

CHANDOS

WEINBERG

String Quartets
Nos 10, 12, and 17
Aria · Capriccio



ARCADIA QUARTET



© Olga Rakhalskaya / Photograph kindly provided by Tommy Persson

**Mieczysław Weinberg and his future, second, wife, Olga Rakhalskaya, 1967;
they married in 1970**

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919 – 1996)

String Quartets, Volume 6

String Quartet No. 10, Op. 85 (1964) **24:08**
in A minor • in a-Moll • en la mineur
Olga Rachalskaja gewidmet

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------|
| 1 | Adagio – | 7:37 |
| 2 | Allegro – | 5:36 |
| 3 | Adagio – | 3:00 |
| 4 | Allegretto – Adagio | 7:54 |

String Quartet No. 12, Op. 103 (1969 – 70) **35:27**
Für Weniamin Basner

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I Largo – | 8:41 |
| 6 | II Allegretto – Largo – | 5:40 |
| 7 | III Presto – | 6:28 |
| 8 | IV Moderato | 14:36 |

	String Quartet No. 17, Op. 146 (1986)	16:16
	in D major • in D-Dur • en ré majeur	
	Für das Borodin-Quartett zum 40-jährigen Bestehen	
9	Allegro – Adagio –	3:51
10	Andantino – Adagio –	3:30
11	Lento –	4:15
12	Allegro	4:37
13	Aria, Op. 9 (1942)	4:00
	in D minor • in d-Moll • en ré mineur	
	for Two Violins, Viola, and Cello	
	Larghetto	
14	Capriccio, Op. 11 (1943)	5:59
	in A flat major • in As-Dur • en la bémol majeur	
	for Two Violins, Viola, and Cello	
	Scherzando con grazia e rubato – Più mosso – Meno mosso	
	TT 85:51	

Arcadia Quartet

Ana Török violin
Răsvan Dumitru violin
Traian Boală viola
Zsolt Török cello

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mieczysław Weinberg' in a cursive script. The signature is written on a light gray background.

Kindly provided by Tommy Persson

Mieczysław Weinberg's signature



Arcadia Quartet



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Mieczysław Weinberg, left, with the composers Mikhail Meyerovich and Veniamin Basner, a close friend, late 1980s

Weinberg: String Quartets, Volume 6

String Quartet No. 10 in A minor, Op. 85

On 21 July 1964 Shostakovich wrote to his friend and secretary Isaac Glikman:

I have kept my word – another quartet, the Tenth, was finished yesterday. It is dedicated to Moysey Weinberg [Weinberg would not reclaim his Polish first name until the 1980s]. He had written nine quartets and with the last of them overtook me, since at the time I only had eight. I therefore set myself the challenge of catching up and overtaking Weinberg, which I have now done. Yesterday, in celebration of this achievement, we had a good old booze-up.

In this friendly quartet competition Shostakovich only managed to keep his nose in front for a few weeks. Between July and August that year, Weinberg (1919–1996) composed his own Tenth Quartet, dedicating it to Olga Rakhalskaya, a friend of his daughter's, who would later become his second wife.

The work follows the slow – fast – slow – fast layout of Shostakovich's Tenth. In terms of character, however, the music is very different. Where Shostakovich's

first movement is flexible and searching, Weinberg's is solid and assertive, as if determined to draw strength from painful experience (on which Weinberg had plenty of his own to draw). In fact, the Quartet plays in one continuous span, even though four sections are almost as well delineated in the score as if they were separate movements.

The opening *Adagio* comes to rest in a mood of provisional resolution, hovering above, rather than resting fully in, its A minor tonality. The cello then ushers in a nervy, shadowy substitute scherzo, Weinberg instructing that it be muted throughout (again in stark contrast to Shostakovich, whose second movement is a brutal *Allegro furioso*). Beneath the surface there seems to be an ethnically tinged dance struggling to break free – a characteristic mood for a number of Weinberg's inner movements and even finales. What emerges instead, after a notated pause, is a short-lived but passionate *Adagio* slow movement. Here the Quartet's opening idea is reworked in a declamatory *arioso* shared between first violin and cello, set in stark relief by towering chords in the accompanying instruments.

This, too, departs from the Shostakovich model (a large-scale passacaglia) in that it soon falters, ultimately freezing into *pizzicato* chords for the second violin over a held D flat on the cello.

