

Anton  
**ARENSKY**

**Chamber Music**

Piano Quintet • String Quartet No. 2 • Piano Trio No. 1

**Spectrum Concerts Berlin**



## Anton Arensky (1861-1906)

### Piano Quintet, Op. 51 • String Quartet No. 2, Op. 35 • Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 32

Born in Novgorod in 1861, Anton Arensky belonged to the generation of Russian composers midway between Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov (that included Glazunov, Gretchaninov and Liadov) and who came to prominence in the closing decade of the nineteenth century. By the time he was nine his precocious gifts had expressed themselves in several songs and piano pieces, and in 1879 the family moved to St Petersburg where he enrolled at its Conservatoire. As a student he was notoriously lazy, but such were his talents that by the time he completed his training in 1882 (with a Gold Medal for his cantata *The Forest Czar*) he had also written a *Piano Concerto*, its startling virtuosity anticipating a glittering future.

The Moscow Conservatoire was quick to recognise Arensky's flair and appointed him to its staff where he was one of its youngest professors. Whilst there, (where his pupils included Medtner, Rachmaninov and Scriabin) he added two symphonies and a violin concerto to the orchestral repertoire and the first of three operas, *A Dream on the Volga*, which gained both the approval of Tchaikovsky and considerable success at its 1891 première. Arensky also became recognised as a conductor and in 1895 he returned to St Petersburg where he succeeded Balakirev to the directorship of the Imperial Chapel. He relinquished this post six years later with a pension of 6000 rubles (twice the sum given to Balakirev) and took up a professorship at St Petersburg Conservatoire where he continued to compose and play the piano for concert tours. But his health was irreparably damaged by both tuberculosis and a dissolute life style, once described by Rimsky-Korsakov as "a dissipated course between wine and card-playing" and which severely contributed to his untimely death in a sanatorium in Finland aged 45. One obituary declared "Russian art has sustained a heavy loss of a thoroughbred artist".

With the exception of his *Variations on a Theme by Tchaikovsky* and the second two chamber pieces on this disc Arensky's early promise never quite translated into lasting achievements. In Rimsky-Korsakov's memoirs,

*Chronicle of my musical life*, Arensky was bluntly dismissed with "he will soon be forgotten", yet the novelist Leo Tolstoy said of him "among the new composers he is the best, he is simple and melodious". This observation might well describe the distinctive but relatively modest contribution Arensky made in the field of chamber music – all written for strings or piano and strings that amply demonstrate the composer's lyric and expressive gifts.

Arensky's *Piano Quintet* dates from 1900 when he was also occupied with his ballet score *Egyptian Nights*. In the absence of any significant Russian tradition for quintet writing Arensky would have looked to Germany for representative examples on which to model his own quintet. The first movement (*Allegro moderato*) is a red-blooded affair, its sweeping main theme bursting from the declamatory opening. Apart from a brief episode of searching harmonies in the development section (with echoes of Brahms) the movement's energy and density of texture rarely lets up, invigorated by bravura piano writing clearly conceived for himself to play.

A set of variations (*Andante*) follows next, based on an old French song *Sur les ponts d'Avignon j'ai oui chanter la belle* and which are by turns gentle and turbulent. Strings alone announce the theme that leads to the first variation heard in the piano. A dramatic paragraph then yields to an extended elaboration for piano and cello before the full ensemble returns in a radiant D major. A reflective and waltz-like variant allows the piano further opportunity for decoration and, after another agitated episode (with a reference to the opening *Allegro* in the piano) the movement draws to a gentle close.

An effervescent *Scherzo* recalls the élan of the first movement and demonstrates Arensky's facility and lightness of touch, its outer sections suggestive of Mendelssohn at his most impish. Sparkling piano writing eventually yields to smoother, flowing lines before returning to the capricious mood of the opening section. The *finale* is a curious integration of Baroque mannerisms, (note the marking *in modo antico*), with a

fugal version of the second movement's French song and a return to the main theme from the first movement.

