

NAXOS

Miklós
RÓZSA

String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2
String Trio
(original version)
Tippett Quartet



Miklós Rózsa (1907–1995)

String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 · String Trio (original published version)

Miklós Rózsa enjoyed a highly successful career composing music for motion pictures, beginning in London in 1937 and ending in Hollywood in 1981, but throughout those busy yet reward-filled decades he never lost his passion for the other side of his *Double Life* (the title of his 1982 memoir). Before he ever thought of composing for films, he had already accrued a distinguished catalogue of concert works – a catalogue to which he continued to add both while he was active in films (especially during the summer breaks that he insisted be written into his M-G-M contract) and beyond. This recording encompasses, in a sense, the alpha and omega of his concert music: the string trio which he began during the spring of his first year as a composition student at the Leipzig Conservatory, and his second published string quartet – his final original work for any ensemble (his subsequent opuses were solo sonatas for various instruments). These are followed by a work written at the height of his film music career, shortly after he had begun his thirteen-year tenure at M-G-M. All three pieces demonstrate that Rózsa, for all the expansive Technicolor symphonic gestures that brought him fame and fortune, was at heart a strict contrapuntist who revelled in the intricacies and complexities of chamber music.

Rózsa completed his *String Quartet No. 2, Op. 38* (actually his third work in the genre – a promising student effort from his conservatory days was never published), during the summer of 1981 at his summer retreat in Santa Margherita Ligure on the Italian Riviera. Its première in Paris on 17th October, 1982, was followed by the American première (played by the Granat Quartet) in Los Angeles on 17th April, 1983. The Gabrieli Quartet recorded the work for the BBC who broadcast it on 18th April, 1987, in celebration of the composer's eightieth birthday.

The first movement, although broadly organized in sonata form, differentiates less between its first and second subjects than is usual in Rózsa's work. The latter (introduced by the cello) tries to introduce a more lyrical element – an effect it almost achieves midway through the movement, but agitated demisemiquaver figures surround it persistently, resulting in a movement that does not let up on counterpoint

or conflict until the *impetuoso* coda based on the first theme (*fortissimo* double stops in all voices) expends itself in whispered pizzicatos. In the slow movement Rózsa alternates passages featuring cello and viola with others played by the two violins. Except for brief overlaps at the beginnings and endings of new sections, the four instruments never sound together (thus the subtitle: "2+2"). As Rózsa's friend, orchestrator and amanuensis Christopher Palmer pointed out, this was "oddly prophetic" of the composer's final works, "in which the number of lines is further reduced to one." The over-all effect is bleak and sombre, beginning *con sordino* and ending with eerie, glassy harmonics. The quicksilver Hungarian scherzo which follows is laced with cross-rhythms and sardonic humour. It echoes some of the gaiety found in Rózsa's orchestral works from the 1930s, tempered by a more mature perspective and conciseness. The final movement develops two themes: an impetuous, rhythmic motif and an angular, wider-ranging idea. With shifting metres and frequently changing textures, the composer works his material with assured confidence and unremitting energy from first bar to last.

Rózsa began writing his *String Trio, Op. 1*, in the spring of 1927. The work, initially called *Serenade for String Trio*, was first performed at the conservatory on 23rd March, 1928, with the composer himself playing the viola part. His composition teacher, Hermann Grabner, showed it to Karl Straube, cantor of the Thomaskirche and one of the most influential musicians in Germany. Straube was sufficiently impressed to arrange for the work's publication by Breitkopf and Härtel. The young composer was thrilled and felt his future was assured. "There were the lovely baroque angels with my name in the middle and 'Opus 1' underneath," he recalled in *Double Life*. "I put the score on the music stand beside my bed and I woke up many times that first night just to look at it. My dream had come true."

In 1974 the composer revised the work for its first recording. Recalling that the initial version of the trio was almost 45 minutes long (the published work is closer to 30), he made numerous cuts and rewrote several passages, designating the new work *Opus 1a*. In *Double Life*, he

acknowledged the trio contains “elements of immaturity” and moments when he was “feeling [his] way,” but also observed that “the basic elements of my mature style are, in embryonic formations, unmistakably present already”. This is the first recording of the original version published in 1929 – the same year the composer graduated *summa cum laude* from Leipzig Conservatory.

