

NAXOS

Ernő
DOHNÁNYI

Piano Quintets Nos. 1 and 2

Gottlieb Wallisch, Piano • Ensō Quartet



Ernő Dohnányi (1877-1960)

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Ernő Dohnányi was born in 1877 in Poszony (the modern Slovakian capital, Bratislava). His father, an amateur musician, taught in Poszony at the Catholic Gymnasium, where Bartók's widowed mother was to be employed and where Dohnányi and Bartók were both pupils. Four years the latter's senior, Dohnányi had organ lessons and instruction in music theory from Karl Forstner, organist at the Catholic cathedral, and began to enjoy early and precocious success. In 1894, rather than study in Vienna, as might have been expected, he chose instead to become a student at the Budapest Music Academy (now the Franz Liszt Academy). There he was a piano pupil of István Thomán, a former pupil of Liszt and principal piano teacher at the Academy, where his composition teacher was the German composer Hans Koessler, a cousin of Max Reger and admirer of Brahms. Bartók was to study under the same teachers, but Dohnányi, while sharing Bartók's later prowess as a pianist, was more strongly influenced by the German school of composition.

In 1897 Dohnányi prepared for his début as a pianist in Berlin by brief study with Eugen d'Albert. He went on to give concerts in Germany and Austria, with an invitation to London from Hans Richter and a triumphant performance of Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto*. Thereafter he embarked on concert tours throughout Europe, in Russia and in the United States, establishing himself as a virtuoso to equal Liszt. In 1905 he was invited by Joachim to join the staff of the Berlin Musikhochschule, where he taught until 1915, when, with the Great War now under way, he returned to Hungary, teaching at the Liszt Academy, giving encouragement to a younger generation

of Hungarian composers, and doing much to reform systems of musical instruction in the country. In 1919 he became President and Director of the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra, a position he would hold until 1944. He was also appointed Director of the Liszt Academy, but was dismissed just a few months later by a new political regime.

Dohnányi's career as a conductor and pianist continued in Hungary and abroad, particularly in the United States, where, in 1925, he served as Principal Conductor of the New York State Symphony Orchestra. In 1928 he returned to the Liszt Academy, of which he was to become director, for a second time, from 1934 until his resignation, for political reasons, in 1943. In 1931 he was appointed Music Director of Hungarian Radio. After his resignation in 1944 Dohnányi moved to Austria, a step that brought later criticism from his opponents and affected his post-war concert career. While he had been strongly against the antisemitic policies introduced into Hungary through German intervention, he had no sympathy with the left-wing forces that were to come to power in Hungary after the war. In 1948 he moved to England and then to Argentina, and finally to the United States, where, from 1949, he was composer-in-residence at Florida State University. He died in New York in 1960 during a recording session, at a time when his reputation was starting to recover from the political attacks that had been made on him in the aftermath of the war.

Keith Anderson

Dohnányi's compositional style is rooted in the Austro-German classical tradition. While he utilized Hungarian folk music, he was never a nationalist composer in the manner of Bartók or Kodály. His catalogue of works includes three operas, a ballet and also three major choral works. Otherwise large-scale abstract pieces dominate – two symphonies, two concertos each for piano and violin, *Konzertstück for Cello and Orchestra* [Naxos 8.554468] and *Variations on a Nursery Song* for piano that remains his best-known work [Naxos 8.572303]. Piano music features prominently, while his chamber output includes sonatas for violin and cello, a *Piano Quartet*, two *Piano Quintets* and three *String Quartets* [with the first and third on Naxos 8.572569].

The *First Piano Quintet* was the teenage Dohnányi's first published work (though it had been preceded by a *String Quartet*, *String Sextet* and *Piano Quartet*). Composed in 1895, it gained appreciative comments from Brahms – no doubt for influences that, while obvious, are still unfaithfully well deployed. The composer took part in the première in Budapest on 16th June 1895 (while Brahms himself is believed to have arranged its performance in Vienna shortly afterward), and its publication in 1902 helped spread Dohnányi's reputation at the start of the new century. It remains among the more impressive Op. 1s by a composer of significance.

