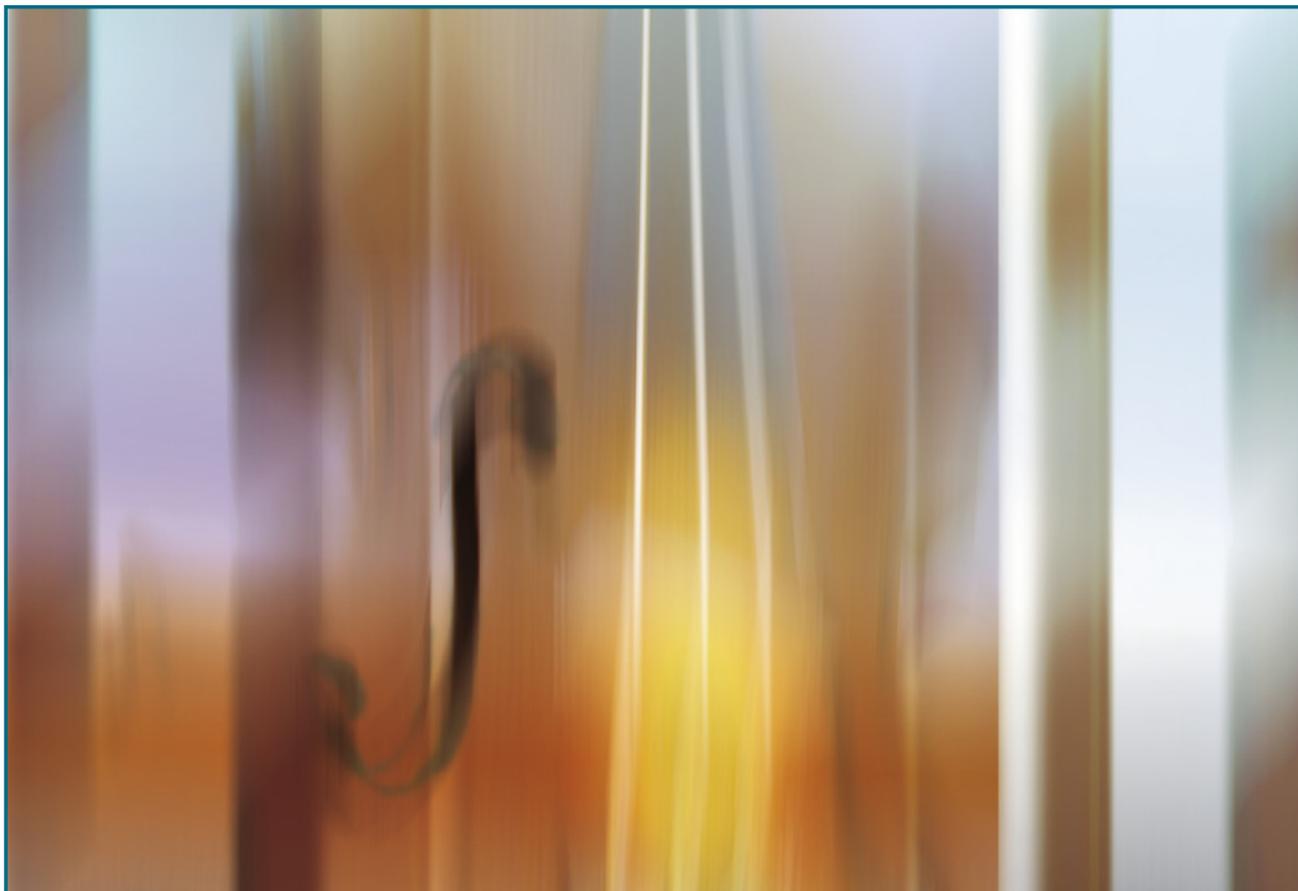


Krzysztof
MEYER

String Quartets Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Wieniawski String Quartet



Krzysztof Meyer (b. 1943): String Quartets Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Krzysztof Meyer was born in Kraków on 11th August 1943 and commenced his formal composition studies when he was eleven at the Kraków Music Academy, first with Stanisław Wiechowicz then with Krzysztof Penderecki (receiving his diploma in 1965) while also participating on courses with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. He himself taught at the Kraków Music Academy from 1965 to 1987, after which he became professor in composition at the Hochschule für Musik in Cologne. Equally active as a pianist, he was a member of the new music ensemble MW2 during 1965-67, and also served as President of the Polish Composers' Union during 1985-89. From 1974 to 1988 he served on the committee of the Warsaw Autumn Festival, having first appeared there in 1965 as the youngest composer in its history. His many awards for composition include first prize at the Prince Rainier of Monaco competition in 1970 and the prize of the Polish Composers' Union in 1992. His two-volume study of Witold Lutosławski (2003/4: co-written with Danuta Gwizdalanka) remains the most extensive in Polish, while his monograph on the life and music of Dmitry Shostakovich (1973, new edition in 1994) has been translated into several European languages, and his completion of the opera *The Gamblers* staged in several countries.