In sharp contrast to the triumph that closes the *Quintet*, the second of Arensky's two string quartets is a sombre, elegiac work in three movements. Written in 1894 in memory of Tchaikovsky, (who had died the previous year), *String Quartet No. 2* is unusual in its scoring for single violin, viola and two cellos. These rich sonorities are fully explored in the repeated chords (based on a Russian Orthodox funeral chant) that open the work. Sobriety of expression soon gives way to tenderness with the appearance of the delicate first theme taken by the violin which, freed from its lowest register, soon discovers higher reaches in passionate outbursts. After a pause five repeated cello Gs introduce a gentle second theme which, after an agitated passage leads to a re-examination of the first theme – by turns intense and elegiac. Two further appearances of the funeral chant enclose one last appearance of the two main themes.

Arensky next turns to Tchaikovsky's popular *Legend*, *Op. 54*, also known in its choral version as *Crown of Roses*, for a set of seven variations which, like the *Quintet*, are alternately lyrical and energetic. The cello initiates both the first variation and the second, now with much agitation in the upper strings. Shifting to a warm E major, the viola carries the theme in the third variation, while in the fourth, fragments of the theme are exchanged in a mood of nervous energy. Tranquil elaborations characterise the fifth, (its tune now augmented and assigned to the cello), while the sixth is a tour-de-force of string writing. The seventh (with strings muted) is elegiac and a chant-like coda draws the variations to a sombre conclusion.

This tone continues into the final movement in which Arensky integrates a theme from a Requiem funeral mass (heard at the outset) with a patriotic folk-song "*Slava Bogu*" (Glory to God) transformed into a lively fugato. After its intense development, with quasi-orchestral sonorities, the slow chant briefly returns before Arensky unleashes a triumphant reprise of the fugato theme and celebrates in grand style the memory of his hero Tchaikovsky.

The first *Piano Trio* (also from 1894) is another commemorative work, this time with a dedication to his friend the cellist Karl Davidoff who had been Director of the St Petersburg Conservatoire when Arensky was there as a student and had died suddenly in 1889. It is no surprise that the cello features prominently in this wonderfully elegiac work.

The expansive first movement opens with a lyrical theme stated twice by the violin over a gently rippling accompaniment. With the cello's arrival both instruments briefly "discuss" the theme before a dance-like episode is reached. Its carefree mood soon makes way for a new expressive idea announced by the cello. To this quiet rapture the violin joins in, and after a dramatic flourish from the piano the music builds towards an intense coda – the piano very much a leading participant. Imitative phrases derived from both the opening theme and the dance-like episode fashion the development and following a dramatic passage of *tremolando* strings the violin ushers in a full recapitulation with the main theme. An *Adagio* section reminiscing on the main theme brings the movement to a gentle close.

Where the first movement is rhapsodic the second, an infectious *Scherzo*, is a glittering waltz, its buoyant mood built on the violin's stammering figure and the piano's cascading scales. Humour of a different kind continues in the *Trio* where the piano's resolute accompaniment to cello and violin seem to nosethumb decades of Viennese tradition. It is perhaps in the *Adagio* movement – the emotional core of this work – that the cellist Davidoff is most fondly recalled. In the *Elegia*, muted cello pours out a heartfelt melody over a dignified accompaniment. A slightly faster central panel brings a lighter mood and a new theme of great charm is given to the piano and supported by undulating strings. With the reprise of the main theme, on the violin's lowest string, the elegiac mood brings this *Adagio* to a peaceful conclusion.

The finale is built on contrasting paragraphs of great restlessness and more leisurely discourse that recall the earlier movements. A sense of impetuosity begins the finale where driving rhythms from the piano and vigorous string interjections (with some virtuosic violin passages)

push the music onward with boundless energy. This leads to the first more relaxed passage – its lyricism recalling the elegiac idea. A return to the dramatic earlier passage leads to further reminders of the slow movement – this time the rising contours of the central theme. Further

drama eventually leads to the work's nostalgia opening theme, but it is the movement's restlessness that ultimately prevails.