In the first movement the composer alternates two ideas. The first is sternly agitated, always surging forward in search of further development (including a brief fugal passage midway through the movement) – and sounds almost nothing like mature Rózsa. The cello introduces the second theme, lyrical and shaped with Hungarian contours, presaging the sense of longing for his homeland that will permeate virtually all of his concert music to come. Rózsa acknowledged this Hungarian influence in his earliest works in a 1984 interview. “It’s hazy”, he said, “but it’s there”. The second movement has the character of a peasant dance, with a contrasting middle section again featuring a lyrical line from the cello – this time against tremolo chords in the violin and viola. After an intervening *Largo con dolore* wherein Rózsa spins his melodic line around an ever-shifting harmonic landscape, the concluding *Allegretto vivo* brings a sense of neo-classical clarity. Its playful D major theme anchors a modified rondo form (ABACDA) that concludes with a coda of increasing speed and growing virtuosity. Many of his future works – most notably his concertos – would end in similar breathless fashion.

Rózsa completed his *String Quartet No. 1, Op. 22*, in September 1950. He had been under contract to M-G-M for over two years and was working intently on his music for *Quo Vadis*. It was a prime period in both halves of his double life (he would soon write his violin concerto for Heifetz – one of his most popular works), and it must have brought him great pleasure to balance the colourful and exotic music he was composing for the film with the intellectual rigour of chamber music. The Compinsky Quartet gave the première of the work in Los Angeles in 1951 (Manuel Compinsky often advised Rózsa on technical aspects of writing for strings); it is dedicated to Peter Ustinov, who played the would-be composer Nero in *Quo Vadis*.

The first movement features two themes. The cello introduces the first, a wide-ranging, expressive melody built in fourths (although answering phrases from the other three

instruments move in thirds). The second theme is quicker and far more agitated, announced in the viola and subsequently in the second violin, first violin and cello in fugal fashion. In a highlight of the development, Rózsa combines these ideas in counterpoint – a technique he returns to in the coda, where the viola plays the first theme against the second theme, played pizzicato by the cello. The scherzo, *In modo ongarese*, frames a rustic peasant dance, first played by the viola and later in the lower register of the cello, with a capricious, playful idea in fast quintuple metre. The dance motif returns on ghostly harmonics in the coda, like a distant echo heard across the night-time sky in the Hungarian countryside. The third movement is a dark *Nachtmusik*, one of many Hungarian nocturnes Rózsa incorporated into his compositions over the years, but in this case with perhaps a bit more of an acerbic edge. Written while the composer was sailing from Europe (where he had been in Rome working on *Quo Vadis*) to America, it seems to evoke a particularly nostalgic longing for the homeland he had left twenty years before. All four instruments are muted throughout. The material builds to a ferocious unison climax before slowly winding its way down to a tranquil but not entirely reassuring C major conclusion. The little Lydian-mode figure heard at the end of the third movement anticipates the principal theme of the finale. Again Rózsa suggests a folk-dance, with double-stops thickening the texture and a prominent Lydian fourth on the downbeat. He contrasts this robust idea with more lyrical material in a tightly constructed sonata-rondo form. Rhythmic tension ebbs and flows but never ceases; changing metres and cross-rhythms propel the movement throughout.

Miklós Rózsa made his home in Hollywood for over fifty years. He displayed a genius for writing film music like no other composer, gracing widescreen spectacles, period dramas, *films noirs*, war pictures – even a comedy or two – with music that was colourful, emotional, exciting and unforgettable. The works on this recording, however, featuring just three or four players sitting across from each other and engaging in serious, sophisticated, probing musical dialogue, suggest that it might have been on a more intimate soundstage – far from everything Hollywood represents – that his true heart lay.

