

Artur LEMBA

**CHAMBER MUSIC, VOLUME TWO:
WORKS FOR STRING QUARTET AND PIANO**

STRING QUARTET IN F SHARP MINOR

PIANO QUARTET IN C MINOR

PIANO QUINTET IN D MAJOR

**M4gnet String Quartet
Sten Lassmann, piano**

ARTUR LEMBA: COMPLETE CHAMBER MUSIC – VOLUME TWO, MUSIC FOR STRING QUARTET AND PIANO

by Sten Lassmann

The talent and achievements of Artur Lemba (1885–1963) are unique in the history of Estonian music. He is the only person in Estonian cultural history to have achieved a high professional standard and international recognition in three categories – as composer, performer and pedagogue. Lemba had a fourth activity, too, one of more local prominence: he was a music-critic, writing vigorously in the 1920s and 1930s, acquiring the reputation of being an aesthetic reactionary who tirelessly disparaged modernist tendencies in the work of other composers.

Lemba belongs to the first generation of Estonian professional composers, along with Rudolf Tobias (1873–1918), Artur Kapp (1878–1952), Mart Saar (1882–1963) and Heino Eller (1887–1970), all of whom studied at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. His father, Gustav Lemba, having been a piano-tuner, one might say that he was born to the instrument. His elder brother, Theodor (1876–1962) – the very first professional concert pianist of Estonian stock – successfully auditioned for Anton Rubinstein and, from 1892, studied at the St Petersburg Conservatoire with Felix Blumenfeld. Artur followed in his brother's footsteps and entered the Conservatoire, first to study piano in 1899 and, from 1902, also composition with Anatoly Lyadov, Alexander Glazunov and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. In 1908, he graduated with a gold medal in piano performance and a silver medal in composition. He was also awarded the Anton Rubinstein Prize, which took the form of a 'Schröder' concert grand, and performed his own First Piano Concerto (1905, rev. 1910) in the graduation concert – where the young Sergei Prokofiev played the bass drum in the orchestra.¹ In the same year,

¹ According to Lemba, Prokofiev is said to have had enjoyed it; the event is corroborated by Prokofiev in his diary (*Sergey Prokofiev Diaries 1907–1914*, Volume One: *Prodigious Youth*, Faber & Faber, London, 2006, p. 54).

Lemba was invited to join the St Petersburg Conservatoire as a piano teacher and in 1915, when he was aged only 30, was appointed professor in 1915. He was a highly regarded concert pianist who frequently gave solo recitals in St Petersburg. In 1920, upon returning to the newly independent Estonia,² Lemba became the first piano professor at the newly established Tallinn Higher School of Music (known from 1923 as the Tallinn Conservatoire, and now the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre), where he continued working for the rest of his life.

His compositions include four operas, two symphonies, five piano concertos, a large volume of instrumental chamber music for various ensembles – almost all genres from duo to octet are represented – and solo and choral songs. Lemba was a staunch conservative as a composer: no element characteristic of any modernist trend of the twentieth century can be found in his work; similarly, the search for a national musical language was not his particular goal. He composed the first opera (*Sabrina*; 1905), the first symphony (1908) and the first completed piano concerto (1905–10)³ in Estonian music history – but since the paradigms of nationalism and modernism, sometimes opposing and sometimes intertwining, were the two main axes of the aesthetics of the past century, it is understandable that his compositions have so far received very little attention in musical scholarship. Even so, his musical flair, romantic verve and melodic charm are highly appreciated by both performers and audiences, and his First Piano Concerto and *Poème d'amour* for violin and piano (1916) are among the best-loved works of Estonian classical music.

Lemba's String Quartet in F sharp minor was completed in 1934 and performed in the Estonia Concert Hall in 1936 by a quartet consisting of Rudolf Palm, August Milli, Artur Saat and August Karjus. Nothing more is known about the performance history of the work until 2025, when an edition was published by the Estonian Music

² Estonia declared its independence from Russia in 1918 and, after the ensuing War of Independence of 1918–19, was recognised as a sovereign state by Soviet Russia in the Treaty of Tartu in 1920.

³ Rudolf Tobias' Piano Concerto in D minor (sometimes referred to as a *Concertstück*) was composed for the most part in 1897, but only the second and third movements were given at the first performance, in 1907; it had to wait until 1973 before Vardo Rumessen prepared an edition of the complete work.

Information Centre (EMIC), and the performers on this recording took the work into their repertoire.

