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QUARTET



Choreography the soundtrack

Kreutzer Quartet

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music by Stravinsky | Ligeti | Lutosławski | Finissy

FOUR QUARTETS

Igor Stravinsky – Three Pieces for String Quartet (1914)	7.58
1 I – crotchet = 126 (1928 title 'Danse')	0.52
2 II – crotchet = 76 (1928 title 'Excentrique')	2.07
3 III – minim = 40 (1928 title 'Cantique')	3.32
<i>(published by Boosey & Hawkes)</i>	
Lutosławski – String Quartet (1964)	26.51
4 Introductory Movement –	9.48
5 Main Movement	16.43
<i>(published by Chester Music Ltd.)</i>	
György Ligeti – String Quartet No. 2 (1968)	21.22
6 ... <i>Allegro nervoso</i>	4.39
7 <i>Sostenuto, molto calmo</i>	4.10
8 <i>Come un meccanismo di precision</i>	4.01
9 <i>Presto furioso, brutale, tumultuoso</i>	2.03
10 <i>Allegro con delicatezza – stets sehr mild – / – always very mildly</i>	5.24
<i>(published by Schott Music)</i>	
11 Michael Finnissy – Second String Quartet (2006-07)	19.17
<i>(published by Oxford University Press)</i>	
Total duration	72.34

PERFORMED by the KREUTZER QUARTET

Peter Sheppard Skærved violin ♦ Mihailo Trandafilovski violin
Morgan Goff viola ♦ Neil Heyde cello

*This album is the audio track from the Metier DVD 'Quartet Choreography'
MSVDX101*

This album is the audio track from 'Quartet Choreography' Metier DVD MSVDX101

An Optic Nerve production

Sound engineer: Kirsten Cowie

Re-mastered for CD and digital download by Stephen Sutton (Divine Art Recordings)

Recorded at The Duke's Hall, Royal Academy of Music, London

on 8 October 2007 (Stravinsky/Lutosławski) and 26 October 2008 (Ligeti & Finnissy)

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Michael Finnissy

Instrumental Choreography

In the 1939-40 academic year Stravinsky gave six lectures at Harvard University for the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures on Poetry series. The last of these, on musical performance, has become infamous – as much for how Stravinsky expresses himself as for the views themselves, and perhaps not helped by the fact that the lectures were originally delivered in French. This album is an audio only version of a DVD issued as a response to part of this lecture that has received surprisingly little attention:

I said somewhere that it was not enough to hear music, but that it must also be seen. What shall we say of the ill-breeding of those grimacers who too often take it upon themselves to deliver the “inner meaning” of music by disfiguring it with their affected airs? For, I repeat, one sees music. An experienced eye follows and judges, sometimes unconsciously, the performer’s least gesture. From this point of view one might conceive the process of performance as the creation of new values that call for the solution of problems similar to those which arise in the realm of choreography. In both cases we give special attention to the control of gestures.... For music does not move in the abstract. Its translation into plastic terms requires exactitude and beauty: the exhibitionists know this only too well.¹

In the middle of Stravinsky's extended invective against the 'superficial exhibitionist' is this striking claim: music is multimedia. This would not perhaps have seemed surprising to a 19th-century audience whose musical encounters were always with physical performances. Perhaps it is not surprising today, even though most people encounter music most often in forms where the sound has been separated from its means of production. However, the visual dimension of new music received very little attention in the mid-20th century and the dominant modes of dissemination were

¹ Igor Stravinsky: *Poetics of Music in the form of six lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1942)

Quartet In Session

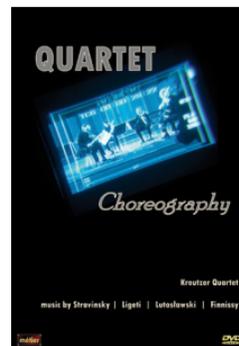


scores and sound recordings. The quartets filmed here are pieces in which each composer's sensitivity to the visual dimension of music is absolutely explicit, yet in the substantial body of literature that has developed around the three older pieces almost nothing has been written about their visual aspects. It is quite possible in some cases that people did not notice these things, or that writers became acquainted with pieces through sound recordings alone and were unable to 'decode' some of the visual cues in the scores. Or, simply, that there has been a habit of not thinking about (or even actively disregarding) how things look.

