

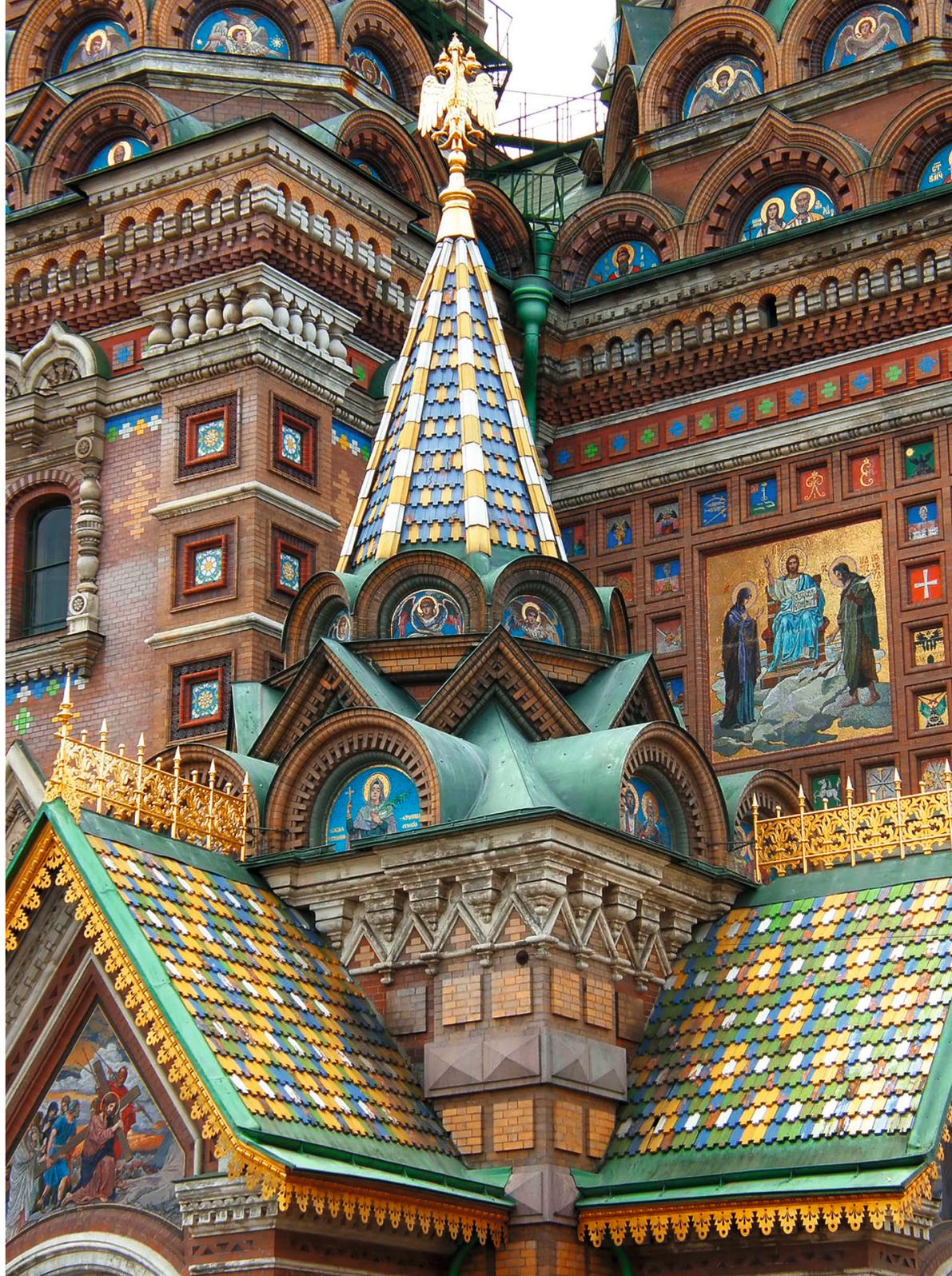
NAXOS

Sergey Ivanovich
TANEYEV

Complete String Quartets • 4

String Quartets
Nos. 6 and 9

Carpe Diem
String Quartet



Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev (1856-1915)

String Quartets Nos. 6 and 9

In western countries, Sergey Taneyev's reputation is still largely based on his musical scholarship, his teaching, and his accomplishments as a pianist. As a composer, he is more admired for being a meticulous craftsman than a gifted melodist, and thus his output, which is not large, continues to stand in the shadow of his teacher, Tchaikovsky, as well as his students, Rachmaninov and Scriabin.

