
Busch String Quartet
BRAHMS String Quartet
No.3 in B-flat
Biddulph
RECORDINGS

Busch String Quartet

Tracks 1 - 5:
Adolf Busch (violin I), Gösta Andreasson / Bruno Straumann* (violin II), Karl Doktor / Hugo Gottesmann* (viola) & Herman Busch (cello)

Tracks 6 - 9:
Rudolf Serkin (piano), Adolf Busch (violin), Hugo Gottesmann (viola) & Herman Busch (cello)

1		**Haydn** Menuetto from String Quartet in D minor, Op.103 recorded on 25 May 1942; Columbia 71479-D (XCO 32874)	4:09
		Brahms String Quartet No.3 in B-flat, Op.67* recorded on 17 & 21 May 1949; Columbia LX 1262/65 & 1266S (CAX 10511/19)	
2	I	Vivace	7:09
3	II	Andante	7:51
4	III	Agitato (Allegretto non troppo)	7:49
5	IV	Poco allegretto con variazioni	10:47
		Brahms Piano Quartet No.1 in G minor, Op.25 recorded on 25 & 26 May 1949; Columbia LX 1217/21 (CAX 10520/29)	
6	I	Allegro	13:02
7	II	Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo - Trio: Animato	8:29
8	III	Andante con moto	9:12
9	IV	Rondo alla Zingarese: Presto	7:46

The greatest string quartet ensemble of the 20th century began their career together in Vienna in 1912, under the title Vienna Konzertverein Quartet. After a slight hiatus caused by Adolf Busch's move to Berlin, they came together again in that city in 1919 as the Busch Quartet. During the 1920s and early 1930s, their summer rehearsals were held in the little town of Holzdorf, where they were guests of a rich industrialist. From 1 April 1933, having witnessed the Nazi boycott of Jewish shops in Berlin, they based themselves in Basel, Switzerland, where the prescient Busch had settled in 1927, realising where his native country was heading. Their HMV records made in London spread their fame around the world. The November 1938 Schubert recordings showed the superlative standard they had achieved but with another war looming, Busch said sadly: 'Now we've reached almost 100 percent and we have to stop.'

On 1 November 1939 Adolf and Frieda Busch emigrated to New York, along with their daughter Irene, her two young daughters and her husband Rudolf Serkin, Busch's sonata partner, who was almost like an adopted son. The other Quartet members made their way to the United States with difficulty. For second violinist Gösta Andreasson, a national of neutral Sweden, the journey was relatively easy and he managed to bring his wife and son. Worst off was violist Karl Doktor, who left his worldly goods in London and his family in Lucerne (he would not see them again for seven years). Banking on a short war, he set off with the Andreassons and cellist Herman Busch (Adolf's younger brother), Herman's wife Lotte and daughter Trudy, hoping to sail from Genoa. But being

Jewish, Lotte and Karl could not travel through Italy, so the Andreassons left as planned, while the others took a hair-raising trip through Spain. From there they caught a plane for Lisbon but the pilot overshot the destination, found himself heading out to sea and made an emergency landing in a field. They caught the last American-bound ship out of Lisbon by the skin of their teeth. The next obstacle was a German U-boat. With the passengers sitting in the lifeboats, waiting for the order to abandon ship, the captain managed to convince the submarine commander of his vessel's neutrality.

The Quartet resumed their career in the U.S., but on 1 December 1940, Busch had a heart attack during a recital with Serkin, so his colleagues had to take orchestral jobs. By May 1941, he was practising the violin, and could join Frieda and the Serkins in making the customary trip to Canada, so that they could re-enter the U.S. and take out naturalisation papers. He also felt able to begin fulfilling a contract which had been offered more than a year earlier by the Columbia Recording Corporation. On 28 May the Quartet congregated at Liederkranz Hall in New York for their first recording session in 27 months.

The Haydn Minuet included here was made in May 1942 as the filler side for Beethoven's First 'Rasumovsky', and has a special place in the Quartet's discography. Busch took Haydn's quartets seriously. Rather than hold to Joachim's 'historical' ordering of programmes, he often ended a concert with one. To judge from contemporary accounts, his Haydn was large-scale and masculine, light and airy where necessary but giving the opening movements their full value. Many hearers attested to the breadth of slow movements, the pesante quality