The first violin then transforms the measured trill that has been a seed-motif for the entire Quartet into a gentle rocking idea. As it does so, the cello's D flat is renotated as C sharp, and Weinberg seems to be on course for a conventional major-mode finale. However, while this phase is certainly complex enough in its unfolding, it declines the option of darkness-to-light transformation or indeed of any obvious tying-up of loose ends. Instead, it tantalises the ear with a waltz that never fully materialises. Ultimately, Weinberg works his way round to the same kind of conclusion as he reached in his first movement, in the same kind of provisional mood but also with a ring of discomfiting expressive truth. He was on the threshold of a late style that would prove as elliptical and inscrutable as that of his great friend and mentor.

String Quartet No. 12, Op. 103

Weinberg dedicated his Twelfth Quartet to Shostakovich's pupil Veniamin Basner, a mutual friend. Composed between August 1969 and May 1970, shortly after his Lenin-

centenary Symphony No. 11, it received its first performance on 14 April 1971, at the hands of the Quartet of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, in the Chamber Hall of Moscow Conservatoire.

The Twelfth is one of Weinberg's most ambitious and expressively wide-ranging quartets. It has often been cited as especially significant for its twelve-note elements. However, these are in fact by no means as clear as in, for example, the Auschwitz opera *The Passenger*, completed two years previously, the Tenth Symphony, Op. 98, or the Twenty-four Preludes for Solo Cello, Op. 100. All Weinberg was doing was following the example of Shostakovich in his own Twelfth Quartet, composed in 1968, and numerous other Soviet composers who had been breaching the official Soviet dodecaphony taboo since the mid-1950s.

The four-movement Twelfth Quartet begins lugubriously, with a *Largo* loosely based on a twelve-note aggregation. Its skilfully woven tissue of parts never rises from the initial *pianississimo* beyond *piano*, its chromatically inscrutable opening gesture paying homage to Bartók's Third Quartet – very much a sign of things to come, not only in this work but in most of Weinberg's later quartets. The central phase is dominated by flurries of sextuplets, quintuplets, and syncopated

accompanimental rhythms; the opening material returns, only to vanish after a brief reminder of the middle section.

The second movement, an *Allegretto* waltz-scherzo, is of a completely different character. The solo cello muses in its upper register, then extends its thoughts to a chordal accompaniment from the other instruments. As the movement progresses, so Bartókian sonorities increasingly intrude (such as *glissando* within *pizzicato*, harmonics, and *col legno*), giving way to a lonely cello recitative of the kind that Shostakovich was about to include in the slow movement of his Fifteenth Symphony.

A rhythmical and robust march-substitute *Presto* follows, unstoppable in character and virtuosic in its demands on the players. Weinberg had not written as volcanically as this for the string quartet since the scherzo of No. 6, more than twenty years previously. This outpouring of energy soon develops an intransigent streak, and with the culminating unison for all instruments – another Bartókian image – Weinberg discovers what will become a signature gesture for his later quartets.

The concluding *Moderato* is surely the strangest movement of all. Above a regular bass motion from the cello, initially in 5/4 but soon in varied metres, we hear a

characteristic rhythmic-melodic motif from the viola, initiating a quasi-*fugato* accumulation. The music strides onwards until we arrive at a section in 7/8, mysteriously *sul tasto* and *punta d'arco*. This is a mixture of canon and double-fugue. A whole succession of further canons, in style very much like Bartók's Fourth Quartet, follows. A highly Shostakovichian duet between first violin and cello leads to a disconsolate review of thematic elements from various points in the movement, and at last comes a reprise of the 7/8 section, ending with a chord iterated thirty-two times, *col legno*, in an expressionless *mezzo piano* – like a worryingly repeated question mark.

Quartet No. 17 in D major, Op. 146

Weinberg allowed nearly six years to separate his last two string quartets. In the interim he carried out the revisions of his first two quartets, giving them new opus numbers in view of the extent of their reworkings. That re-encounter may have prompted the initially carefree, youthful tone of his last essay in this medium, which he composed in October 1986, almost half a century after No. 1, dedicating it to the Borodin Quartet on its fortieth anniversary (there is no evidence that the Quartet ever performed it).

Like the majority of his instrumental works from the 1980s, the Quartet is liberally strewn

with allusions to his earlier music. It plays without a break but falls into three (arguably four) more or less clearly defined sections.

The opening of the sprightly D major *Allegro* balances a bright, energetic theme against one in the conventional dominant key. Not since No. 11, composed more than ten years earlier, had Weinberg launched a string quartet in such frankly tonal style, and in the major mode to boot. The second theme is a chorale-like progression that carries considerable significance in the composer's output, often registering as symbolic of innocent idealism. Weinberg had first featured this sequence of chords in the song 'Discovery', from his song-cycle *Lulling the Child*, Op. 110, at the point where the poet discovers a child asleep in a haystack. It also appears in the Trio for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Op. 127 and in the final act of the Gogol-based opera *The Portrait*, in which it supports the Professor's eulogies to the eternal qualities of art. It would have one final incarnation as the opening material for Chamber Symphony No. 4.