Taneyev is widely known as a scholar of massive erudition, and certainly one of the greatest experts of his time in the study of counterpoint. He showed interest in many subjects, and was acquainted with the greatest Russian writers, including Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy. In the 1870s, he travelled to Western Europe and made acquaintance with writers and composers there. And he was a devoted promoter of Esperanto, even setting texts in the synthetic language to music. A teetotaler who avoided tobacco, he lived an upstanding life devoid of scandal, and was blissfully unaware when Tolstoy's wife became deeply infatuated with him.

It is fair to say that Taneyev's music is more respected than loved. His most ambitious work is his sole opera *Oresteia*. Although a success at its premiere and greatly admired by Rimsky-Korsakov, it has fallen out of the repertory and its only recording is out of print. His two choral cantatas (standing as the first and last of his 36 opus numbers), are superb combinations of Russian aesthetic and extraordinarily skilled counterpoint. Of his four symphonies, only the last (also the only one he saw fit to publish) is somewhat known, but it was the piece Rimsky-Korsakov told Stravinsky to study when he assigned the younger composer to write a symphony.

Tchaikovsky called Taneyev the "Russian Bach" because of his devotion to counterpoint, and his extreme compositional care has also led to him being dubbed the "Russian Brahms" (although ironically, he claimed to dislike the music of that composer).

It is in the field of chamber music where Taneyev's compositional voice has most successfully risen out of its relative obscurity. Two works with piano, the quintet and

the trio, are considered masterpieces of their genres. His most ubiquitous genre, however, was the string quartet. Both Tchaikovsky and Brahms only wrote three quartets. Taneyev completed nine. Given his thin overall output, this is indeed a large proportion of the whole. And it is in the quartets where the diversity of his technique can be most strongly observed.

There are actually eleven works in total. Both the first and last composed were left incomplete, with two movements apiece. The second through fourth were not published in his lifetime. All five of these were first published long after his death, in 1952. The three completed quartets were assigned the misleading numbers 7-9, as the six he released with opus numbers were already known as Nos. 1-6.

Of these three unpublished quartets, *String Quartet No. 9 in A major*, composed in 1883, is the most impressive. It is an exceedingly romantic work with lush melodies and Russian folk elements, and Taneyev's craftsmanship is on full display. The four movements remarkably have almost exactly the same duration. The piece has special interest because of Tchaikovsky's commentary, preserved in his handwriting on the manuscript score. The older composer was complimentary toward the first three movements, especially the *Scherzo*, but more critical of the *Finale*. Taneyev donated the score to the Tchaikovsky museum in 1901 because of the presence of these handwritten notes.

The first movement begins with a broadly arching, memorable theme in the first violin. This melody dominates much of the movement, but there is also a more active second theme first heard in E major. It contains distinctive leaps and is accompanied by rapid trill-like figures. Taneyev's skill is evident in the excellent development section, which begins with the main theme played by the cello in A minor. After a full reprise, Taneyev ends the movement with a gentle, quiet coda.

The second movement is a songful E major *Andante* in 6/8 time. There is a more passionate middle section

beginning in C sharp minor, and the movement reaches a full-hearted climax before subsiding to its close. The *Scherzo* in F sharp minor is the best movement, as Tchaikovsky observed. It has a distinctly Slavonic energy reminiscent of Dvořák's examples of the genre. There is an extremely tender contrasting *Trio* section in F sharp major. Tchaikovsky's criticisms notwithstanding, the *Finale* is a highly effective, exuberant *rondo* whose main theme is driven by slightly disconcerting, unexpected accents and syncopations. Contrast is provided by a more subdued central section in D major.

String Quartet No. 6 in B flat major, Op. 19, is the composer's last completed work in the genre. Published in 1905, long after Tchaikovsky's death, it is a masterful, assured piece. Taneyev indulges in both harmonic and structural adventures. Here, however, the melodic invention is more austere and less immediately accessible. Taneyev compensates for this by using a cyclical structure, in which the themes of the first movement, made memorable on their first appearances, are transformed in the later movements.

The main theme of the first movement, with its rising third and falling seventh, becomes the germ of not just the movement, but the entire quartet. Taneyev emphasizes its importance by initially harmonizing it with a surprisingly harsh dissonance. The continuation of the theme makes much use of a "dotted" long-short rhythm. Of no less importance is the second theme, which is first announced in the remote key of G flat major. A directional inversion of the main theme, it is more lyrical, and will eventually be transformed into the principal melody of the slow movement.