The DVD of this program is an attempt to reveal that simply listening to these pieces offers only partial access to them. We considered a 'Warhol-static' approach, and also experimented with filming that directly matched the music's own cuts and transitions. The final edit follows more conventional practice with a view to allowing access to the details of the physical interaction with our instruments and also the broad choreography of the ensemble. The static camera left the viewer 'stuck' permanently in wide-angle perspective, and cutting the film to the music's structure came across as too obviously manipulative and controlled. Each piece suggested slightly different editing strategies and we are very grateful to Colin Still of Optic Nerve and his editors Sam Collins and Jane Clegg for their enormous expertise in helping to manage a balance here that feels appropriate to us as musicians – and to Amanda Bayley for her overview of the issues across the project. The notes that follow are an attempt to help provide a focus for Stravinsky's 'experienced eye' to 'follow and judge'. Although we felt it would be helpful to identify a few special moments we are also aware that if the visual dimension has the capacity to speak for itself it is vital that it is given some room to breathe.

There is an explicit bodily connection between the musical material in a String Quartet and the four players – enhanced by the fundamental similarity of the instruments and the absence of a 'director'. Playing with this connection is at the heart of every piece on this disc and is also essential to the idea of the String Quartet from its inception – redistributing roles, changing voicings etc. Ensemble must be directed from *within* the group, encouraging players to find creative ways of communicating with one another in order to be able to keep together without

QUARTET CHOREOGRAPHY – THE DVD



If you enjoy the music on this album, why not buy the DVD - and see the musicians' interaction for yourself. A valuable aid for string teachers and students and anyone interested in how music is performed

Metier MSVDX101

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Finnissy has for years preferred 'part books' instead of scores for much of his chamber music – the individual voices often exist in free relation to one another. The closest there is to a Lutosławskian 'sort of score' for this piece is the formal outline created by Amanda Bayley as part of a multimedia software DVD package of materials around the piece including multiple recordings, interviews, rehearsals images of the parts themselves.¹⁰ Finnissy's understanding of the enormous range of 'games' that the parts can open – among the players, with the music of the past, and with the audience – is second to none. The four individual performers are explicitly 'activated' and they interrupt, break off, and comment on and with one another. Towards the end of the piece the second violin appears to tire of the beautifully expressive *Adagio*, and wanders off as if into another musical space. During rehearsals of the final section that follows Finnissy repeatedly counselled the viola and cello not to try to compete for psychological space with the two violins (who have much more active material) but to imagine being in another room altogether, looking through a window at the action.

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These recordings are linked to an extensive research project (led by Amanda Bayley, in collaboration with the members of the quartet) and funded by a British Academy Larger Research Grant in 2007-2009. Michael Finnissy's Second String Quartet was commissioned by the University of Wolverhampton and the Birmingham Conservatoire (Birmingham City University) in 2006. The world premiere in 2007 was generously supported by Arts Council England, the Britten-Pears Foundation, the Hinrichsen Foundation, the Holst Foundation, the PRS Foundation and the RVW Trust.

¹⁰ Bayley, Amanda, and Michael Clarke: *Evolution and Collaboration: the composition, rehearsal and performance of Michael Finnissy's Second String Quartet* (Lancaster: PALATINE, 2011).

sacrificing individual shape. By recognizing the special possibilities of the medium the composer activates a game that we begin to explore during rehearsal. The more effectively we are able to realize the potential implications of the material, the richer the relationships that can be opened up and the greater the variety of means of communication.

Sometimes the composer explicitly indicates an action that goes beyond the 'normal' use of the instrument for which there may be little or no sonic result: Stravinsky asks for the second violin and viola to be inverted and held like a cello for a short moment in the second of his pieces; Ligeti constructs an unnecessary choreographed page turn (players turning in sequence whilst plucking with the left hand) as a pre-echo of the sonic unfolding that happens shortly afterwards in the third movement of his quartet; and in the Main Movement of his quartet Lutosławski instructs the players to explicitly signal one another on completion of material. These sorts of explicit directions open a door on to a range of implicit manipulations in which the relation between action and sonic event may be much closer: Stravinsky specifies some extraordinary fingerings and bowings, whose purpose is not immediately clear (and which have been very rarely followed on recordings); and Ligeti indicates several completely different types of silences in his quartet (in some of which time is 'moving' and in others where there is complete stillness). In these we have to find a way of revealing the ramifications of performance indications in the score that might initially appear over-fussy or inconsistent. Stravinsky's fingerings (worked out in close consultation with the Flonzaley Quartet, with whom he also collaborated on the *Concertino*) are largely not observed in audio recordings because they are exceptionally difficult and likely to produce a result that is audibly 'imperfect'. Nevertheless it is easy for another player to tell simply by listening if 'safer' fingerings have been taken. It is the *relationship* between physical gesture and sonic result that is critical, and to which Stravinsky was clearly especially sensitive. The opening 8-10 seconds of 'absolute silence' of Ligeti's quartet is usually cut from CDs to avoid confusing the listener, but the 'suspension' of time in that silence is essential to establishing the *Ex abrupto* material that follows. Perhaps it goes without saying, but we have followed all of the composers' instructions to the letter in this recording.

