



Arvydas
MALCYS
(b. 1957)

Pēteris
VASKS
(b. 1946)

Baltic Inspiration

Piano Quartets

Ippolitov-Ivanov Piano Quartet

Arvydas Malcys (b. 1957): Blackthorn Eyes • Hyacinth of the Snowfields • Milky Way
Pēteris Vasks (b. 1946): Piano Quartet

Although it flourished as a medium during the late 18th and throughout the 19th centuries, the piano quartet has latterly been overlooked in favour of the piano trio and piano quintet, while continuing to attract composers such as those from Lithuania and Latvia featured here.

Arvydas Malcys was born on 22 February 1957 in Kaunas, where he duly commenced his studies under Vilnius Petrauskas, graduating from the Juozas Gruodis Conservatoire in 1975. From the Lithuanian Academy of Music he received diplomas both for cello in 1980 and for composition in 1989. He attended lectures on polyphony with Osvaldas Balakauskas, as well as harmony and analysis with Rimantas Janeliauskas. In 2004, he was awarded Third Prize for *Only Heaven Above Us* at the Sinfonia Baltica International Composers Competition in Riga; in 2005, First Prize for *Concerto for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* at the Juozas Karosas Composers' Competition; in 2006, the Conductor's Prize for *In memoriam* for string orchestra at the 'Mozart 250' competition in Moscow; in 2008, First Prize for *Saxchord* for tenor saxophone and string quartet at the Juozas Karosas Competition; in 2007, Second Prize for *Cantus Sirenum* at the Haifa International Flute Festival; while in 2009, *Narcissus* was included within the obligatory programme at the Max Rostal Viola Competition in Berlin. Malcys's works have been performed by thirty orchestras and ensembles and heard over a hundred times by audiences in European, American and Asian concert halls.

Instrumental music constitutes the most significant portion of Malcys's sizable output. In many of his works, the attributes of absolute music accord well with their frequently expressionistic imagery and a sonic poetry which is often reminiscent of impressionism; along with a feeling for neo-Classical forms, a penchant for colourful textures and specific sound effects. Possessed of a resourceful and discriminating ear, he has taken considerable interest in those timbral possibilities of instruments when heard in their different registers. Familiar with the idiosyncrasies of numerous instruments,

Malcys often manipulates their expressive possibilities, shaping them so they serve as strongly defined personalities and theatrical characters. His music is fraught with ironic and sometimes grotesque contrasts.

Blackthorn Eyes hesitantly comes into focus with fractured sound on each instrument, gradually coalescing into a cluster from which the piano leads off with a resolute gesture that is answered more tentatively by the strings. Gradually these exchanges become lengthier until strings assume the foreground with a subdued and chorale-like theme as decorated by piano – gaining in activity before opening out into detached gestures. There follows a lively passage in which syncopation abounds though the 'chorale' once again intervenes, then the livelier idea is resumed on the way to a raucous climax that proceeds to vanish as if into nothingness.

Hyacinth of the Snowfields commences with a commanding motif played by the strings in unison, the piano countering with a hardly less forceful idea before the music heads into calmer and more expressive territory. There follows a resourceful while always eventful development of these ideas, whether individually or in combination, whose rhythmic impetus is countered by ardent melodic lines. At length the music dies down to laconic gestures and ostinato patterns shared between instruments, duly falling away to leave the piano sounding ruminative against sustained string harmonies. A stealthy emotional upsurge brings about an incisive conclusion.

Milky Way opens much as *Hyacinth of the Snowfields* left off, with lively if detached phrases on strings and dance-like gestures on piano, though more sustained harmonies are also apparent from the upper strings. The underlying motion intermittently relaxes yet rarely for long, with the initial manner continuing to motivate as it unfolds, though a yearningly expressive quality latterly takes hold in which the cello is to the fore. This seems to clarify the tonal direction of the music once it resumes its lively course, now continuing unabated towards a heady culmination which brings this work to its decisive yet rather peremptory close.

Pēteris Vasks was born in Aizpute on 16 April 1946. He attended the Riga Music Academy then the Lithuanian Music Academy in Vilnius, where he studied double bass with Vitautas Sereika. During 1973–78 he studied composition with Valentin Utkin at the Latvian Academy of Music in Riga. Vasks was a member of the Lithuanian Philharmonic Orchestra (1966–69), the Latvian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra (1969–70) and the Orchestra of Latvian Radio and Television (1971–74). On three occasions he has received the Great Music Award, the highest prize bestowed by the Latvian State in the field of music – in 1993 for *Litene*, in 1998 for his violin concerto *Distant Light*, and in 2000 for his *Second Symphony* (Ondine ODE1005-2). In 1996 he was awarded the Herder Prize of the Alfred Toepfer Foundation in Hamburg and was also appointed principal composer of the Stockholm Festival of New Music. Since 1994 Vasks has been an honorary member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences and in 2001 he was made a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. During 2004 the Ondine recording of his *Second Symphony* was awarded the Cannes Classical Award for the CD of the Year as well as Best Orchestral Work. Vasks currently resides in Riga, where he works as a freelance composer and continues to accept commissions from around the world.

