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NAXOS

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

Piano Quintets

Alessandro Marangoni, Piano
Quartetto Adorno



Mario
CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO
(1895–1968)

Piano Quintet No. 1 in F major, Op. 69 (1931–32) 26:42

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|----------|---|------|
| 1 | I. Lento e sognante – Vivo e appassionato | 9:37 |
| 2 | II. Andante | 4:54 |
| 3 | III. Scherzo: Leggero e danzante | 3:26 |
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Piano Quintet No. 2, Op. 155
‘Memories of the Tuscan Countryside’ (1951) 35:46

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Allegretto innocente | 6:13 |
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Edoardo Zosi, Violin I • Liù Pellicciari, Violin II
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Piano Quintet No. 1 in F major, Op. 69

In his autobiography, *Una vita di musica, Un libro di ricordi*, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco describes both the early and late phases of his career writing chamber music: ‘During the years from 1927 to 1932 I began to explore and cultivate chamber music, first in relatively free forms, and then gradually moving closer to traditional structures.’ He composed his *Piano Quintet No. 1* in 1931–32 for the International Festival of Contemporary Music in Venice, where he premiered it with the Quartetto Poltronieri. He describes it as ‘without a doubt’ the best of all his chamber music from that period. ‘It is an emotional and robust work (and in a sense, romantic). The two outer movements are extensively developed, framing two shorter movements: a wistful *Andante*, where one can hear again, and not for the last time, the melancholy and contemplative character of *Cipressi* [a work for solo piano composed in 1921 and later orchestrated], followed by a lively *Scherzo*, light and dancing, with a spirit that some critics described as Mendelssohnian.’

Opinions regarding the work were divided. ‘Some,’ the composer recalled, ‘preferred the two outer movements, and then there were those who, like Falla, Segovia and me, were predisposed toward the central movements. The entire work, however, enjoyed great success, so much so that we had to repeat the *Andante* and the *Scherzo* (which was very unusual at a contemporary music festival).’

The first movement develops three thematic ideas. The first, which Castelnuovo-Tedesco teases in the slow introduction, is a lyrical motif announced by first violin and immediately echoed one beat later by cello [1] 0:47]. The second is fanfare-like, introduced by piano [1:29] and characterised by strong dotted rhythms. The two play off one another immediately but are soon joined by a third idea – also lyrical but more longing than the first – introduced by viola [2:29]. Each motif is distinctive, with its own musical character, yet easily recognisable in the thematic development that follows through the rest of the movement. Castelnuovo-Tedesco varies their colour (the rhythmic piano idea works equally well on strings, for example), employs canon and counterpoint and mixes his thematic stew with all the confidence and aplomb of a master chef. At one point he returns to his dream-like introductory passage (*Lento et sognante*), signalling the start of a recapitulation section that again lays out each motif in order (I–II–III–I–II) as it rushes to a precipitate conclusion in F major.

The second movement, although only half the length of the first, delivers in colour and atmosphere what it perhaps lacks in developmental sophistication. It is built from two contrasting themes, the first announced by the strings at the outset and having a flowing, chant-like character, and the second [2] 0:53] proclaimed by cello, more rhythmic but accompanied by gentle triplet figures derived from the first theme. It is later taken over by piano [2:39]. At 3:24, the composer combines the themes contrapuntally – I in second violin and II in cello – with the supporting triplets in piano. The ensuing A–B–A *Scherzo* movement may possess overall the fairy-like Mendelssohnian qualities noted by early critics, but it begins, surprisingly, with strings in octaves announcing a vigorous motif that sounds like it wandered in from a scherzo by Bruckner. This leads to a passage featuring assertive cross rhythms before the arrival of the trio section [3] 1:41] brings us back to more Mendelssohnian delicacy.

The finale of the quintet is, broadly speaking, a sonata-allegro movement with two themes. Strings in octaves introduce the first motif straightaway, *Vivo e impetuoso*. Castelnuovo-Tedesco expands it extensively before cello introduces the second theme [4] 1:55], a chromatic idea with occasional augmented seconds that give it an Oriental character. The highlight of the development section (begun with the first theme in piano) [3:36] comes when the tempo slows down to a *marcia funebre* and the composer begins a sombre fugal treatment of his main idea [5:19]. He condenses the recapitulation [7:16] by combining his two themes in counterpoint (I on piano and II on strings) before bringing the movement, which has primarily been based in A minor, to a final cadence in F major – the home key of the first movement.