David Truslove

## Anton Arensky (1861-1906)

### Klavierquintett op. 51 • Streichquartett Nr. 2, op. 35 • Klaviertrio Nr. 1, op. 32

„In seiner Jugend entging er nicht einem gewissen Einfluss von mir; später kam der Einfluss von Tschaikowsky. Er wird schnell vergessen sein.“ So urteilte Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov über seinen Schüler Anton Arensky, eine Einschätzung, die bis heute verhängnisvoll nachwirkt. Denn das Etikett des Eklektikers, allenfalls des Klassizisten, in dessen Formvollendung man nicht viel Originalität erblicken wollte, ist der russische Komponist niemals so richtig losgeworden. Dabei hatte er alle Voraussetzungen für eine glanzvolle Karriere. Der Sohn eines musikbegeisterten Arztes und einer Pianistin begann bereits mit neun Jahren zu komponieren. Nach nur dreijährigem Studium in St. Petersburg erhielt der 21jährige eine Professur für Tonsatz am Moskauer Konservatorium. Alexander Skrjabin und Sergej Rachmaninow zählten zu seinen Studenten. Nach seiner Rückkehr nach St. Petersburg 1895 leitete er die zaristische Hofkapelle, ein Posten, für den ihn Mili Balakirev vorgeschlagen hatte. Davon zog er sich 1901 zurück, um sich ganz dem Komponieren und Konzertieren zu widmen – er war auch als Pianist und Dirigent sehr geschätzt.

Doch dieses erfüllte Musikerleben hatte seine Schattenseiten. Zeitlebens litt Arensky, von lebhaftem, scharf denkendem Geist, unter Depressionen, die er mit Glücksspiel und Alkohol zu bekämpfen suchte. Geschwächt durch diesen Lebenswandel, starb er 1906 an Tuberkulose, noch nicht 45 Jahre alt. Drei Werke dieses fast vergessenen Komponisten hebt Spectrum Concerts Berlin auf den Prüfstand, gibt ihm die Chance, seine ganz eigene, feinsinnige Originalität zu beweisen.

Gegenüber dem ausladenden *Trio* zeigt das *Quartett* – trotz des gemeinsamen Entstehungsjahrs 1894 –

bereits starke Anzeichen formaler Konzentration und Reduktion. Dazu gehört der Verzicht auf kontrastierende Themen; alles scheint aus einem gemeinsamen Materialkern geschaffen. Im 1900 vollendeten *Klavierquintett* ist diese Entwicklung auf die Spitze getrieben. Ein feuriges Marschthema löst sich in fließende Bewegung auf, findet seine lyrischen, nachdenklich verschatteten oder grell auftrumpfenden Beleuchtungen. Kontraste schließt das nicht aus, etwa einen eleganten Walzer im melancholischen Variationensatz. Ein Fugato ist bei soviel Komprimierung die notwendige Folge. Viktor Belajev hielt das *Quintett* für Arenskys „Meisterwerk“, während das *Scherzo* für den Kammermusik-Enzyklopädisten Walter Cobbett funkelte „wie Diamanten in der Sonne“.