In his own music Meyer has shown a keen awareness of the stylistic paths in music after 1945 and a conviction in using them for his own ends. Serial and sonorist as well as aleatoric means have periodically informed his compositions, yet, as he himself stated in an interview four decades ago, "Applying various techniques is for me only a means to composition, and it is by no means an exaggeration ... to say that I enter some regions of my inner soundscape using any technical means available and that I will still arrive at a result that I had aimed at from the start, regardless of the means applied". Although his sizable output takes in the broad spectrum of musical genres, the series of eight symphonies and thirteen string quartets stand at the centre of his achievement – with this latter covering 47 years (so far) of his composing career [Nos. 5, 6 and 8 appear on Naxos 8.570776, with Nos. 9, 11 and 12 on 8.572656 and Nos. 7, 10 and 13 on 8.573001].

It was with his *First String Quartet* (1963) that Meyer made his Warsaw Autumn début. Although its musical idiom is strongly influenced by the sonorist language then being

advocated by such as Penderecki, its three-movement design of Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis points to an underlying formal evolution which in itself looks forward to his later works. The first movement opens with intensive *col legno* playing, to which are added harmonics, then *sul ponticello* and finally *pizzicato* techniques, before a sudden pause on a cluster which expands across the quartet and brings about a febrile burst of activity that persists until the lower instruments unfold a sequence of glissandos; these latter then persist as the music gradually winds down to a restive close. The brief second movement centres much more on consistency of texture, as the contrasting techniques sounded by each player are channelled towards a laconic close. The third movement attempts an amalgamation of its predecessors, as slowly undulating glissandos are countered by diverse gestures and the music gains in expressive intensity prior to reaching a heightened climax featuring aggressive interplay between the four instruments: this gradually falls away to leave a more tentative dialogue which then disperses until an uneasy chordal truce is attained.

By the time of the *Second String Quartet* (1969), Lutosławski had written his only work in the genre and its methodical yet never predictable evolution of its salient musical ideas is reflected in Meyer's piece – though in contrast to the senior composer's preference for 'introductory' and 'main' movements, the present work unfolds as a single and unbroken span. The stuttering initial gestures (redolent of the opening of Bartók's *Fifth Quartet*) quickly extend to all four instruments as the music's harmonic density expands accordingly. The texture gradually thins out to reveal a more individuated dialogue with *pizzicato* and *col legno* playing to the fore, and which is succeeded in turn by attempts to rekindle the initial impetus until a mingling of strident unison and *pizzicato* gestures is reached. The music then passes through an intensive burst of free harmonies (akin to 'tuning-up'), before its continuation of stark chordal gestures leads into a more inward and even reflective passage that only gradually loses its poise as the stuttering gestures at the very opening are recalled. These do not round off the work, however, which instead closes with restive chords as the music heads towards an uneasy calm.

The *Third String Quartet* (1971) pursues a not dissimilar trajectory to its predecessor, though here the formal design

falls into three separate movements – with elements of development and reprise to be detected in the first and third of these. The first movement opens with three detached *pizzicato* chords, after which the music launches into a headlong outburst which duly subsides into a dense though now more cohesive texture. Intricate *pizzicato* and searching harmonic writing are now combined, followed by a distant recollection of the earlier outburst and then a more wistful interplay prior to a tensely inward close. The second movement picks up on the later stages of its predecessor, if without a parallel sense of motivation as the music passes through constantly changing textures before it reaches a tentative yet expectant ending. The third movement begins with forceful unison gestures and a densely harmonic interplay between the four instruments that is belatedly silenced by stark repeated gestures. A series of tremolo decrescendos then makes way for pensive unison chords that spread across the texture as the music seems intent on securing some manner of resolution, but any hints at a more decisive close are denied as the activity gradually thins out to leave the fugitive gestures with which the work ends.

