

**MARCO
POLO**

Anton Stepanovich

ARENISKY

DDD

8.223811

**String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2
Piano Quintet**

**Ilona Prunyi, Piano
Lajtha Quartet**



Anton Stepanovich Arensky (1861-1906)

String Quartet No.1 in G Major, Op. 11

String Quartet No.2 in A Minor, Op. 35

Piano Quintet in D Major, Op. 51

The son of keen amateur musicians, his father a doctor, Anton Arensky was born in Novgorod in 1861. His musical abilities were encouraged by his parents and he had his first piano lessons from his mother. As a child he had begun to write music and when the family moved to St Petersburg he was able to take more consistent musical instruction and after some preparation, in 1879 to enter the Conservatory, where his teachers included Rimsky-Korsakov for composition and Johannsen for counterpoint and fugue. He was entrusted with the preparation of a piano reduction of the former's opera *The Snow Maiden* and under Rimsky-Korsakov's supervision began work on his own first opera *A Dream on the Volga*, which was later completed, to be staged in Moscow with some success in 1891. His teacher, however, saw no great future for the works of his pupil, considering any success achieved likely to be transitory. This prediction has not proved true in every respect, since some, at least, of Arensky's works have maintained a secure if limited place in standard orchestral and piano repertoire.

Arensky completed his studies at the Conservatory in 1882 and at once took up a position at the Moscow Conservatory as a teacher and later as professor of counterpoint and harmony. There his pupils included Rachmaninov, Glière, Conyus and Skryabin, and there was fruitful contact and friendship with Tchaikovsky and with Taneyev. He appeared as a conductor at concerts, notably of the Russian Choral Society, and his connection with church music led to his appointment, on the recommendation of Balakirev, as director of the imperial chapel in St Petersburg, a position he took up in 1895 and held until 1901. His final years left him free to follow a career as composer, pianist and conductor, brought to an end in part through his dissolute way of life. He died of tuberculosis in 1906 at the age of forty-five.

In style and technique Arensky owed much to his teachers. He developed a sure command of harmonic, contrapuntal and structural musical resources, with a lyrical facility. These elements are at once apparent in his String Quartet No.1 in G major, Opus 11, written in 1888. This shows, from the first bars, an easy understanding of the medium

of the string quartet and of the possibilities still inherent in the traditional first movement form. The second movement opens with a melody of fine contour, before a contrapuntal element is introduced by the cello, followed by the other instruments, and a treatment of the principal melodic material with more elaborately contrapuntal accompaniment. The mood changes with a light-hearted Menuetto and contrasting Trio. A Russian element makes its appearance in the Finale, with its variations on a Russian theme. These bring their surprises, not least in the traditional folk texture suggested by the plucked accompaniment in one variation and the later fragmentation of the theme, before a cadenza and the return of the theme in a mood of mounting excitement, leading to an emphatic and vigorous conclusion.

Arensky's String Quartet No.2 in A minor, Op. 35, was written in 1895 and in its first movement presents a more sombre atmosphere, lightened by secondary material, dramatically developed, but returning to its initial mood. The theme of the second movement is stated simply, before its elaboration in a series of variations with the theme taken by each instrument in turn, before the possibilities of plucked strings and further textural resources are explored in a spirit that ventures far from the original material, sometimes with the energy of a scherzo, then relaxing into a gentler lyrical and eventually sombre mood. The third movement continues in its opening bars the Russian idiom, already heard in the theme of the second. The introduction is followed by what promises to be a vigorous fugue, on a Russian subject, superseded by a reminiscence of the melancholy of the opening of the quartet and followed by an energetic and triumphant conclusion.

The Piano Quintet in D major, Opus 51, was written in 1900. The piano starts the first movement, soon joined by the string instruments in a histrionic opening of a texture that recalls that of Schumann's Piano Quintet. Here too the piano plays a virtuoso part, whether in accompaniment or in the statement of thematic material. The second movement is again in the form of a theme and variations, the former entrusted first to the strings, before the lyrical intervention of the piano, followed by a turn to the more dramatic, a change of mood to the solemn and then to the lyrical. The piano moves on to a re-creation of Chopin, in romantic partnership, and then to music of greater vigour, subsiding into the language of the opening. The capricious Scherzo breaks in, interrupted in its turn by a peaceful Trio that brings momentary serenity here and when it returns after a repetition of the Scherzo, which itself has the last word. A subject of Baroque contour introduces the last movement fugue, but the rigours of counterpoint are later submerged in a thoroughly romantic conclusion.

Ilona Prunyi

Ilona Prunyi was born in Debrecen in 1941 and studied at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, distinguishing herself in the Liszt-Bartók Competition while still a student. Her career as a concert performer was interrupted by a period of ill-health, and for personal reasons she spent ten years as a teacher at the Academy before making her début in 1974. Since then she has appeared frequently in solo and chamber music recitals and as a soloist with the principal Hungarian orchestras. Ilona Prunyi received the Hungarian Artist's Association Award in 1992 and an award for excellence from the Hungarian Ministry of Culture in 1993.

Lajtha Quartet

The Lajtha Quartet, its name taken from that of the distinguished Hungarian composer and expert on folk-music, with Bartók and Kodály, was founded in 1990 by the violinist Leila Rásonyi, winner of a special prize at the Jacques Thibaud International Violin Competition in Paris in 1971 and an award-winner in Vienna two years later, with study in Budapest and in Moscow. Since 1989 she has been a member of the teaching staff of the Liszt Academy. She is joined in the quartet by the violinist György Albert, the viola-player László Kolozsvári and the cellist László Fenyő.

**Anton Stepanovich
ARENISKY
(1861 - 1906)
String Quartets · Piano Quintet
Ilona Prunyi · Lajtha Quartet**

String Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 11		
1	Allegro	7:31
2	Andante sostenuto	3:18
3	Menuetto: Allegretto	2:51
4	Finale (Variations sur un theme russe): Allegro non troppo	4:08
String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 35		
5	Moderato	10:07
6	Theme: Moderato (and Variations)	12:00
7	Finale: Andante sostenuto – Allegro moderato	4:35
Piano Quintet in D Major, Op. 51		
8	Allegro moderato	6:33
9	Variations: Andante – Tempo di valse – Allegro molto – Tempo I	5:45
10	Scherzo: Allegro vivace	6:10
11	Finale (Fuga): Allegro moderato	2:45

**Recorded at the Rottenbiller Street Studio, Budapest,
from 16th to 22nd January 1994.**

Producer: László Beck

Engineer: Janos Horvath

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Cover Painting by Alexie Savrasov

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STEREO

Anton Stepanovich

ARENKY

(1861 - 1906)

String Quartets • Piano Quintet**Ilona Prunyi • Lajtha Quartet**A co-production with
Records International

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Playing Time: 66'25"

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