A developmental continuation reworks ideas from the *Andante* of Sonata No. 4 for Solo Cello, Op. 140. This is cut short, however, by a solo cello transition to the quasi-second movement, an *Andantino* that redeploys passages from the first movement of the same sonata. Violin and viola solos

then frame an extended *Lento*, echoing Nastasya's 'birthday' aria from Act I, Scene 1 of Weinberg's Dostoyevsky opera, *The Idiot*. Only a lack of strong thematic definition and the presence of ties to the material of the *Andantino* argue against considering this *Lento* as a section in its own right. At its conclusion, a balancing mini-cadenza for the viola leads into a restoration of the tempo of the opening *Allegro*, along with familiar-sounding melodic fragments.

In the reconstitution of the initial positive mood which follows, the rhythmic playfulness from the 'first movement' development section reappears but with whispered dynamics, until the main theme finally re-emerges, followed by the animated-chorale subsidiary theme. At this point it becomes clear that this is, in effect, the long-delayed recapitulation of the opening *Allegro*, in which ideas from the *Lento* section and ultimately the *Andantino* are also reworked. In the course of this final section the apparently rather inconsequential, even self-dismissive, quality of the opening theme is replaced by a wiry determination that betokens psychological as well as technical resourcefulness. In fact, little or nothing is predictable about this three- or four-in-one sonata structure. Weinberg thus concludes his quartet cycle by leading us up the garden

path, but towards the light rather than into Shostakovichian gloom.

Two early works for string quartet

In 1942, on either side of his First Symphony, Op. 10, Weinberg composed two short works for string quartet, coincidentally paralleling the *Aria* and *Polka* that had marked Shostakovich's string quartet début ten years earlier. Weinberg's pieces are fresh compositions, however, rather than arrangements. It is not known for which players they may have been written, and the manuscripts carry no dedications or indications of first performance.

***Aria*, Op. 9**

Played with mutes throughout, the beautiful D minor *Aria* is a kind of Slavonic cousin to Fauré's famous song 'Après un rêve', echoing its arcing melody over a gently pulsating accompaniment. This is a movement the lyrical charm and formal perfection of which could easily make it an effective encore piece, rivalling in this respect the second movement of the composer's Seventh Quartet. That Weinberg retained a special affection for the *Aria* is suggested by the fact that he reworked it multiple times: as the second movement of his orchestral Suite, Op. 26 (compiled in 1945), as one of his Five

Pieces for Flute and Piano (1947), and as one of his two *Songs without Words* for Violin and Piano (also 1947).

Capriccio, Op. 11

The *Capriccio*, in A flat major, begins in the easy-going, serenade style of the first movement of Weinberg's Second Quartet, continuing with a relaxed waltz lilt and some deft metrical shifts between the basic 3 / 8 and sections in 5 / 8 and 5 / 16. It, too, was reused in the Five Pieces for Flute and Piano, where it is placed centrally as the 'Second Dance'.

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Light in the dark: a note by the performers

In the field of classical music, we tend to categorise composers into two main groups: the well-known ones whose music is often played, and... the others. The first group is the one that shaped the history of music and gave humanity one of its most important gifts: the ability to express our soul through the power of sound. The music of these composers is present all around us and enriches our lives with meaning, beauty, and delight.

Although from time to time we encounter music that we have never heard before, rarely is that music something we would listen to or

play again. In our times, with our technology of information, it is rather difficult to discover something meaningful and valuable that had been overlooked in the past, but when it does happen it is a really special moment.

For us it happened when we first encountered the string quartets of Mieczysław Weinberg. We felt instantly captivated by the wonderful music, the deeply inspired melodies and perfectly shaped structures. The joy of playing his music has only proved equalled by the enthusiastic response of the public every time we present these quartets in concert, so the obvious question arises: 'How can it be that we never heard about Weinberg earlier?'

His music is like a glow of light surrounded by the darkness of the unknown, and it quickly became a goal of ours to attempt to dilute these shadows. With every recording and every live performance of his music, we intend to shine some light on this wide-ranging, profound phenomenon, which has remained overlooked for so long, and we hope that, with time, Mieczysław Weinberg will take his rightful place in the history of music.

