

NAXOS

# Carl STAMITZ

## Orchestral Quartets, Op. 14

NZSO Chamber Orchestra  
Donald Armstrong, Director



## Carl Stamitz (1745-1801)

### Orchestral Quartets, Op. 14 Nos. 1 and 4 • Concertante Quartets, Op. 14 Nos. 2 and 5

Carl Stamitz is unquestionably the best-known of the second generation of composers associated with the Mannheim court although for most of his career he was based elsewhere. He received his earliest musical training from his brilliant and famous father, Johann, Director of Instrumental Music and leader of the incomparable Mannheim court orchestra. After his father's early death in 1757 Carl continued his studies with a number of leading court musicians and later joined the orchestra as a second violinist, a position which enabled him to continue to develop his formidable performing technique as well as study the contemporary Mannheim repertoire at first hand. His orchestral colleagues included a number of gifted composers, foremost among them Christian Cannabich, leader of the court orchestra.

Stamitz left Mannheim in 1770, travelling to Paris where, the following year, he was appointed court composer to Duke Louis of Noailles. Together with his brother Anton, Carl was a regular performer at the *Concert Spirituel* and undertook tours as a virtuoso to Vienna in 1772, to Frankfurt the following year, and in 1774, to Augsburg, Vienna and Strasbourg. After his departure from Paris in the late 1770s he never again held an important permanent position. He travelled incessantly, performing concerts throughout Europe and composing prolifically in all genres. Among his more unusual works from this period is a musical allegory to mark Blanchard's successful balloon ascent in 1787.

Stamitz's compositions enjoyed great popularity in their time and circulated widely in both printed and manuscript copies. When asked by his father whether he had met the Stamitzes in Paris, Mozart replied: "Of the two Stamitz brothers only the younger one [Anton] is here, the elder [Carl] (the real composer *à la* Hafeneder) is in London. They are indeed two wretched scribblers, gamblers, swillers and adulterers – not the kind of people for me. The one who is here has scarcely a decent coat to his back" [Letter of 9th July 1778]. As

with so many comments originating from Mozart's ill-fated trip to Paris, his opinion of Carl Stamitz should be treated with some caution, particularly in the light of Gerber's later enthusiastic appraisal published in his *Historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler* in 1792:

"With what extraordinary art and facility he plays the viola! With what heavenly sweet tone and cantilena he enchants our ears with his viola d'amour – and with what fire and surety he plays the violin as Konzertmeister! Berlin, Dresden, many capitals and large cities are witness of his prowess! And he certainly would have been long attached to one of the German courts, if this artist's unusual dislike for all connections of this sort had not stood in the way of his entering an orchestra. Indeed, it is a great undertaking to live in Germany as a free artist. And he who tries and wishes to succeed must not have any less art than Stamitz ... in his relationships, as highly esteemed for his honorable and noble character, as for his art".

In spite of his early fame, his obvious gifts as a performer and composer, and his sporadic experiments in alchemy, Carl Stamitz died so heavily in debt that his possessions had to be auctioned to help pay his creditors.

Stamitz composed nearly as much chamber music as he did the works for orchestra upon which his reputation today largely rests. His first published work was a set of six 'orchestral' quartets issued by the Parisian publisher Sieber in 1770 with a dedication to 'Sig. Di St. Giorgio' – M. de Saint-Georges, father of the celebrated mulatto violin virtuoso, composer and master swordsman Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges. Like his father's nine orchestral trios, composed in the mid-1750s [Naxos 8.553213], these works were intended to be suitable for performance *a quattro* or by an orchestra. They have something of the

intimate quality of chamber music about them but they also demonstrate Stamitz's familiarity with the famous Mannheim orchestral style.

The six quartets of Op. 14, published in Paris by Sieber in 1776, present an altogether less homogenous appearance. Only two of the quartets are specifically designated 'orchestral' quartets; two others are described as 'concertante' quartets and the remaining two works are simply styled 'quartets' in which the uppermost part may be played by a flute, oboe, violin or clarinet. The two 'orchestral' quartets (Op.14 Nos. 1 and 4) demonstrate a considerable advance over their predecessors. They are larger in scale and more genuinely symphonic in their outer movements which make effective use of dense, busy string textures, dramatic dynamic shifts and urgent crescendos in the best Mannheim traditions. Although they would work satisfactorily as conventional string quartets it is clear from their style that they were conceived for orchestral performance. The case is by no means clear, however, with the 'concertante' quartets: were they intended to be performed strictly a *quattro* in the manner of other concertante quartets of the period or did Stamitz envisage that they would be performed as miniature *symphonies concertantes*? The 'solo' cues that appear

sporadically throughout the parts are inconclusive and certainly cannot be taken to imply unequivocally that a *concertino-ripieno* relationship exists. Nonetheless, the frequent use of the extreme upper register of the cello undoubtedly benefits from a contrasting solid grounding in the 'tutti' sections. This kind of stylistic dichotomy does not arise in the authentic 'solo' quartets, Op. 14 Nos. 3 and 6. In these works the cello plays a conventional basso rôle and the uppermost part is idiomatically neutral in order to work equally well for several different instruments. With a little editorial license the two concertante quartets work very satisfactorily as scaled-down *symphonies concertantes* and are performed in this manner on the present recording.