A composer whose music resists easy or obvious categorisation, Vasks has often included archaic and folkloric elements derived from Latvian music in his compositions. Most of his works have programmatic titles that refer to natural events and occurrences. Most important in his thinking is not the poetic praise of nature, or description of landscape as an aesthetic ideal: rather it is the reciprocal relation between nature and man, the beauty of life and the threatening ecological destruction of these values which he has taken up in his later work.

Among the longest and most imposing of his chamber works, Vasks' *Piano Quartet* was completed in 2001, then first performed on 30 June that year at the West Cork Chamber Music Festival in Bantry by the Florestan Trio

with James Boyd on viola. Playing with minimal pauses, its six movements unfold in a symmetrical and cumulative sequence during which the music's expressive intensity gradually yet inexorably comes to the fore.

The *Preludio* unfolds in subdued and distant terms with spare gestures on piano echoed by sustained chords from the strings. Both types of music open out into greater activity, prior to a sudden crescendo which duly launches the *Danze*, whose more diverse range of activity is immediately made clear. Various dance-like ideas are stated and juxtaposed over its course, with the folk-inflected theme heard at the outset returning as a refrain. At length it reappears to see this movement through to its unexpectedly disintegrative close, whereupon the *Canti drammatici* begins with impassioned string gestures countered by forceful chords on piano.

The cello then leads off with a plangent cantilena which is taken up by viola then violin in a cadenza-like passage with multi-stopping much in evidence. This duly works its way to the passionate music from the outset, though the piano now intervenes to initiate the *Quasi una passacaglia* whose energetic initial idea is made the basis of a series of informal variations which between them outline a wide range of expressive character-types – with the emphasis on an underlying propulsion that in due course climaxes in the return of the opening theme.

This accumulated intensity provides an explosive entry into the *Canto principale* – the work's longest movement as well as its emotional heart, unfolding from a long-limbed cello melody of real pathos and heard against pensive chords on piano. Only gradually do the other string instruments enter, so making for a sustained discourse that distils the work's expressive essence towards its climax. This breaks off at its height, allowing the *Postludio* to continue in a similar vein before it gradually dies down into its inevitable while also regretful ending.

Richard Whitehouse

Ippolitov-Ivanov Piano Quartet

From left to right: Anastasia Yakushina, Irina Graifer, Olga Kogan, Sergey Ananich



The Ippolitov-Ivanov Piano Quartet was founded in 2001. Since then, the ensemble has participated in multiple international masterclasses and festivals in Russia, Lithuania and Germany, and conducted music workshops in Austria and Italy. The quartet regularly participates in the Moscow State Philharmonic Society's 'Subscription' series, and has instigated numerous chamber music concert series across Moscow including *Ippolitov-Ivanov Quartet and friends* at the Andronikov Monastery of the Saviour from 2012 to 2016, *Magic World of Music and Fairy Tales* at the Russian National Museum of Music from 2015 to 2018, and *Stories of Love in Music and Letters* at the Mosconcert Hall in 2017. The quartet's soloists have participated in the annual Yuri Bashmet International Music Festival in Yaroslavl, Moscow Autumn and Gallery of Actual Music contemporary music festivals in Moscow and the international Kristupo festivalis in Lithuania. Alongside core piano quartet repertoire, the ensemble also works with other musicians.

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The *Piano Quartet* by much-admired Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks is one of his longest and most imposing chamber works. Unfolding with inexorable expressive force, it utilises dance-like motifs and folk-inflected themes throughout. The pieces by Lithuanian composer Arvydas Malcys form a cohesive sequence akin to a three-movement piano quartet in which specific sound effects, emotional power and colourful textures are in perfect alignment.

Arvydas
MALCYS
(b. 1957)

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|---|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| ❶ | Blackthorn Eyes (1999) (version for piano quartet, 2004)* | 12:22 |
| ❷ | Hyacinth of the Snowfields (2012)* | 11:07 |
| ❸ | Milky Way (2002) (version for piano quartet, 2012)* | 8:57 |

Pēteris
VASKS
(b. 1946)

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---|------------------------------|-------------|
| Piano Quartet (2001) | | 35:15 | | | |
| ❹ | Preludio | 3:13 | ❺ | Quasi una passacaglia | 7:24 |
| ❺ | Danze | 5:17 | ❻ | Canto principale | 9:00 |
| ❻ | Canti drammatici | 6:53 | ❼ | Postludio | 2:28 |

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Ippolitov-Ivanov Piano Quartet

Anastasia Yakushina, Violin • Olga Kogan, Viola
Sergey Ananich, Cello • Irina Graifer, Piano

Recorded: 8 June 2017 at CineLab SoundMix, Moscow, Russia ❹–❺ and 7 July 2015
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