The fretful, upward surging main theme of the first movement, marked *Allegro moderato* [1], soon amplified by pulsating triplets, is transformed through an excited and pleading *Animato* – an inversion of the main theme – into the blissful, *tranquillo* second theme in the high register. After a tentative start, the development section gathers chromatic tension and then treats the motif of the main theme in an upbeat, heroic manner. As this enthusiasm winds down, the recapitulation brings back the familiar mixture of unease and aspiration of the main theme. Though the second subject retains its initial dreamy calmness, the brooding and descending coda then establishes a pessimistic conclusion for the movement. The theme of the second movement [2] is a lullaby in A major, though it is mostly anchored in the subdominant of D. This tonal ambiguity with Lydian bent creates a folksy, almost Bartókian ambience. The first variation, *Più mosso* [3], relies on triplet figurations while staying within the expression range of the theme; the second, *Allegretto scherzando* [4], brings a contrast not only with its dancing lilt but also with its key: it is in D minor. The third variation, *Con moto* [5], returns to the heartfelt affection of the theme, this time emphasised by expressive passages in semiquavers (sixteenth notes), and is then contrasted by the sumptuous optimism of the fourth variation, *Allegro risoluto* [6]. The fifth variation, *Andante cantabile* [7], feels like a sentimental reminiscence of the initial lullaby, whereas the sixth, *Presto (Scherzo)* [8], is a relentless Mendelssohnian chase. The life-asserting march theme of the final variation [9] builds up momentum with added layers of semiquaver passages that eventually rumble down in a powerful unison.

The Piano Quartet in C minor, composed in 1938, was purchased by the Directorate of Education (*Direktorium für Bildungswesen*), part of the ‘Estonian self-government’ (*Estonische Selbstverwaltung*) during the German occupation of Estonia in 1941–44; it was acquired along with works by Eduard Tubin, Johannes Aavik and Artur Kapp. A newspaper article at the time stated laconically: ‘Prof. A. Lemba’s Piano Quartet with Strings adds a work to our chamber-music repertoire that is fluently written and

rewarding for the performers.⁴ It could well be this association with the Third Reich that explains why the work was never taken up in the ensuing Soviet half-century – just as almost all of Lemba's *œuvre* continued to be neglected in independent Estonia after 1991. Thus there is no record of the work ever being performed until only recently. It was published only in 2021, by EMIC. It received its first performances in 2025 – played by Merily Leotoots (violin, Estonia), Maggie Lamelas (viola, Portugal), Anna Ryland-Jones (cello, UK) and Joonatan Jürgenson (piano, Estonia), on 15 February at Hellens Manor in Much Marcle, Herefordshire, England, and then on 21 August in Tallinn Town Hall, now with Aleksandra Lipke (Poland) replacing Maggie Lamelas on viola.

Lemba's piano parts are always lushly romantic and virtuosic, probably reflecting his own rare mastery of the instrument. In the main themes of the first [10] and last [13] movements of the Piano Quartet, the Romantic momentum and pathos typical of the C minor tonality predominate, whereas the secondary themes are counterbalanced by a delicate lyricism. The mournful march character of the second movement [11], which begins as a resigned fugato for strings, really emerges only in the piano-solo sections. The fugue theme, however, develops into an exalted hymn in unison strings, accompanied by piano triplets, before fading away into the distance. The third movement [12] is a light-hearted scherzo with a highly virtuosic piano part, with a sorrowful, serenade-like central episode. The work draws to a close in a true romantic fashion with a frenzied fugato.

Lemba's Piano Quintet in D major was completed in 1946 and premiered on 17 April 1947 in the newly reopened Estonia Concert Hall by Rudolf Palm (violin), Artur Aleksander Saat (violin), Adolf Udrik (viola) and Martin Levald (cello), with the piano part performed by the composer himself. In her coverage of the concert in the newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*, the composer Lydia Auster wrote:

Lemba's Quintet is a large chamber work that the composer only recently completed. The quintet, like a number of other recent works by the same author, testifies to the composer's great creative activity. The work is written by a master who is well versed in the form and

⁴ *Eesti Sõna* ('Estonian Word'), No. 151, 4 July 1942.

specifics of the string quartet. Great attention is devoted to the piano part. However, the author can be criticised for a lack of freshness and innovation in the musical material. In the second part, the author uses a folksong, but the latter appears as if unexpectedly as a very short episode and harmonises little with the general style and romantically sublime mood of the entire music.⁵

The first movement, *Allegro moderato* [14], is fiery and energetic and culminates in a cascade of arpeggios and broken octaves reminiscent of a piano concerto. The second, *Andante* [15], begins with a pastoral meditation in F major, and is then interspersed with a humorous 'Estonian polka', marked *Allegretto*. The *Allegro* last movement [16] is in the form of a sonata-rondo (ABACABA), the main part of which is based on fiery scale passages; in the two episodes, sprawling melodies in the strings are amplified with meandering arpeggios in the piano part. The coda brings the house down with rapid unison passages from the whole ensemble

The M4gnet String Quartet is a promising and forward-looking Estonian string quartet, praised for its ever widening repertoire, spirited performances and passionate interplay. The ensemble consists of the violinists Robert Traksmann and Katariina Maria Kits-Reimal, violist Mart Kuusma and cellist Siluan Hirvoja. The Quartet seeks to perform venerable classical repertoire in tandem with forgotten works from the diverse and multifaceted string-quartet heritage.