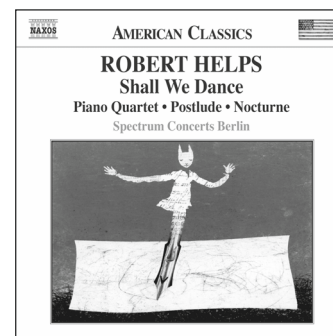
Das *Streichquartett Nr. 2* entstand 1894 zum Gedenken des ein Jahr zuvor verstorbenen Mentors und Vorbilds Peter Tschaikowsky. Der „Trauermusik“ entspricht das ungewöhnlich dunkle Klangbild – statt der zweiten Violine wird ein zweites Cello eingesetzt. Im Zentrum steht ein Variationensatz auf ein Thema von Tschaikowsky – die „*Legende*“ aus den „*Kinderliedern*“ op. 54 – der weite Extreme des Tempos und der Bewegungsformen von choralartiger Schlichtheit bis zu erregter Virtuosität umschließt, den melodischen Stil des verehrten Meisters teilweise imitiert und in der Coda die Anfangstakte des ersten Satzes zitiert. Im Finale wird das Eröffnungsthema aus einer russischen Trauermesse von einem Volkslied abgelöst, das offenbar zur Zarenkrönung gesungen wurde und das sowohl Beethoven in seinem „*Rasumowsky*“-*Quartett* op. 59 Nr. 2 als auch Mussorgski in „*Boris Godunow*“ verwendeten.

Das *Klaviertrio* op. 32 ist Arenskys wohl bekannteste Komposition. Es begegnet immer wieder im Konzertsaal und ist jetzt auch als CD-Einspielung häufiger zu finden. Wer es einmal gehört hat, wird vor allem das weitgeschwungene, schwärmerische Hauptthema nicht wieder vergessen – ein „Ohrwurm“, der einen noch tagelang begleitet. Nicht nur in der Tonart d-Moll, sondern auch in vielen Details nimmt sich das Werk Mendelssohns *Klaviertrio* Nr. 1 zum Vorbild und bezieht sein eigenes Profil doch gerade aus seiner Melodik. Sie strahlt stets elegante Melancholie aus und streift durchaus die Sphären des Salons, ohne jemals geschmacklich abzugleiten. Der äußerst virtuose, gleichwohl transparente

zwischen den Streichinstrumenten vermittelnde Klavierpart im Kopfsatz enthält Spuren des frühen Chopin, während sich das quirlige *Scherzo* an Mendelssohns „*Elfenmusiken*“ anlehnt. Im Zentrum steht auch hier der langsame Satz; eine „*Elegie*“ im Gedenken an den Cellisten Karl Davidoff, die einen ätherischen Mittelteil einschließt. Dieser taucht ebenso wie das Eröffnungsthema im kraftvollen Finale wieder auf, was seiner eher „diesseitigen“ Virtuosität die nachdenklich rückschauenden Momente einzieht und für formale Geschlossenheit sorgt.

Isabel Herzfeld

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## Boris Brovtsyn



A fourth-generation musician, Boris Brovtsyn started to play violin under the guidance of his grandfather, a student of Lev Tzeitlin and Abram Yampolsky. After graduating from Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory where he studied with Maya Glezarova, he made his British début with the BBC Philharmonic conducted by Rumon Gamba and soon moved to London, where he completed his studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with David Takeno. He is in ever-increasing demand internationally both as concerto soloist and as chamber musician, with a repertoire of over fifty violin concertos and hundreds of chamber works. He has collaborated with distinguished conductors, orchestras and chamber music colleagues and is a frequent guest at Les Grands Interprètes chamber music series in Geneva and Spectrum Concerts Berlin, where he has appeared in every season since 2008.

## Alexander Sitkovetsky



Alexander Sitkovetsky made his concerto début at the age of eight and the same year began studies at the Menuhin School. Lord Menuhin was his inspiration and they performed together in works including the Bach *Double Concerto* and the Bartók *Duos*. He also performed the Mendelssohn concerto under Menuhin's baton. He has performed with the Netherlands Philharmonic, the Philharmonia, the Royal Philharmonic, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the BBC Concert Orchestra, the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra and the Brussels Philharmonic, among others. As chamber musician Alexander Sitkovetsky has appeared with Spectrum Concerts Berlin since 2007, has recorded for Angel/EMI, Decca, Naxos and Orfeo, and is a founding member of the Sitkovetsky Piano Trio.