The first movement sets off with a theme of simmering restlessness, soon gaining in intensity before a spacious transition into the more relaxed second theme with its Brahmsian interplay of piano and strings. There is no exposition repeat, the development drawing aspects of both themes into a cumulative span as resourceful motivically as it is sustained expressively. At its height the reprise is launched, though now the first theme quickly makes way for its successor – leading to a dramatic unison statement of the first theme's opening gesture, and then a coda that deftly restores the music's underlying poise before heading into the decisive closing bars.

The second movement again looks to Brahms in its intermingling of scherzo and intermezzo, the main theme unfolding nimbly if often fugitively as a dialogue between piano and strings. The central trio focusses on a warmly expressive theme which provides a measure of relative calm, but the initial activity soon resumes as the music pursues a course very much as before prior to a coda which dovetails elements of both themes and ends in an unexpected repose.

The third movement begins with a heartfelt melody that is heard on cello, before being taken up by the other strings, over a flowing piano accompaniment. This gains gradually in ardour before reaching a pause, from where commences a more impulsive theme which brings some of the most intricate harmonic writing in the whole piece. This, in its turn, spills over into the resumption of the main theme – soon building up to a passionate climax that draws in all of the instruments, and which presently subsides into a tranquil though undeniably poetic coda.

The fourth movement commences with a rumbustious

theme whose rhythmic syncopations add much to its character, and duly finds contrast with a suavely expressive melody whose Brahmsian credentials are once more to the fore. What unfolds as a sonata-rondo now takes in a methodical *fugato* for strings and piano in various combinations, before returning to the main theme and a modified reprise of its successor. An extended coda touches on aspects of both themes, which latter is made the focus of a gradual build-up to the exuberant final bars.

Composed in 1914, the *Second Piano Quintet* amply confirms the incremental as well as subtle evolution that typifies Dohnányi's music as a whole. Premiered in Berlin by the composer and the Klinger Quartet on 12th November 1914, the unorthodox yet convincing formal trajectory of its three movements, allied to the understated though questioning nature of its tonal thinking, points to awareness of, without being beholden to, ongoing developments in European music. Still underestimated, it ranks among the most important works of Dohnányi's 'middle period'.

The first movement opens with a modally inflected theme whose harmonic ambiguity is to pervade much of what follows. An agile rejoinder from the piano sees a brief though stormy transition into a second theme which is more stable in its harmonic profile and more relaxed in overall demeanour, with the exposition rounded off in like manner. The development gets going with the piano's earlier rejoinder, heading into an extensive and resourceful discussion of both main themes. The reprise is largely taken up with a spacious revisiting of the second theme, its predecessor returning only in a coda that brings about the understated conclusion.

The second movement is an intermezzo whose two sharply contrasted ideas exude charm and inquisitiveness in equal measure. At its centre of this through-composed piece is a trio section whose easy eloquence is likewise disrupted by an almost Mendelssohnian animation, before the piano restores a measure of stability with its allusions back to the opening idea. The initial theme briefly resumes to bring about the calm though expressively ambivalent ending.

The third movement is also the most extended. It begins with a pensive introduction in which the strings enter calmly in a slow fugue, the music all the while increasing in its intensity prior to the piano's solemn first appearance with a hymn-like theme which is soon taken up by the strings in a passage of nobly wrought polyphony. This winds down to a sombre recollection of the work's opening theme, from where the tempo picks up rapidly into a heated discussion of the fugal theme then an intense build-up on the hymn-like theme. This soon culminates in a transition on solo cello to an eloquent restatement of the fugal theme, now radiating a new sense of affirmation, but this in turn makes way for a limpid response from piano and then a final allusion back to the work's initial theme as the music reaches its calmly resigned close.