The musicians of the Quartet have played together in various formations for more than ten years, but the decisive impulse to form a stable string quartet came from the residency programme initiative of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. The objective of the residency programme is to expand opportunities for chamber ensembles by supporting the establishment of ensembles, offering opportunities to collaborate with an artist manager, and broaden the repertoire with newly commissioned compositions.

The ensemble has participated in master-classes of several outstanding figures in the realm of the string quartet, such as Simone Gramaglia (Quartetto di Cremona), Marc Danel (Quatuor Danel) and Peter Jarůšek (Pavel Haas Quartet). In 2021 the Quartet was awarded the prestigious

⁵ Lydia Auster, 'Kammermuusika', *Sirp ja Vasar* ('Hammer and Sickle'), No. 17, 26 April 1947.



chamber-ensemble residency scholarship by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. In 2022 the ensemble was selected to join *Le Dimore del Quartetto* international network, which widens possibilities for attending master-classes, giving concerts abroad and investing in international connections.

The Quartet has participated in several festivals, including the Pärnu Music Festival (artistic director Paavo Järvi), Tallinn Chamber Music Festival, the Tubin festival in Tartu, the Haapsalu Early Music Festival and the contemporary-music festival Estonian Music Days.

Robert Traksmann began playing the violin at the age of four under the guidance of his teacher Tiiu Peäske. He graduated from the Tallinn Music High School and obtained a master's degree from the Hanns Eisler School of Music Berlin (with Kolja Blacher). He has polished his skills in master-classes with Ulrike Danhofer, Florian Donderer, Jüri Gerretz, Ivry Gitlis, Arvo Leibur and others. Since spring 2022, he has been a member of the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra. He has performed as a soloist with several orchestras, among them the Oulu Symphony, Jyväskylä Symphony, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and Pärnu City Orchestra. As an active chamber musician, Robert Traksmann has had a long-standing connection with the ensemble Trio '95, along with Rasmus Andreas Raide and Marcel Johannes Kits. In 2020, the Trio received the Annual Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Sound Arts Foundation. He has been playing in the M4gnet String Quartet since its founding in 2021.

Katariina Maria Kits-Reimal began violin studies at the Tallinn Music High School under Marge Lill; in 2004 she, too, began to study with Tiiu Peäske. She then studied at the Lausanne Conservatoire in Switzerland under Svetlana Makarova, obtaining her bachelor's degree (*cum laude*) under the guidance of Arvo Leibur at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Her studies continue under Pavel Berman in Lugano (Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana). She has enhanced her skills in master-classes with renowned musicians, their number including Ulrike Danhofer, Nicolas Dautricourt, Florian Donderer, Francis Gouton, Detlef Hahn, Petru Munteanu, Jan Repko and Pavel Vernikov. She has achieved success in numerous competitions, including the grand prix at the 'Con fantasia' competition (2010, 2012, 2014); second place at the Baltic String Players Competition in Vilnius (2018), as well as winning the 2014 'Classical Stars' television competition in Estonia.

Katariina Maria has performed as a soloist with several orchestras, including the Kymi Sinfonietta, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Vaasa City Orchestra and Pärnu City Orchestra. She plays a violin made by Henricus Catenar in 1670, generously provided for her by the Estonian Foundation of Musical Instruments.

Mart Kuusma began his viola studies at the Tallinn Music High School under the guidance of Toomas Nestor, continuing his education under the same teacher at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and, since 2016, at the Detmold Music Academy in Germany in the class of Diemut Poppen. Mart Kuusma has participated in master-classes of Christian Euler, Veit

Hertenstein, Hermann Menninghaus, Nils Mönkemeyer, Peijun Xu, Máté Szűcs, Xandi van Dijk and Aleksandr and Mihhail Zemtsov, among others.

As an enthusiastic chamber musician, he has taken part in several competitions, achieving, for instance, second place in a piano trio at the 'Pavasario Sonata' competition in Lithuania. Mart Kuusma has also been involved with several orchestras, including the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and Detmold Chamber Orchestra; from 2014 to 2016, he was a member of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra Academy. Since 2021, he has been a member of the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and also joined the M4gnet String Quartet that year.