The *Fourth String Quartet* (1974) marks a clear step forward in terms of its three movements contrasting with each other to create a dynamic and goal-directed formal design, though the balance between them is by no means a traditional one. The first movement commences with

impassioned chordal gestures that bring with them a sense of meaningful harmonic progression, as underpinned by strident *pizzicato* writing, until a sudden pause brings a sparser but still cohesive texture which gains in momentum as the music builds towards its powerful culmination. This latter is summarily dispersed to leave fleeting harmonics as the top of the compass, before brief recollections of the opening effect the dramatic close. The second movement begins with repeated gestures, countered by more assaultive chords from the lower instruments as the music gradually takes on greater substance and direction. Over these initial gestures a more agitated motion comes to the fore, with the players drawn into an elaborate dialogue that gives vent to their respective characters and progresses towards a sequence of intensive passage-work which then subsides into elegiac musing that persists through to the close. The third movement starts with strident *pizzicato* writing, against which the initially spare gestures gradually accrue in prominence without the music gaining in emotional impetus. Instead it heads into a series of plangent monologues for solo instruments over held unison chords, before the impassioned gestures from the very opening re-emerge to guide the work to a conclusion that fades into silence – icy harmonics at the top of the compass gradually receding beyond earshot.

Richard Whitehouse

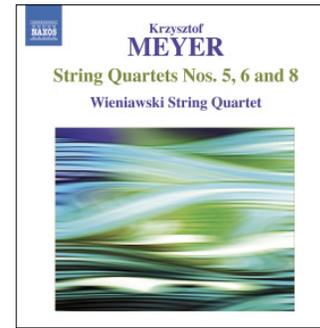
Photo: Kamil Babka



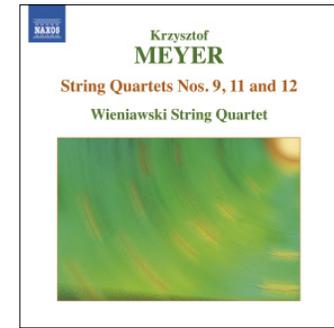
Wieniawski String Quartet

Since its foundation in 1998 the Wieniawski String Quartet has established itself as one of the leading chamber music ensembles in Poland. The members of this Poznań-based ensemble are all players in the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra of Polish Radio, conducted by Agnieszka Duczmal: Jarosław Żołnierczyk, leader of the orchestra, Mirosław Bocek, principal of the second violin section, Lech Bałaban, of the viola section, and Maciej Mazurek, of the cello section. The quartet's repertoire ranges from the classical to the contemporary. Recordings include *String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2* by Karol Szymanowski and Grazyna Bacewicz's *Quartet No. 4*.

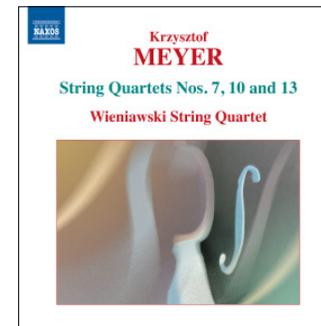
Also available



8.570776



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Standing at the heart of award-winning Polish composer Krzysztof Meyer's output are his symphonies and string quartets. The first four quartets chart his development over an important decade, from the 1963 *First Quartet, Op. 8* to the strikingly powerful *Fourth* of 1974. Whether structured in a single span – as in the *Second* with its hints of Bartók – or more formally devised in three movements, Meyer's work is at the forefront of contemporary European quartet writing, showing some allegiance to, but differences from, the quartets of his compatriots Penderecki and Lutosławski. This is the fourth and final volume of the complete Quartets.



Krzysztof
MEYER
(b. 1943)

Playing Time
75:18

String Quartets • 4

	String Quartet No. 1, Op. 8 (1963)	15:17
1	I. Tesi	6:07
2	II. Antitesi	2:45
3	III. Sintesi	6:25
4	String Quartet No. 2, Op. 23 (1969)	14:44
	String Quartet No. 3, Op. 27 (1971)	18:08
5	I.	5:33
6	II.	3:57
7	III	8:38
	String Quartet No. 4, Op. 33 (1974)	27:09
8	I. Preludio interrotto	7:36
9	II. Ostinato	11:00
10	III. Elegia e conclusione	8:33

Wieniawski String Quartet

Jarosław Żołnierczyk, Violin I • Mirosław Bocek, Violin II

Lech Bałaban, Viola • Maciej Mazurek, Cello

Recorded at Radio Merkur, Poznań, Poland, 15th October 2012 (track 4); 16th-17th October 2012 (tracks 5-7); 5th February 2013 (tracks 1-3); 4th-5th February 2013 (tracks 8-10)

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