The richest choreographic dimension lies in the relationships activated *between* players (which cannot be explicitly indicated). In the opening Stravinsky piece, for example, each of the four players inhabits a completely different physical space: it is the *absence* of relationships between the players that is critical. In a workshop at the Royal Academy of Music in London some years ago we were exploring this differentiation with the audience and someone suggested that we follow all of the physical movements required by the piece without making any sound. The response to this brief experiment was an exclamation from the rear of the hall: "That's the piece!". This sort of choreographic play is absolutely central to Michael Finnissy's Second String Quartet, which explicitly references Haydn who loved to invert the 'normal' instrumental/performer roles, but perhaps the most striking example on the disc can be found at the opening of the Ligeti Quartet's second movement, where the corporate presentation of a transcendent slowly unfolding 'cloud' of sound is in extreme contrast to the high level of controlled but unsynchronised physical activity on the instruments.

In the pieces recorded here we would like to claim that the inter-relationships between the physical production of the sounds and the sounds themselves *are the music itself*: musical form transcends both the purely physical and the purely sonic.

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
(T.S Eliot: *Four Quartets*)²

² T.S. Eliot: 'Burnt Norton', first published 1936.

*...at the end of the first movement, there is one particular type of motion: until then there was a very fast motion, a kind of very energetic, compressed process, and that gradually comes to a standstill: it is like a kind of braking, or like an air-balloon that has been pricked with a needle and gradually collapses. These directions of motion are essential to my musical ideas. I mean all that in a metaphorical way: I think only in music and not in descriptions like that. But the collapse at the end of the first movement returns as a variant at the end of the second movement. It is like a rhyme between two lines of a poem.*⁹

Ligeti's attention to detail in coding a physical manifestation of these associative gestures in the instrumental parts is extraordinary, and is to our minds a vital key to the piece's extraordinary success and influence.

Michael Finnissy – Second String Quartet (2006-07)

Commissioned by the University of Wolverhampton and the Birmingham Conservatoire (Birmingham City University)

Written, like all my other string-quartet works of recent years, for the Kreutzer Quartet. The 'starting-point' was Haydn, more specifically the 'Lark' Quartet - traces of which surface most specifically in the central parts of this piece: as a Minuet and Adagio. It seems appropriate to give some consideration to the acknowledged progenitor of string-quartet writing at some point in one's life, and exploring tonal writing in an atonal way, or simply 'walking through' the landscape of 'early classicism', seeing what features particularly stick in the mind. There remains the question of how it is all going to fit together. There is also a passage, obvious enough in its slowly rising 'glissando' paying homage to Gloria Coates.

(Michael Finnissy)

⁹ Also from the 1969 pre-premiere Häusler interview.

Sculpture. Sculpture which is empty'.⁶ (The parallel with Eliot's Chinese jar, quoted above, is striking.) Ligeti repeatedly mentions the influence in this Quartet of great masterpieces of the quartet literature – especially Berg's *Lyric Suite* (1927) and Bartok's Fourth and Fifth String Quartets – but some forty years after its composition it is clear that in turn Ligeti's quartet has exerted an extraordinarily powerful influence on the quartet music that followed.

A few specific instances of his control of physical movement have been mentioned above, but in his pre-premiere interview in 1969 Ligeti provided a beautiful and very concise summary of the physical form of the piece:

*... in the first movement, abrupt, very sharp switches of fast and slow, in the second movement the same material slowly, in the third movement the same material broken up, as it were, into a kind of grill or grid system. The fourth movement is a very brutal movement, presto and minaccioso, that is to say, very fast and very threatening. Everything that happened before is now crammed together. In astronomy there are dwarf stars: the same mass that is contained in our sun is compressed into a millionth part of the volume and has an incredible density, but it is still the same mass. And the fifth movement – in great contrast to the compressed fourth – spreads itself out just, just ... like a cloud.*⁷

In a later interview with Péter Várnai, Ligeti observed that 'In general, my works abound in images, visual associations, associations of colours, optical effects and forms' and that 'the experiences of listening and seeing come very close'.⁸

⁶ This interview was first published in *Music and Musicians*, 263 (July 1974)

⁷ Interview with Josef Häusler, Baden-Baden, 14/12/1969. Translated by Sarah Soulsby in *Ligeti in Conversation* (Eulenberg: London, 1983)

⁸ Interview with Péter Várnai, 1978. Translated by Gabor Schabert in *Ligeti in Conversation* (Eulenberg: London, 1983)

Igor Stravinsky – *Three Pieces for String Quartet* (1914)

I – crotchet=126 (1928 title 'Danse')

II – crotchet=76 (1928 title 'Excentrique')

III – minim=40 (1928 title 'Cantique')

Although these pieces acquired titles when Stravinsky orchestrated them in 1928 (with the addition of a fourth piece and under the global title 'Quatre Etudes') all of the information in the original quartet pieces is on the score in the form of direct instructions to the players.