Siluan Hirvoja began his cello studies at Nõmme Music School under the guidance of Kaia Tambi, continuing his education in the cello class of Mart Laas at Tallinn Music High School. In 2021, he obtained a master's degree from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre under the guidance of Henry-David Varema. He has participated in master-classes with several prominent cellists, including Georgi Anichenko, Jan-Erik Gustafsson and Marko Ylönen, and he has also successfully performed in various international competitions. He is a member of the cello section of the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra.

Sten Lassmann is one of the most prominent Estonian classical pianists and has been regularly appearing as a soloist and chamber musician since winning first prize in the Sixth Estonian Piano Competition in 2002. He has performed all over the world, and in some of the most prestigious venues, such as the Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto, Southbank Centre in London, the Grand and Small Halls of the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire in Moscow, the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatoire Concert Hall in Milan and the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing. As a recording artist, featuring on thirteen albums so far, Lassmann has focused on the Estonian classical heritage. He made the first-ever recording of the complete piano works by Heino Eller for Toccata Classics, submitting all 206 piano compositions by this founder of Estonian national instrumental music on nine albums between 2011 and 2023. In 2024 Toccata Next released *Estonian Cello* with the cellist Valle-Rasmus Roots, and Toccata Classics *Ester Mägi Complete*



Photograph: Kaupo Kikkas

Songs, in collaboration with the mezzo-soprano Maarja Purga. In June 2025, a major new recording series was launched with *Artur Lemba: Complete Chamber Music – Volume One*, Music for Violin and Piano (again with Toccata Classics), where he is partnered by the violinist Triin Ruubel.

Sten Lassmann began his musical education at the Tallinn Central Music School in 1989 and continued at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre with Ivari Ilja. He also studied at the Paris Conservatoire (CNSMDP) with Brigitte Engerer and at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Ian Fountain. A major pianistic influence also comes from his father, the late Peep Lassmann, an esteemed professor of piano at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and a former student of Emil Gilels at the Moscow Conservatoire. In 2013 Sten Lassmann was awarded a Ph.D. at the Royal Academy of Music in London for his research on Heino Eller. He has also received the Heino Eller Music Prize (2011), the Estonian Cultural Endowment annual music prize (twice, in 2015 and 2021), and in 2018 was elected Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM). His final volume of Heino Eller's Complete Piano Works was chosen as 'Best Classical Album' at the Estonian Music Awards in 2024. He is currently senior lecturer in piano at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

He is an avid chamber musician and in recent years has given recitals with the violinists Pavel Berman, Anna-Liisa Bezrodny, Natalia Lomeiko, Mikk Murdvee, Katariina Maria Kits, Movses Pogossian, Stanislav Pronin, Robert Traksmann, Triin Ruubel, the cellist Valle-Rasmus Roots, soprano Arete Kerge, mezzo-sopranos Maarja Purga and Karis Trass and the bass Pavlo Balakin.



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ARTUR LEMBA Chamber Music, Volume Two

String Quartet in F sharp minor (1934)	18:21
1 I <i>Allegro moderato</i>	8:26
II Tema con variazioni	9:55
2 Tema. <i>Andante espressivo</i>	0:50
3 Variation 1: <i>Più mosso</i>	1:08
4 Variation 2: <i>Allegretto scherzando</i>	0:43
5 Variation 3: <i>Con moto</i>	1:03
6 Variation 4: <i>Allegro risoluto</i>	0:50
7 Variation 5: <i>Andante cantabile</i>	1:46
8 Variation 6: <i>Presto (Scherzo)</i>	0:48
9 Variation 7: <i>Finale. Allegro moderato (Alla marcia)</i>	2:47

Piano Quartet in C minor (1938)	21:00
10 I <i>Allegro</i>	7:41
11 II <i>Moderato (Fugato)</i>	3:21
12 III Scherzo – Quasi una serenata. <i>Presto – Meno mosso, tranquillo</i>	4:05
13 IV <i>Maestoso – Allegro</i>	5:53

Piano Quintet in D major (1946)	19:19
14 I <i>Allegro moderato</i>	8:30
15 II <i>Andante – Allegretto</i>	4:54
16 III <i>Allegro</i>	5:55

TT 58:45

FIRST RECORDINGS

M4gnet String Quartet

Robert Traksmann and Katariina Maria Kits-Reimal, violins

Mart Kuusma, viola

Siluan Hirvoja, cello

Sten Lassmann, piano 10–16