The Op. 14 quartets reveal a side of Stamitz's work that is not very familiar to contemporary audiences. The qualities that make his symphonies and concertos so popular, however, are well in evidence in these charming works. They abound in brisk energetic, driving themes, sparkling string writing, and, in their slow movements, they possess the easy grace and elegance that that is the hallmark of so much of his work.

Allan Badley

## NZSO Chamber Orchestra

The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra Chamber Orchestra (originally the New Zealand Chamber Orchestra) was founded in 1987 from leading players of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Since then it has established itself as New Zealand's leading chamber orchestra, an ensemble of the highest quality with a dedication to excellence. It generally performs without a conductor, directed from the first violin chair by Music Director Donald Armstrong. Its size can vary from that of a chamber group up to around 35 players. It is generally made up of strings, with woodwind, brass, and other instruments as the repertoire demands. This small orchestra is generally seated in a semicircle on stage or sometimes the players may stand, the latter being popular with audiences. It has performed with leading world soloists and produced a catalogue of fine CDs. The NZSO Chamber Orchestra has toured throughout New Zealand over the past nineteen years, and increasingly abroad. Highlights have included acclaimed performances at EXPO in Seville in 1992, and an engagement by Musica Viva, Australia, as Orchestra in Residence at the prestigious Mittagong Festival, NSW, in 1993. The variety of music played ranges from early works such as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, classical works by Mozart and friends, to romantic music, and contemporary works. On stage, the NZSO Chamber Orchestra can look elegant and sophisticated, or casual and contemporary, as the occasion demands.

## Donald Armstrong

Donald Armstrong has been Music Director of the NZSO Chamber Orchestra since its beginnings in 1987, and his incisive leadership has been a major force in creating its dynamic and exciting style. He has served as Associate Concertmaster of the NZSO since 1987 and appears frequently as a soloist with the NZCO as well as being very much involved with chamber music in New Zealand. Before returning to New Zealand in 1987 he completed a Masters degree at the New England Conservatory in Boston, was principal second violin of the Tivoli Sinfoniorkester in Denmark and Concertmaster of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice in France. He plays a violin by Nicolò Gagliano of 1754.

*The orchestral parts and scores of the following works are available from:*

**www.artaria.com**

### *Sources*

The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

#### **Orchestral Quartet in C major, Op. 14 No. 1**

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE016  
Sieber print [Paris, 1776]: London, The British Library (Sig. g.412.a.[8.1])

#### **Concertante Quartet in G major, Op. 14 No. 2**

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE017  
Sieber print [Paris, 1776]: London, The British Library (Sig. g.412.a.[8.1])

#### **Orchestral Quartet in F major, Op. 14 No. 4**

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE018  
Sieber print [Paris, 1776]: London, The British Library (Sig. g.412.a.[8.1])

#### **Concertante Quartet in B flat major, Op. 14 No. 5**

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE020  
Sieber print [Paris, 1776]: London, The British Library (Sig. g.412.a.[8.1])



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Known for his considerable contribution to orchestral music in the late 18th century, Carl Stamitz wrote nearly as much chamber music as symphonies and concertos. The six quartets of *Op. 14* are unusual in that only two of the works, *Nos. 1* and *4* are specifically designated 'orchestral' quartets, while *Nos. 2* and *5* are described as 'concertante' works, to be performed either by a quartet or, as heard on this recording, by a small chamber orchestra. These charming works abound in energetic, driving themes, sparkling string writing and, in their slow movements, the grace and elegance that are the hallmark of Stamitz's compositions.



Carl  
**STAMITZ**  
(1745-1801)

## Orchestral Quartets, Op. 14

### Orchestral Quartet in F major, Op. 14 No. 4

- |                         |      |
|-------------------------|------|
| 20:58                   |      |
| 1 Allegro assai         | 9:43 |
| 2 Andante ma allegretto | 6:49 |
| 3 Presto assai          | 4:26 |

### Concertante Quartet in B flat major, Op. 14 No. 5

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 12:56                                      |       |
| 4 Allegro poco moderato                    | 10:19 |
| 5 Rondo – Poco moderato –<br>Allegro assai | 4:41  |

### Concertante Quartet in G major, Op. 14 No. 2

- |                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| 12:56                 |      |
| 6 Allegro con spirito | 7:29 |
| 7 Andante gracioso    | 3:11 |
| 8 Presto              | 2:17 |

### Orchestral Quartet in C major, Op. 14 No. 1

- |                     |      |
|---------------------|------|
| 18:00               |      |
| 9 Allegro assai     | 7:26 |
| 10 Andante di molto | 6:00 |
| 11 Poco presto      | 4:34 |

NZSO Chamber Orchestra  
Donald Armstrong, Director



### THE SCOTTWOOD SERIES

Recorded in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Wellington, New Zealand,  
from 3rd to 6th August, 2004 • Producer and Editor: Wayne Laird  
Engineer: Paul McGlashan • Booklet Notes: Allan Badley  
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(AKG London)

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