Piano Quintet No. 2, Op. 155 **'Memories of the Tuscan Countryside'**

Castelnuovo-Tedesco's second phase of writing chamber music began in earnest in 1945, after he had settled in Los Angeles. He says it was 'partly due to the interest of various instrumentalists (mainly wind instrument players), and partly due to the formation of various local ensembles, but, above all, it was my acquaintance and friendship with Bernard Sinsheimer that helped revive my love for chamber music. He was an elderly violinist whom I had met briefly, many years before, in Paris, where he was teaching chamber music at the École Normale. I ran into him again here in Los Angeles; then retired from performing, he was still dedicated to teaching and still passionate about playing chamber music for pleasure.' This experience opened the floodgates, inspiring a burgeoning catalogue of sonatas for single instruments with piano, duos, trios and quartets (including his second string quartet, available on Naxos 8.574580).

Castelnuovo-Tedesco began work on a second quintet for piano and strings when, in 1951, the Coleman Chamber Music Association of Pasadena asked him to perform his first quintet during their next season. The composer hesitated to accept the invitation since he had already played the work many times in and around Los Angeles; he told them he would rather write a new one. They embraced the idea, saying, 'Why don't you write it and let us give the premiere?' He had, in fact, begun a second quintet after the great success of the first in Venice that he had envisioned should be a 'rustic' quintet, but had abandoned work on it when, as he explains in *Una vita di musica*, he had 'arrived at a modulation that was not right, that did not persuade me; and in certain situations, it can take years to find just the "right" modulation.'

The four movements follow traditional formal patterns: the first is a sonata-allegro, the second is a theme and variations, the third is a scherzo with two trios, and the final movement is a rondo. The composer describes it as 'a decidedly programmatic work, and it bears the subtitle, "Memories of the Tuscan Countryside: Usigliano di Lari 1919–1939".' In his autobiography, he provides brief accounts of the memories and feelings evoked in each:

I. Le Colline ('The Hills'). Everyone who knows the Tuscan hills knows that they are synonymous with sweetness, grace and harmonious rhythm. (And those who do not know them cannot imagine them!)

II. I Cipressi ('The Cypress'). Once again, I recall the solemn melancholy of the centuries-old cypress trees, in the dim evening light, brightened only by the stars. (Here, however, they are softened by a poignant memory.)

III. Processione nel Mese di Maria ('Procession in the Month of Mary'). This is the most descriptive passage. In a sense, it follows the procession, starting from the church, that would carry the image of the Virgin Mary on a long journey – up to the farm, then down to the little country cemetery, before returning it to the church. It is always followed by praying women murmuring the litany, *Sancta Maria, Ora pro nobis*, accompanied by veiled girls scattering flower petals and the village band, playing muted cornets and trombones.

IV. La Mietitura ('The Harvest'). A robust chorus of reapers down in the valley in the midday sun could be heard from a distance. As they climb the slope, their singing grows more distinct. Late into the night they beat the wheat on the threshing floor by torchlight, singing *stornelli* [a type of Tuscan folk song]. In the end, after a crazy, disorderly cadenza played by all instruments, peace returns, along with the initial theme, *The Hills*, as a short, moving farewell.

The first theme of the opening movement suggests the peaceful serenity of the Tuscan Hills with a pleasant 'walking tune' introduced on piano against a gently undulating accompaniment in strings. The second [5] 1:34] is more rhythmic. The composer combines them near the start of the development [2:59]. At the beginning of the recapitulation [5:45], he reverses roles for the instruments – strings playing the melody (each entering in turn in fugue-like fashion) while piano provides the undulating background. He builds his material to an impassioned climax that eases off before a coda returns to the *dolce et sognante* ('sweet and dreamy') opening.

The *tema* of the second movement is a stately, hymn-like melody presented in block chords by strings. Piano adds ornamental figuration around it in the first variation [6] 1:42], with four more following (at 3:15, 4:54, 6:15 and 8:29, respectively). Near the end of Variation IV, the piano plays a four-note motif described by the composer as ‘the cry of an owl in the distance’, which becomes almost the entire substance of the final variation. The theme’s block chords return on piano for the coda [10:11], which ends with the faint cry of the owl on string harmonics.

As the composer noted, the scherzo movement is the most obviously pictorial one in the work. The procession depicted therein is clearly a religious one, evoked by the chant-like nature of the main theme – an idea reinforced by the placement of the words ‘Sancta Maria, Ora pro nobis’ (‘Holy Mary, Pray for us’) underneath the notes in the score. The first trio [7] 1:09] is meant to evoke the sound of a village band (with its ‘quasi trombone’ solo and bass drum accents in the piano), while the second [3:05] mirrors the form of a Catholic litany: short, improvisatory phrases on cello are answered by solemn chords in strings and piano.