of minuets and the wit of finales in his interpretations. 'He really laughed in the last movements', his pupil Dea Gombrich recalled. Sadly there is little recorded evidence, as HMV allotted the Haydn Quartet Society project to the under-powered Quatuor Pro Arte - who misled the producer Fred Gaisberg that they knew all the quartets and sometimes had to sightread them. Hearing Herman Busch's probing playing on the Schneider Quartet performances of Op.76 only reinforces the feeling of frustration that the Busch ensemble did not leave us any of this set. Although a 1951 performance of Op.74 No.2 may exist, all that definitely survives of undisputed Haydn by Busch is this single minuet, albeit a superb one - the composer's last essay in the form from his unfinished quartet. After discussing the Pro Arte's elegant style, the Haydn scholar H. C. Robbins Landon said of the Busch players' way with this minuet: 'It's another world. They weren't interested in elegance. I can see Busch saying: "What's that? I don't want to know about it." And so he tackles this quartet as if it were a ferocious piece of stone. It's just amazing. And of course he's quite right because it's that kind of quartet. It's indeed a major breakthrough even for a man who's been writing quartets for 40 years. There's this curious granite-like, sombre quality that the Busch [Quartet] in my opinion brilliantly bring out. And this is another world.'

Sadly, a recording ban enforced by the American Federation of Musicians, from August 1942 to November 1944, scotched further discs of the Busch Quartet's most effective line-up and contributed to its dissolution. Doktor became unwell and was replaced for a year by the much-loved Lotte Hammerschlag, maintaining the tradition of having a Viennese violist in the Quartet. After

another brief hiatus, the Busch brothers started again in 1946 with the distinguished Viennese violinist Hugo Gottesmann playing the viola and Ernest Drucker from Cologne as second violinist. As the latter's wife did not like him touring, in 1947 he resigned in favour of the young Basel player Bruno Straumann, a pupil of Andreasson, Carl Flesch and Adolf Busch. The Quartet continued until the leader's retirement at the end of 1951. In London in May 1949 the four gave their final BBC broadcasts and made their last Abbey Road recordings. Two EMI friends, producer-conductor Lawrance Collingwood and Leonard Smith of the International Artistes Department, attended the sessions to ensure that they were happy with the new medium of magnetic tape; and they set down magnificent accounts of Brahms's B-flat Quartet, Op.67, and G-minor Piano Quartet, Op.25, with Serkin at his most leonine, engineered by Harold Davidson and Anthony Griffith respectively. EMI still used the new technology in five-minute segments, however, and it was not until the Quartet toured Germany, in February 1951, that Busch and his colleagues could appreciate the advantages of longer takes.

Although Adolf Busch missed knowing Brahms personally, all his teachers had been in the composer's circle and he was acquainted with a number of Brahms's close friends. When he performed the Violin and Double Concerto or the chamber music, it seemed he had been born to play Brahms. Especially noteworthy was his feeling for tempo, evident in the string quartets. His recordings could serve as templates for any ensemble struggling to solve the problems of Brahms's tempo relationships. The C-minor Quartet is interpreted with

expansive authority but also with rhythmic drive and transparency of counterpoint in the faster movements. The *Romanze*, by contrast, is breathed with an almost holy rapture, at a daringly slow speed. The overall shaping of the A-minor Quartet is masterly; but best of all, from the standpoint of judging tempo, is the B flat - the most idiosyncratic of Brahms's quartets but also the finest. The first movement, almost like a scherzo in mood, is given the right relaxed, outdoor character, with a spring in its step. In the *Andante*, one of Brahms's most beautiful melodies is sung quite slowly, with a flexible but forward-moving pulse. The third movement, highlighting Gottesmann's fairly light viola tone, is taken at a trim tempo; and the final variations are launched relatively soberly, with trenchant rhythm. It is all too easy to make this lovely work sound like a succession of medium-tempo movements, a fault the Busch players avoid.

In Brahms, Busch could stretch a Romantic point while staying within a Classical framework. The hymn-like *Andante con moto* of the G-minor Piano Quartet is a movement in which many ensembles get bogged down. Busch and his colleagues, however, phrase the main theme gloriously, in broad spans, letting it breathe as if a single singer is at work. This phrasing, an object lesson in cantabile, also displays these players' mastery of portamento, a device often misunderstood and neglected today. When it comes to the scintillating Hungarian finale, we meet another aspect of the Busch-Serkin magic. In his formative years, Busch had many contacts with Clara Schumann's disciples Lazzaro Uzielli (the teacher of Adolf's brother Fritz) and Carl Friedberg, and he helped to shape the clarity of Serkin's Brahms style. For all their admiration of the tonally opulent,

legato style, so ably propounded by Artur Schnabel and Edwin Fischer, Busch and Serkin looked more to the leaner Clara Schumann line when developing their interpretations of Brahms's chamber music with piano.

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Johannes Brahms

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