[www.alexandersitkovetsky.com](http://www.alexandersitkovetsky.com)

## Maxim Rysanov



GRAMMY®-nominated Ukrainian-British violist and conductor Maxim Rysanov is principally known for his performances as a violist, guest of major events of the international music scene such as the BBC Last Night of the Proms, the Edinburgh Festival and the Salzburg Festival. He has performed with Spectrum Concerts for many years. Among his concerto highlights are performances with the Mariinsky Orchestra, the Russian National Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, La Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León and the DSO Berlin. Early awards testifying to his international reputation include the *Classic FM/Gramophone* Young Artist of the Year Award and the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Award. His enthusiasm for new music has led to a number of collaborations, which have extended the viola repertoire. This includes world premières of works by Dobrinka Tabakova, Richard Dubugnon and Valentin Bibik. He plays a Giuseppe Guaragnini viola (1780) on extended loan from the Elise Mathilde Foundation.

[www.maximrysanov.com](http://www.maximrysanov.com)

## Jens Peter Maintz



Jens Peter Maintz won first prize at the Munich Competition, the International Cello Competition in Scheveningen and at the German Music Competition, and was a prizewinner at the 1993 Leonard Rose Competition. He was principal cellist of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and has been principal cellist of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra since 1996. His début recording for Sony of works by Bach, Kodály and Dutilleux received the Echo Klassik Award. He has recorded Isang Yun's *Cello Concerto* for Capriccio and for Arte Nova, a CD of romantic repertoire by Tchaikovsky, Fitzenhagen, Davidov and Brandukov. In 2008 Berlin Classics released his recording of Haydn's *Cello Concertos* with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen. David Geringas was his principal teacher. Jens Peter is professor at the University of Arts Berlin and plays cellos made by Giovanni Battista Grancino, Vincenzo Ruggeri dated 1696 and by Wolfgang Schnabl dated 2010. Jens Peter Maintz has performed with Spectrum Concerts Berlin since 1995.

## Boris Andrianov



Boris Andrianov won the bronze medal at the International Tchaikovsky Competition, first prize at the International Antonio Janigro Cello Competition and was the first Russian cellist to become a laureate at the Sixth International Rostropovich Competition in Paris. He has appeared as soloist with major orchestras throughout Europe and has performed with Valery Gergiev, Pavel Kogan, Alexander Vedernikov and David Geringas. Some of his chamber music partners include Yuri Bashmet, Menahem Pressler and Akiko Suwanai. He has performed with Spectrum Concerts Berlin for many years. In 2002 the Delos Record Label released a CD with music for cello and guitar with Andrianov and Dimitri Illarionov. His recording of Rachmaninov and Shostakovich sonatas with Uri Urasin on the Quartz label received *Gramophone's* "Editor's Choice". Boris Andrianov plays a Montagnana cello from the Russian State Collection.

[www.sempremusica.com/borisandrianov](http://www.sempremusica.com/borisandrianov)

## Eldar Nebolsin



Eldar Nebolsin enjoys a career as soloist, recitalist and chamber music player, appearing with conductors, orchestras and colleagues of international distinction. In 2005 he was unanimously awarded the Sviatoslav Richter Prize in the First International Piano Competition in Moscow, where he was also honoured with the special award for The Best Classical Concerto Performance. Eldar Nebolsin has lived in Spain since 1991 and currently holds a place on the faculty of the International Institute of Chamber Music in Madrid, teaching alongside Ralf Gothoni, and is regularly invited to give master-classes both in piano solo repertoire and chamber music. He is also Professor of Piano at the Hanns Eisler Musikhochschule in Berlin. A former student of Dmitri Bashkurov, Eldar Nebolsin currently records for the Naxos label. His recording of both Liszt *Piano Concertos* (8.570517) and *Totentanz* earned top place on the Naxos Bestsellers' Digital Platform for six consecutive months. He followed this with Erno Dohnányi's *Variations on a Nursery Theme* (8.572303), Chopin's complete works for piano and orchestra (8.572335-36), released in August 2010, and a solo album of works by Schubert (8.572459), released in the summer of 2011. Earlier recordings include two albums for Decca.