After a frenzied introduction, Castelnuovo-Tedesco bases the entire last movement on the harvesters’ song that he introduces on cello and viola playing double stops [8] 0:26]; apparently, being Italian, the workers express their joy in four-part harmony. They also dance, since the composer emphasises the dotted rhythms and triplets in his theme as he builds it into a lively, irresistible tarantella. As they approach their *fortississimo* climax, the players seem to be outreaching the limits of their instruments, but the composer calms the situation by bringing back the first theme of the first movement [7:09], *calmo e sereno*. The workers pass on through the valley to cadence on a peaceful and serene C major chord.

The first performance of the second quintet took place in Pasadena in April 1952 (a few days before the composer left for his second return visit to Italy). Castelnuovo-Tedesco collaborated with the Hungarian String Quartet led by Zoltán Székely, who, 22 years earlier, had performed the composer’s *Variazioni Sinfoniche* in Rome. As Castelnuovo-Tedesco recalled in *Una vita di musica*: ‘One of the usual super-intelligent critics scolded me (as they are wont to do) for always being too tender-hearted and nice. He added that “evidently, Castelnuovo-Tedesco had only fond memories of Italy.” I replied (which I generally never do) that I also had unpleasant memories of Italy, from Fascism onwards, but I preferred to forget them and only remember the good and beautiful things’ – so handsomely recalled in this nostalgic work.

Frank K. DeWald

(Once again, the writer wishes to acknowledge the help of the composer’s granddaughter, Diana Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and James Westby in providing a soon-to-be-published English translation of the relevant chapters from Una vita di musica.)



Alessandro Marangoni

Alessandro Marangoni studied piano with Maria Tipo. A winner of several national and international awards, including an International Classical Music Award (ICMA) and the Franco Abbiati Prize, he has appeared throughout Europe, America and China as a soloist and a chamber musician, collaborating with leading performers including Daniel Barenboim, Mario Ancillotti, Aldo Ceccato, Valentina Cortese, Enrico Dindo, Quirino Principe, Massimo Quarta and Milena Vukotic. Marangoni is artistic director of Almo Collegio Borromeo in Pavia and professor of piano at the Conservatorio Guido Cantelli in Novara. He collaborates with music publishers Edizioni Curci, Éditions Alphonse Leduc and G. Schirmer, and is an ambassador for the International Labour Organization's campaign 'Music against Child Labour'. His discography includes an album of the piano works of Victor de Sabata for the 40th anniversary of Sabata's death. For Naxos, he has recorded the complete piano works of Rossini (*Péchés de vieillesse*) (8.501306), Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (8.572325 through to 8.572328), and Castelnuovo-Tedesco's piano concertos (8.572823) and works for cello and piano with Enrico Dindo (8.573881).

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Quartetto Adorno

Founded in 2015, Quartetto Adorno won three prizes at the 2017 International String Quartet Competition 'XI Premio Paolo Borciani', the first Italian quartet to do so in the 30-year history of the competition. In 2018 it won the X International Competition 'V.E. Rimbotti' and became an associate artist in residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel. The quartet has been supported by CIDIM since 2019. Quartetto Adorno has performed at prestigious series, venues and festivals such as the London Chamber Music Society Series at Kings Place; Wigmore Hall; Musikerlebnis, Munich; Flagey, Brussels; Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Rome; La Società dei Concerti, Milan; Fondazione I Teatri, Reggio Emilia; MITO Festival, Unione Musicale, Torino; Fazioli Concert Hall, Sacile; Amici della Musica, Perugia; Musica Insieme, Bologna; Amici della Musica, Firenze; Amici della Musica, Padova; and Micat in Vertice, Siena. Important collaborations include artists such as Nicolas Baldeyrou, Simonide Braconi, Enrico Bronzi, Bruno Canino, Alessandro Carbonare, Michel Dalberto, Miguel da Silva, Francesco Di Rosa, Louis Lortie, Paul Meyer, Andrea Oliva and Giovanni Sollima. The quartet released its debut album featuring works by Zemlinsky and Brahms in 2019 on Decca Italia alongside clarinetist Alessandro Carbonare, and this was followed by the guitar quintets of Castelnuovo-Tedesco with Giampaolo Bandini in 2021 on the same label. In 2022 the quartet recorded works by Franck and Enescu for Fuga Libera, and in 2024 released an album of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's complete string quartets on Naxos (8.574580).

www.quartettoadorno.com



Castelnuovo-Tedesco's chamber works were composed early and late in his career. He considered the *Piano Quintet No. 1* in F major from 1932 to be the best of all his chamber works from that period. It exudes Romantic candour and contrapuntal richness, full of lively themes and with a colourful atmosphere. The beautiful *Piano Quintet No. 2*, composed in 1951, draws on the composer's memories of a serene and rustic Tuscany. Quartetto Adorno's 'reference-worthy performance' (*Classicstoday.com*) of the complete string quartets is on 8.574580.

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