Frank K. DeWald

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Tippett Quartet

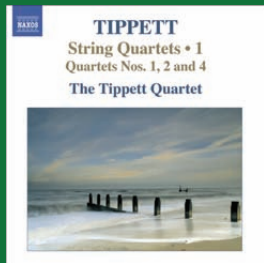
For over a decade and a half, the celebrated Tippett Quartet has delighted critics and audiences alike with its animated and virtuosic performances, and its inspired and attractive programming. They have performed at the BBC Proms and numerous festivals in the United Kingdom and abroad, including tours of Europe, Canada, Mexico and beyond. The quartet regularly appears at Kings Place, the Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Bridgewater Hall and frequently performs on BBC Radio 3. Alongside a busy touring schedule, the Tippett Quartet pursues a keen interest in educational work with both schools and universities and is currently Ensemble in Residence at Sidney Sussex College, University of Cambridge. Their impressive and diverse catalogue of releases has not only topped the classical charts but has also entered the pop charts. The quartet has worked with Peter Maxwell Davies on a performance of his *Ninth Quartet* (as part of a complete cycle of his ten quartets) at the South Bank Centre, with Anthony Payne on his *Quartet No. 1* for a live BBC broadcast from the Spitalfields Festival, and with Hugh Wood on his *String Quartet No. 3* at the Presteigne Festival. The quartet has given premières of works by composers including John Adams, Howard Goodall and Stephen Dodgson and has collaborated with artists such as Kathryn Stott, Stephanie Gonley and Lawrence Power. This is the Tippett Quartet's fourth recording for Naxos. www.tippettquartet.co.uk



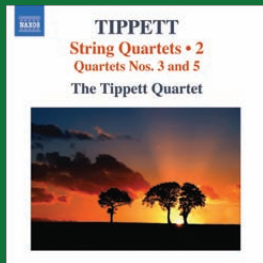
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From left to right: **John Mills** Violin • **Julia O’Riordan** Viola • **Jeremy Isaac** Violin • **Bozidar Vukotic** Cello

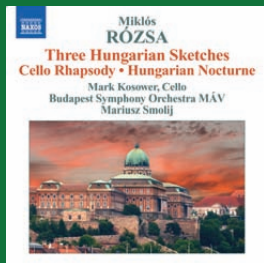
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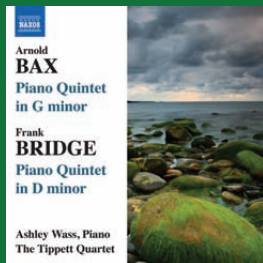
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Playing Time
75:07Made in Germany
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Booklet notes in English

Though Miklós Rózsa became one of the most admired of film composers, he had always written music in other forms and his two published string quartets reveal important facets of his musical background. *String Quartet No. 1* was written in 1950 when he was under contract with M-G-M and, with its nocturnal and folk-dance imagery, is redolent of his Hungarian youth. *String Quartet No. 2* is prophetic of his later sparer style, though it too is infused with great energy and high drama. The *String Trio, Op. 1*, recorded for the first time in its original 1929 published version, abounds with youthful vitality.

Miklós RÓZSA

(1907–1995)

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 38

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 1 | Allegro con brio | 5:27 |
| 2 | Andante | 6:16 |
| 3 | Allegro scherzando | 3:04 |
| 4 | Allegro risoluto | 5:49 |

String Trio, Op. 1 (original published version)*

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|---|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | Largo – Allegro molto
energico | 10:51 |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------|

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|---|------------------|------|
| 6 | Gioioso | 5:20 |
| 7 | Largo con dolore | 5:42 |
| 8 | Allegretto vivo | 8:05 |

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 22

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 9 | Andante con moto | 7:35 |
| 10 | Scherzo in modo ongarese:
Vivo capriccioso | 4:18 |
| 11 | Lento | 7:01 |
| 12 | Allegro feroce | 5:21 |

* WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING



Tippett Quartet

John Mills* and Jeremy Isaac, Violins
Julia O'Riordan, Viola • Bozidar Vukotic, Cello

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