



PENDERECKI

Complete Music
for String Quartet
String Trio

Tippett Quartet

Krzysztof PENDERECKI (1933–2020)

String Quartets Nos. 1–4 • Der unterbrochene Gedanke • String Trio

Krzysztof Penderecki was born in Dębica on 23 November 1933 and studied at the Academy of Music in Krakow, then at the Jagiellonian University, before he established himself at the Warsaw Autumn Festivals of 1959 and 1960. He soon became part of the European avant-garde, achieving international success with *Threnody* [Naxos 8.554491], where he imparted an intensely expressive vein to what was his then 'sonorist' musical language. The *St Luke Passion* [8.557149] proved just how successful this idiom could be in sacred music, and he continued to be inspired by religious themes, as is witnessed by his cantatas, oratorios and operas. During the mid-1970s, however, such an involvement with tradition became deeper, Penderecki embarking on a dialogue with music rediscovered for himself as he internalised the post-Romantic tradition and then combined it with the technical hallmarks of his earlier music. Works composed in this later idiom include the concertos for violin [8.555265], for cello and viola [both 8.572211], the *Second Symphony* [8.554492], the opera *Paradise Lost*, the *Te Deum* [8.557980] and *A Polish Requiem* [8.557386-87]. Continued formal and stylistic investigation resulted in operas such as the expressionist *The Black Mask* or the satirical *Ubu Rex* as well as the oratorios *Seven Gates of Jerusalem* [8.557766] and *Credo* [8.572032] – all of them informed by an acute expression together with a refined array of technical means. This evolutionary process continued until the composer's death in Krakow on 29 March 2020.

Chamber music features intermittently in Penderecki's output. He was an able violinist as a student, with a *Sonata for Violin and Piano* from 1953 published some four decades later. He wrote numerous works for small instrumental ensembles up until the *First String Quartet* of 1960. Thereafter, with the exception of the *Second String Quartet* in 1968, the emphasis was firmly on operatic, choral and orchestral works. Chamber composition was restricted to short 'homages' to friends and colleagues until, in the 1990s, he returned to the medium in earnest. The present album collates all the composer's music for string quartet,

together with the *String Trio* which further underlines the seriousness with which he returned to the chamber domain.

When he composed his *First String Quartet* (1960), Penderecki was still establishing himself at the forefront of the avant-garde. Premiered in Cincinnati on 23 May 1962 by the LaSalle Quartet, this is indebted to the quartet writing of Berio and Xenakis for its content and ethos. Beginning with rapid passagework across the ensemble, the piece rapidly draws upon a wide range of playing techniques as it unfolds in a succession of asymmetric timbral patterns and rhythmic ostinatos. After several minutes, the music pauses then continues in an interplay of jagged gestures and breathless tremolos – the relative density of this interaction determining the cumulative intensification of the latter stages, until gently ricocheting figures signal the approaching end. The piece then dies away as quickly and as inscrutably as it had emerged.

Similar in length and conception, the *Second String Quartet* (1968) was premiered in Berlin on 30 September 1970 by the Parrenin Quartet, and reflects the influence of Ligeti (whose own *Second Quartet* had appeared in 1968) in its technical aspects and overall soundworld. A convulsive gesture launches this piece, which duly proceeds as a gradual build-up against pulsating dissonances. Unlike the earlier work, there is a clearer definition between textural and dynamic shading that gives the music a greater sense of formal growth for all the refractory nature of the material. In common with other of the composer's pieces from the period, there is also a streak of humour (albeit sardonic) in the way that the instruments react or respond to each other – not least a climactic confrontation which reluctantly disperses towards the close.

Penderecki did not return to the quartet medium until 1988 with *Der unterbrochene Gedanke*, which was premiered in Frankfurt on 4 February that year by the Kreuzberger Quartet. As befits a piece whose title translates as 'The Interrupted Thought', the content is predominantly restrained though highly eventful in its animated build-up towards a short-lived central apex of activity. After which,

there is an even more rapid subsidence into those questioning final bars, stylistic traits from across the composer's idiom finding accord in barely three minutes.

Before attempting a further string quartet, however, Penderecki essayed a *String Trio* (1990) which was given its premiere in Krakow by the Deutsches String Trio on 8 December 1990, with the definitive version being heard in Metz on 15 November the following year. Unlike many of this composer's later works (whether chamber or otherwise), the tempo markings of both movements imply rapid motion. Not least the opening *Allegro molto*, which unfolds as the juxtaposition between jagged repeated gestures on all three instruments and impassioned responses from respectively viola, cello then violin. Having so established this isolation there follows a phase of integration that is speculative but also inquisitive, until the music regains an impetus that is waylaid by a methodical interplay towards the expressively sustained close. Following on without pause, the ensuing *Vivace* leads off with a vaunting gesture from viola that is soon joined by violin then cello in an incisively contrapuntal discourse. This is pursued both collectively and individually, with the range of expression duly expanding yet without the music losing any of its initial energy. At length, a forceful climax is reached from where the music passes through a succession of nonchalant responses before it regains its previous animation, moving impulsively to an ending the more decisive for being so grounded tonally.

