote, Rubbra has never made any concession to popularity, but "he goes on creating masterpieces, which I am convinced will survive their composer and most of those who are his contemporaries".

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) **String Quartet No.14 in D minor –** ***Death and the Maiden***

1. Allegro; 2. Andante con moto; 3. Scherzo – Allegro Molto; 4. Finale – Presto.

Schubert's family hailed from Silesia and his parents were first-generation Viennese. His father was a schoolmaster and his mother a maid and they had 14 children of whom 5 survived to adulthood: Franz was the fourth, born on 31 January 1797. His father played the cello and all the family played stringed instruments so from 1810 they would have had a string quartet in which Franz played the viola.

Young Franz was an adolescent, not an infant, prodigy and his earliest teacher was a man called Holzer, who said of him "I merely talked with him and looked at him with mute astonishment". In 1808, Franz won both a place in the Imperial and Royal Chapel under Salieri (the only teacher he ever acknowledged) and a free place at the Royal Chapel school, providing him with a fine musical education. After his mother died in 1812, Franz was offered an endowment to stay at the Royal school but would have to take an exam to show he was up to the mark in non-musical subjects (and thereafter decrease music). He chose music so, in 1813, he qualified and practised (unhappily) as a schoolteacher in his father's school but, in 1816, after an unsuccessful application to become Kapellmeister at Laibach, Schubert abandoned teaching to focus on composition. Nearly half the works in the Deutsch catalogue come from his teaching years, during which he wrote 5 symphonies, 4 masses, 6 operas, 4 string quartets, 270 songs and a vast number of smaller pieces. Like Beethoven, he often performed in the countless musical evenings in fashionable Vienna. Schubert spent most of the rest of his short life composing. His career suffered many setbacks, but he gradually gained recognition and began mounting concerts of his own works. Unfortunately, just as he

was beginning to achieve public success his health took a turn for the worse. He died of syphilis aged just 31.

A distance of nearly ten years separates the dozen or so youthful string quartets composed during Schubert's initial teenage plunge into the realm of chamber music and the three late quartet masterpieces of 1824-1826. Schubert's mind - and his pen - were hardly occupied with string instruments between these two peaks, but he did find time in his astoundingly busy schedule to come up with two string trios, D471 and D581, both in B flat major and both composed during the month of September, D471 in 1816 and D581 in 1817.

After the initial reading of the *Death and the Maiden* quartet in 1826, the quartet was played again at a house concert in the home of the composer Franz Lachner, with the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh leading. Schuppanzigh was one of the leading violinists of the time, who performed in, and gave the premieres of many of Beethoven's and Schubert's string trios and quartets, was reportedly unimpressed. "Brother, this is nothing at all, let well alone: stick to your Lieder," the ageing Schuppanzigh is reported to have said to Schubert. Schuppanzigh's impressions notwithstanding, Schubert's quartet soon won a leading place on the concert stage and in the hearts of musicians. "Only the excellence of such a work as Schubert's D minor Quartet... can in any way console us for the early and grievous death of this first-born of Beethoven; in a few years he achieved and perfected things as no one before him," wrote Robert Schumann of the quartet.

In 2009, the critic Matthew Lynch described the quartet thus: Tonight's famous quartet, written in 1826, is an intense work with the theme of death at its heart. The title *Death and the Maiden* stems from the re-use in the *Andante* of Schubert's song by the same name, as a theme and five variations. The theme is like a death march in G minor, ending on a G major chord. The text is by the German Romantic Matthias Claudius and the lyrics recount an old European myth, where a sovereign (in this case, Death) demands a pre-nuptial night with a bride-to-be. If she declines, Death will take her betrothed on their wedding day. The Maiden sings: "Leave me, terrible spectre, I am so young, go away and let me be". To which Death replies: "Give me your hand, beautiful and sweet creature, I am your friend, and have not come to punish you. Have courage! You will sleep sweetly in my arms'. Only Death's section is used in the quartet.

While *Death and the Maiden* is a string quartet in every respect, it could also be seen as a romantic tone poem. Throughout the work, Schubert's writing creates a dramatic scene, evoking death in all his guises, both harsh and gentle. Furthermore, the composer chooses D minor, a key which Schubert generally reserved for songs containing poignant expressions of death, penitence, shadowy dreams, and shrouded moonlight.

The terrifying opening to the *Allegro* movement gives the impression of a macabre fanfare, heralding Death's arrival and his now inevitable proposition. Crafted in a typically romantic version of sonata form, this movement still manages to evoke the terror of Death's presence, even with strict formal guidelines. In G minor, the second movement, *Andante con moto*, offers the haunting pulse and phrase of the chant of Death, drawn straight from Schubert's song. This is followed by five variations of which only the fourth moves into the brighter, less foreboding key of G major before dark reality returns. The short *Scherzo-Allegro* also reflects the spectre of the deathly visitor, blending into major at the Trio, feigning comfort to the Maiden. The brilliant *Rondo-Finale* is a ghostly tarantella, creating a sense of the chase in the opening section of Schubert's song. Built on preceding elements and cryptic references to previous movements, it whirls around rhapsodically before hurtling into its conclusion.