In the first piece the first violin is directed to use the whole length of the bow for the whole movement – in some very awkward patterns. In addition, Stravinsky places the material high on the lowest string, but only at a medium dynamic (against natural inclination, and usually ignored). The second violin uses only the heel of the bow throughout, alternating directions, but always playing very loud and dry. The viola is almost frozen in one position using very long slow bows, and the cellist, alternating between loud and quiet plucked notes is very active and repetitive. The only meeting point is the viola's left-hand pizzicato and the cello. This is 'anti-chamber music'.

The second piece, described by Stravinsky as a portrait of the English musical hall comedian Little Tich, works in starkly contrasted blocks. (Little Tich – 4'6" tall – was best known for his 'Big Boots' act with 28" 'slapshoes', consisting of numerous pratfalls.³) In addition to inverting the viola and second violin briefly, Stravinsky directs the cello to make a 'strangled sound' at the end of the middle section and asks the two violins to play in unison a fingering that nobody in their right mind would choose to do – even on their own, in a practice room.

The third piece is almost completely locked together. The blending of sound in the very quiet 'chanting' sections is enhanced by having all four players bow 'sul tasto' (above the fingerboard) which reduces the timbral differentiation between the voices by taking some of the upper partials off the sound.

³ A number of film versions of Little Tich acts have been posted on YouTube.

Witold Lutosławski – String Quartet (1964)

Introductory Movement –

Main Movement

(The two movements here run together without a break)

Lutosławski had originally intended to present this piece to the players as a set of four parts with no score to show the relationships between them (standard publishing practice in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but not for complex 20th-century pieces). It seems the plan had been to find a way of helping players negotiate the conflicting demands between the differentiation of individual instrumental ‘voices’, and ‘being together’. However, the LaSalle quartet, who premiered the piece in 1965 found the absence of a score problematic and requested one (which Lutosławski had prepared by his wife).

Lutosławski’s ambivalence towards the ‘sort of score’ that resulted is expressed in correspondence with Walter Levin of the LaSalle Quartet. He observes:

...one of the basic techniques used in my piece is that, in many sections of the form, each particular player is supposed not to know what the others are doing, or, at least, to perform his part as if he were to hear nothing except that which he is playing himself. In such sections he must not bother about whether he is behind or ahead of the others.⁴

The parts Lutosławski created have an elaborate plan of military-style ‘need-to-know-basis’ instructions, where what would normally be considered vital information, such as who starts a ‘section’, is *withheld* from some, or occasionally even all players. (During his military service he had trained as a signalman and radio operator.) From one perspective it would seem that the ‘need to know’ instructions disempower the players, but Lutosławski explicitly and repeatedly counselled the performers he worked with on the piece that he wanted them to play like soloists as well as chamber musicians. What the parts represent is thus a detailed coding of a chamber music

⁴ This correspondence is printed in the score (published by Chester Music).

aesthetic that shifts between areas of clear corporate identity, various duos and trios, and areas of individuality.

Lutosławski tells us almost nothing about the expressive dimension of the music but at the climax of the Main Movement he shifts from using non-expressive descriptions of pacing to a series of sections titled *Appassionato* (16’56”), *Presto* and then *Funebre* (20’56”).

György Ligeti – String Quartet No. 2 (1968)

... Allegro nervoso

Sostenuto, molto calmo

Come un meccanismo di precisione

Presto furioso, brutale, tumultoso

Allegro con delicatezza – stets sehr mild – / – always very mildly

Ligeti’s love of gesture and instrumental colour is as evident in this quartet as in any of his orchestral pieces. Ten years after its premiere this was seen by Arnold Whittall as a weakness:

The Quartet indicates a whole-hearted relief in the rediscovery of an Expressionistic vocabulary, but Ligeti’s virtuosity as an exploiter of instrumental colour can lead him to use that colour as a substitute for more substantial content, and this work, for all the skill of its formal articulation over a span of more than 21 minutes, does seem to squander its exciting diversity of tone in a manner that prefers gesture to argument.⁵

Ligeti has often described his particular stamp of musical expressionism as ‘deep-frozen’. Like Stravinsky he loathed ‘romantic expression’ and in an interview with Adrian Jack from 1974 he described his aim as ‘To make from time a kind of

⁵ Arnold Whittall: ‘Score Review’ in *Music Review* vol 40, 1979