[www.eldarnebolsin.com](http://www.eldarnebolsin.com)



## Spectrum Concerts Berlin



Spectrum Concerts Berlin was founded by the American cellist Frank Dodge in 1988 and has become one of Germany's most significant voices in the world of chamber music. Reviewers have showered praise for years, both in reviews of their live performances at the Philharmonie's Kammermusiksaal, and of their recordings. Spectrum Concerts Berlin members include, in addition to those on this recording, Janine Jansen, Valeriy Sokolov, Julia-Maria Kretz, Amihai Grosz, Hartmut Rohde, Torleif Thedéen, Frank Dodge, Lars Wouters van den Oudenweijer, Jacob Katsnelson, Naomi Niskala, Ya-Fei Chuang, Robert Levin, and many others. The mission of the organization expanded in 2006 with the opening of Spectrum Concerts Berlin – USA, Inc., a sister organization based in New York City which presents Spectrum's work to New York audiences at Carnegie's Zankel Hall, the Times Center and other venues. Most recently, members of Spectrum Concerts Berlin have been involved with helping rebuild musical life in Kosovo.

For more information, please visit Spectrum Concerts Berlin's website: [www.spectrumconcerts.com](http://www.spectrumconcerts.com)

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Anton Arensky belonged to the generation between Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, his early flair leading Tolstoy to state that, “among the new composers he is the best, he is simple and melodious.” Lacking a Russian tradition for the genre, Arensky’s *Piano Quintet* draws on Brahms and Mendelssohn for its sweeping themes and sparkling wit. The *Second String Quartet* was written in memory of Tchaikovsky and is a tender, elegiac work unusual in its scoring with two cellos. Dedicated to his cellist friend Karl Davidoff, the *First Piano Trio* is also a wonderfully heartfelt and virtuosic masterpiece.

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# Anton Stepanovich ARENSKY

(1861-1906)

Deutschlandradio Kultur

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|-----------|---|--------------|
|           | <b>Piano Quintet in D major, Op. 51 (1900)</b>                            | <b>23:50</b> |
| <b>1</b>  | <b>I. Allegro moderato</b>  | <b>6:56</b>  |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>II. Variations: Andante – Tempo di valse – Allegro molto – Tempo I</b> | <b>6:12</b>  |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace</b>                                       | <b>7:05</b>  |
| <b>4</b>  | <b>IV. Finale (Fuga): Allegro moderato</b>                                | <b>3:37</b>  |
|           | <b>String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 35 (1894)</b>                     | <b>28:26</b> |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>I. Moderato</b>  | <b>11:00</b> |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>II. Theme: Moderato (and Variations)</b>                               | <b>9:57</b>  |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>III. Finale: Andante sostenuto – Allegro moderato</b>                  | <b>7:29</b>  |
|           | <b>Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32 (1894)</b>                         | <b>27:43</b> |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>I. Allegro moderato</b>  | <b>9:33</b>  |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>II. Scherzo: Allegro molto</b>   | <b>5:56</b>  |
| <b>10</b> | <b>III. Elegia: Adagio</b>  | <b>6:19</b>  |
| <b>11</b> | <b>IV. Finale: Allegro non troppo</b>                                     | <b>5:55</b>  |

## Spectrum Concerts Berlin

**Boris Brovtsyn, Violin 1** **1-4**, **Violin 5-11** • **Alexander Sitkovetsky, Violin 2** **1-4**  
**Maxim Rysanov, Viola** **1-7** • **Boris Andrianov, Cello 1** **5-7**, **Cello** **8-11**  
**Jens Peter Maintz, Cello** **1-4**, **Cello 2** **5-7** • **Eldar Nebolsin, Piano** **1-4** **8-11**

**Frank S. Dodge, Artistic Director**

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