It was not until 2008 that Penderecki essayed his *Third String Quartet*, commissioned for the Shanghai Quartet in honour of its 25th and the composer's 75th anniversaries, then first heard in Warsaw on 21 November that year. Its subtitle 'Leaves from an Unwritten Diary' gives a specific indication of the inherently personal and even autobiographical nature of this music. As with both of its predecessors, the work proceeds as a single span – though here its relative length (longer than those earlier quartets combined) admits of a far greater formal elaboration and emotional depth. After the powerfully

sustained opening gesture, the music alights on a variety of rhythmically interlocking figures which generate a considerable momentum before subsiding into a more understated and yielding demeanour. What follows gives each of these instruments the melodic spotlight, as heard against a constantly changing accompaniment that itself exacerbates the anguished mood. This is succeeded by a *scherzo*-like episode in which earlier ideas are developed and intensified with an unflagging resolve, duly interrupted by an interlude as spectral as it is insubstantial, before continuing with an audible modal tinge to its harmonies. The earlier melancholy soon returns in what becomes the most affecting passage, from where the music subsides into a ruminative postlude that recalls previous ideas with an underlying eloquence which pervades through to a conclusion as resigned as it is cathartic.

Penderecki's *Fourth String Quartet* followed eight years later – a commission for the Belcea Quartet, who gave its first performance at Wigmore Hall in London on 11 December 2016. Unlike each of its predecessors, this work falls into two clearly demarcated movements – the opening *Andante* being essentially a prelude in its limpidity and restraint, with viola taking the melodic line and gaining brief gestural responses until the inward concluding bars. The ensuing *Vivo* sets off with acerbic gestures between the instruments that generate no mean impetus, and itself acts as the refrain to a more individuated yet no less purposeful dialogue. Here, too, there is the discernible presence of modal or even folk inflections – the music all the time gaining momentum which is left in abeyance by the cello's halting gestures at the close.

The sheer brevity of the work as it stands does leave an undeniable feeling of incompleteness – though whether this is deliberate on the part of the composer, or whether he had intended to add further movements in due course (as was the case in his third and eighth symphonies) cannot now be answered. What remains can be interpreted as an intriguing 'might have been'.

Richard Whitehouse

Tippett Quartet

The Tippett Quartet have performed at Wigmore Hall, the BBC Proms, Kings Place, Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall and The Bridgewater Hall, and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. The quartet has toured Europe, Canada and Mexico, and its broad and diverse repertoire highlights the ensemble's unique versatility. It has an impressive catalogue of recordings, most recently being awarded *Gramophone* magazine's Recording of the Month for Górecki's *String Quartet No. 3* (Naxos 8.574110). The Tippett Quartet has worked on a ground-breaking reimagining of Beethoven's *Op. 135* with composer/soundscape artist Matthew Herbert and has also given numerous world and UK premieres including newly discovered works by Tchaikovsky and Holst, as well as new pieces by John Adams, Freya Waley-Cohen, Howard Goodall and Alissa Firsova. In 2011 the quartet celebrated the anniversary of the iconic film composer Bernard Herrmann with a series of concerts and radio broadcasts, and can be heard as featured artists on the film *Knives Out*.

www.tippettquartet.co.uk



Penderecki wrote music for string quartet over a period of 56 years. His *String Quartet No. 1* was written in the same year that he achieved international success with *Threnody* (Naxos 8.554491), and includes a wide range of playing techniques reflective of the avant-garde. *String Quartet No. 2* reveals the influence of Ligeti, while *No. 3* is a personal, even autobiographical work. In *No. 4* there are modal or even folk inflections, in writing that is both limpid and abrasive. The eventful *Der unterbrochene Gedanke* completes Penderecki's music for quartet, while the *String Trio* exemplifies his music's motoric energy.

**Krzysztof
PENDERECKI**
(1933–2020)

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|---|--|-------|
| 1 | String Quartet No. 1 (1960) | 6:09 |
| 2 | String Quartet No. 2 (1968)
Lento molto | 8:02 |
| 3 | Der unterbrochene Gedanke (1988)
Grave | 2:18 |
| | String Trio (1990, rev. 1991) | 13:12 |
| 4 | I. Allegro molto – | 7:36 |
| 5 | II. Vivace | 5:31 |
| 6 | String Quartet No. 3 'Leaves from
an Unwritten Diary' (2008)
Grave | 16:46 |
| | String Quartet No. 4 (2016) | 6:06 |
| 7 | I. Andante | 1:37 |
| 8 | II. Vivo | 4:25 |

Tippett Quartet

John Mills, Violin I • Jeremy Isaac, Violin II 1–3 6–8
Lydia Lowndes-Northcott, Viola • Bozidar Vukotic, Cello

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Playing Time
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