The development section is superb, and gives full attention to both themes. The movement's argument remains coherent throughout its 11-minute length. As in the A major quartet, Taneyev ends this first movement quietly.

The slow movement in G minor lives up to its *Adagio serio* marking. Even the major key of the intensely passionate and energetic middle section does little to lighten the overwhelmingly serious mood. Although the main melody's derivation from the lyrical second theme of the first movement is clear, its character is completely transformed into a slow and melancholy march laden with pathos.

Taneyev replaces the traditional *Scherzo* with a movement in G major entitled *Giga*. The character of that dance is reflected in the 6/8 metre and the fast tempo. The contour of the jig theme is derived from the ubiquitous main theme of the first movement. It is marked by playful and subtle syncopation. At times it sounds like a very sophisticated barnyard dance with its use of *pizzicato* and occasional drones. A more tranquil middle section beginning in B minor is distinguished by a drone-like broken octave passed between the instruments. The movement ends surprisingly quietly.

The finale alternates three times between the initial *Allegro moderato* and a faster *Allegro vivace*. The former is distinguished by a rising chromatic melodic line and the latter by a more scurrying, angular motion. In the faster music, the first movement's main theme gradually emerges. The fast sections also enclose a *scherzando* passage that first appears in G major, a key used in the two middle movements. In the last alternation, the music from the faster section invades the *Allegro moderato*, and the final fast section itself is now marked *Presto*. In this concluding peroration, the first movement's main theme becomes more and more prominent until it dominates the closing measures, rounding off the piece in a most satisfying, unifying manner.

Kelly Dean Hansen

Carpe Diem String Quartet

Charles Wetherbee, Violin I • Amy Galluzzo, Violin II • Korine Fujiwara, Viola • Carol Ou, Cello



Founded in 2005, Carpe Diem String Quartet has become nationally recognized for its innovative and electrifying performances. They are four-time recipients of the prestigious PNC Foundation's ArtsAlive Awards, the only quartet in America to attain such recognition. Carpe Diem is dedicated to forging a new identity for chamber music by championing the music of living composers, bringing to light overlooked gems of the chamber music repertoire, and undertaking daring, creative projects with other artists and art forms. Carpe Diem has released eight CDs, and is nearing the completion of an ambitious project to record the complete Taneyev quartets, with performances earning praise from *Classical CD Review*, *Fanfare*, *American Record Guide*, and *The Strad*, among others. A history of diverse programmatic partnerships with artists such as singer/songwriter Willy Porter, bandoneón player Peter Soave, klezmer clarinetist David Krakauer, cellist Yo Yo Ma, Chinese pipa player Yihan Chen, and world master of the Persian santoor Dariush Saghafi, testifies to the expanse of their vision. In addition to presenting two performance series each year, Seize the Music and Free Family Concerts, Carpe Diem has developed outreach programmes that make high-quality arts experiences accessible to diverse audiences regardless of means and circumstance: Music from the Start (serving Head Start centres), Music Goes to School, MusiCare (serving institutional health facilities), Musicare/MusicAccess (serving juveniles in maximum-security facilities), and eStage (free, streaming educational programmes). The resident ensemble for Columbus Dance Theatre, their joint project The String Machine, was aired on WOSU-PBS in 2007-2008 and nominated for an Emmy. www.carpediemstringquartet.com

The Carpe Diem String Quartet is grateful for the unflagging support of its donors and friends to help ensure the completion of this ongoing project. The Quartet would also like to thank the Tufts University and Ohio Wesleyan University Departments of Music for the use of their beautiful recital halls.

A pupil of Tchaikovsky, who called him the ‘Russian Bach’, Sergey Taneyev is best known today for his four symphonies, although he also composed a sizeable body of chamber music, including nine complete *String Quartets*. *Quartet No. 9* is a memorably melodic work, while the beautifully crafted *Quartet No. 6*, his last completed quartet, is rather more austere, though marked by a playful *Jig*, and even more masterful in construction.

Sergey Ivanovich
TANEYEV

(1856-1915)

Complete String Quartets • 4

String Quartet No. 9 in A major (1883) 31:03

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Allegro moderato | 8:35 |
| 2 | II. Andante | 6:41 |
| 3 | III. Scherzo: Allegro con fuoco | 7:34 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro giocoso | 8:14 |

String Quartet No. 6 in B flat major, Op. 19 (1905) 34:29

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Allegro giusto | 11:18 |
| 6 | II. Adagio serioso | 8:38 |
| 7 | III. Giga: Molto vivace | 6:03 |
| 8 | IV. Allegro moderato | 8:41 |

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