Richard Whitehouse

Gottlieb Wallisch

Photo: Stephan Polzer



Born to a Viennese family of musicians, Gottlieb Wallisch studied in Vienna, Berlin and Paris. At the age of sixteen he won first prize in the prestigious international piano competition The Stravinsky Awards in the USA. He was a finalist in the 1999 Queen Elisabeth International Piano Competition in Brussels and at the XXI. Concours Clara Haskil in Vevey in 2005. A concert in 1996 under the baton of Yehudi Menuhin was the starting point of his international career. Since then, he has been performing with orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, Festival Strings Lucerne, and the Camerata Salzburg under distinguished conductors, including Sinopoli, Marriner, Foster, Davies, Hogwood, Weller, Entremont and Haselböck, and appearing at leading festivals and in major concert-halls (Salzburg Festival, Lucerne Festival, Klavierfestival Ruhr, Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Tonhalle Zurich, Musikhalle Hamburg, Singapore Arts Festival, among many others). In 2010 Gottlieb Wallisch was appointed professor of piano at the Geneva University of Music. In 2013 he served as visiting professor at the Franz-Liszt Music Academy in Budapest. He was named a Steinway Artist in early 2012.

Ensō Quartet

Photo: Jurgen Frank



Founded at Yale University in 1999 and based in New York City since 2007, the Ensō String Quartet has, in a decade and a half, risen to the front rank of string ensembles. Praised by the *Washington Post* for its “glorious sonorities” and “smoldering power – half honey, half molten lava... full-throated dramatic intensity”, the Ensō has won numerous awards, including top prizes at the Concert Artists Guild competition and the Banff International String Quartet Competition. Apart from a busy touring and teaching schedule, the quartet has made a number of critically acclaimed recordings for the Naxos label. The Ensō’s

members were all drawn to the string quartet repertoire because of its richness and diversity, and the ensemble regularly performs the string quartet classics, but also champions lesser-known works that deserve to be heard, along with much contemporary music, including works that it has commissioned. The ensemble also performs its own arrangements of 16th-century Renaissance music. World premières include commissioned works by the New Zealand composer Dame Gillian Whitehead, and by the American composer Kurt Stallmann. The Ensō also gave the world premiere of Joan Tower’s *Piano Quintet*, with the composer at the keyboard. Recent seasons have seen them perform in major concert halls across the USA such as Carnegie Hall, the Library of Congress and the Kennedy Center, as well as on tours of Canada, Central and South America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. The Ensō was awarded the Guarneri String Quartet Award for Artistic Excellence by Chamber Music America. The ensemble’s name is derived from the Japanese Zen painting of the circle, which represents many things: perfection and imperfection, the moment of chaos that is creation, the emptiness of the void, the endless circle of life, and the fullness of the spirit.

Few composers have achieved greater success with their first published composition than Ernő Dohnányi with his *Piano Quintet in C minor, Op. 1*. Written in 1895 and praised highly by Brahms, who is believed to have organised a Viennese performance shortly afterwards, it heralded the emergence of a major new talent. The harmonic ambiguity of the 1914 *Piano Quintet in E flat minor* points to the composer's awareness of ongoing developments in European music. Still underestimated, it ranks among the most important works of Dohnányi's 'middle period'.

Ernő
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(1877-1960)



**Piano Quintet No. 1
in C minor, Op. 1**

29:20

- 1 I. Allegro 8:27**
- 2 II. Scherzo: Allegro vivace –
Trio 5:04**
- 3 III. Adagio, quasi andante 7:23**
- 4 IV. Finale: Allegro animato –
Allegro 8:26**

Piano Quintet No. 2

in E flat minor, Op. 26 24:55

- 5 I. Allegro non troppo 9:05**
- 6 II. Intermezzo: Allegretto 5:08**
- 7 III. Moderato –
Tempo del primo pezzo 10:42**

Gottlieb Wallisch, Piano

Enso String Quartet

Maureen Nelson, Violin I • John Marcus, Violin II

Melissa Reardon, Viola • Richard Belcher, Cello

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