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Winner of the International Chamber Music Competition, Hamburg in 2009, International

Chamber Music Competition, Almere in 2011, Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, London in 2012, and Osaka International Chamber Music Competition in 2014, the **Arcadia Quartet** is one of the most exciting string quartets of its generation. Formed in 2006, the Quartet has performed throughout the world, making appearances at the Budapest Spring Festival, George Enescu International Festival, Aldeburgh Festival, North Norfolk Music Festival, International Chamber Music Festival Q'arto Mondí, Poznań, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Kammermusiktage Mettlach, and Zeist Music Days, The Netherlands, as well as at the Cité Internationale des Arts and Salle Gaveau, Paris, Alte Oper, Frankfurt, Pollack Hall, Montreal, Royal Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall, London, Suntory Hall, Tokyo, Izumi Hall, Osaka, Wiener Musikverein, Berliner Konzerthaus, and Romanian Athenaeum, Bucharest, in addition to venues throughout the United Kingdom, in Portugal, Tel Aviv, and Beijing.

The Quartet is regularly heard on BBC Radio 3 and is Quartet-in-Residence at the prestigious Centrul Național de Artă Tinerimea Română, Bucharest, playing six concerts a year, broadcast by the Romanian Broadcasting Company. The Quartet issued its debut CD, of works by Mendelssohn and

Brahms, in 2009, a disc followed in October 2013 by a recording of Janáček's quartets, both attracting critical acclaim. Under its new, exclusive recording contract with Chandos Records, the Arcadia Quartet in October 2018 released a recording of the six string quartets by Bartók. This double CD received five-star reviews in *Diapason* and *Classica*, was named Disc of the Week by BBC Radio 3, one of the best albums of October 2018 by WQXR-FM, in New York, and Disc of the Month by *Classica* in January 2019. In 2020 the Quartet launched a project to record the complete set of seventeen string quartets by Mieczysław Weinberg, issuing the first disc in January 2021. This was called one of 'the best classical albums released in 2021 so far' by *BBC Music*, named Record of the Week by BBC Radio 3, and listed among 'Die Alben der Woche' by Westdeutscher Rundfunk. It went on to win the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik in 2021 and was a finalist of the International Classical Music Awards in 2022. Volume 2 in the series reached the finals of the Limelight Recording of the Year 2022 and was nominated for the 2023 ICMA. The third volume (Quartets Nos 4 and 16) was released in March 2023 and awarded the Diapason d'Or by *Diapason* in August; it was shortlisted for

the *Gramophone* Awards in September and nominated for the 2024 ICMA in November.

The fourth volume once again brought a nomination for the ICMA, in 2025, having received a five-star review in *BBC Music* and been made a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice. The penultimate disc in the series, recorded at the end of April 2024, was among the best-selling classical music CDs in the spring of 2025, receiving superlative reviews from *Gramophone*, *The Strad*, and *BBC Music*, as well as a nomination for the 2026 ICMA. At the beginning of 2026 the Quartet was named Instrumentalists of the Year, an award presented by the Union of Music Critics, Editors, and Producers of Romania.

The Arcadia Quartet founded its own chamber music workshop in 2021, the Arcadia Chamber Music Classes, acting on the desire to share its experiences with future generations of musicians and to promote classical music at the highest level. Organised annually, this series of master-classes and concerts is dedicated to chamber string ensembles and aims to offer guidance and professional support in an effort to encourage and promote young musicians in their professional development through the art of chamber music, and to enrich the community.



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Olga Rakhalskaya and Valentin Berlinsky, long-time cellist of the Borodin Quartet and close friend of the composer's, Moscow, 7 December 1999

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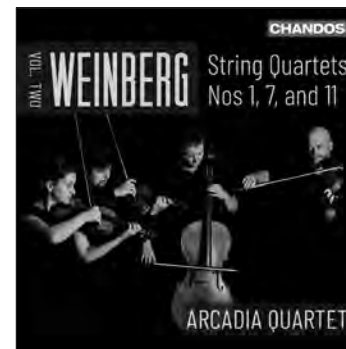


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Chandos 24-bit / 96 kHz recording

The Chandos policy of being at the forefront of technology is now further advanced by the use of 24-bit / 96 kHz recording. In order to reproduce the original waveform as closely as possible we use 24-bit, as it has a dynamic range that is up to 48 dB greater and up to 256 times the resolution of standard 16-bit recordings. Recording at the 44.1 kHz sample rate, the highest frequencies generated will be around 22 kHz. That is 2 kHz higher than can be heard by the typical human with excellent hearing. However, we use the 96 kHz sample rate, which will translate into the potentially highest frequency of 48 kHz. The theory is that, even though we do not hear it, audio energy exists, and it has an effect on the lower frequencies which we do hear, the higher sample rate thereby reproducing a better sound.

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Olga Rakhalskaya, at the Moscow Conservatory, 8 December 1999

WEINBERG: STRING QUARTETS, VOL. 6 – Arcadia Quartet

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MIECZYŚŁAW WEINBERG (1919 – 1996)

String Quartets, Volume 6

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