

Saint-Saëns

audite

Piano Quintet | String Quartet No. 1



Andrea Lucchesini | Quartetto di Cremona

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Piano Quintet in A minor, Op. 14

- I. Allegro moderato e maestoso 10:23
- II. Andante sostenuto 7:26
- III. Presto* 4:38
- IV. Allegro assai, ma tranquillo 8:48

String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, Op. 112

- I. Allegro 11:28
- II. Molto allegro quasi presto 5:46
- III. Molto adagio 8:37
- IV. Allegro non troppo 6:24

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

ANDREA LUCCHESINI, piano

ANDREA LUMACHI, double bass*

Camille Saint-Saëns as a chamber musician

Amongst the composers who defined musical history in France during the second half of the nineteenth century, Camille Saint-Saëns was classically orientated from the outset – in contrast to the Belgian-born César Franck, who was eleven years his senior. He has to be counted amongst the small number of highly gifted artists possessing keen, rapid and versatile perception, as well as the ability to express themselves creatively; his talents and interests were not limited to music, but also encompassed the other arts, languages, sciences, religion and philosophy. Music, however, remained central for him, the field around which everything else was grouped.

The hierarchy of his talents resulted mainly from his upbringing. At first glance, his early childhood seems harsh: at the tender age of three months, his father died, and only a few months later also his great uncle, with whose family Jacques-Joseph-Victor Saint-Saëns and his wife and child had shared a house. Initially, Camille was placed in a children's home; two years later, however, he was returned to the care of his mother on account of his poor constitution. Henceforth she and his great aunt raised the boy, nurturing his talents in every possible way. At the age of three, he received his first piano lessons; as a ten-year-old, he gave his first public performance at the Salle Pleyel – the most prestigious Paris concert venue alongside the Conservatoire (if one discounts the theatres). His programme included Beethoven's C minor Piano Concerto which he played from memory: an absolute sensation at the time. In 1848, the thirteen-year-old entered the Conservatoire as its youngest student. He was a child prodigy to whom composing came naturally. Hector Berlioz commented about the younger musician that the only experience which he lacked was failure.

His classical tendencies manifested themselves in a secure sense of form, structure and proportion, but also, externally, in the relationship of the genres within his *œuvre*. He considered them all; in contrast to several of his colleagues, he did not regard opera, central to the musical life of the French capital, an undoubted focal point. Purely instrumental works – symphonies, concertos, chamber music – on the other hand made up an unusually large proportion: nearly one quarter of his entire oeuvre consists of chamber music. From the duo sonata (for melody instrument and piano) through to the septet, all ensemble sizes can be found. The works on this CD depict two phases from his oeuvre: the Piano Quintet of 1855 represents his early period (he composed the piece at the age of twenty), whilst the String Quartet in E minor of 1899 can be ascribed to his late period – at the same time, it is the first piece of chamber music for which Saint-Saëns, himself a magnificent pianist, did not demand a piano.

The Piano Quintet Op. 14

The Piano Quintet, which Saint-Saëns dedicated to his great aunt, combines the essential components characteristic of the exquisite chamber music genre in France at the time. Opus 14 forms part of the *concertante* chamber works which were particularly popular amongst music lovers of the *grande nation*. Joseph Haydn made allowances for this *goût*, for instance, in his String Quartets Op. 54 which were intended to demonstrate to the Paris audience his mastery of the more subtle musical genres. Saint-Saëns conceived the piano part of his quintet as a virtuoso, brilliant and technically

challenging one, almost as in a concerto: the pianist is given the lead role. The string quartet, however, is not reduced to pure accompaniment but is treated as a partner. At the outset, the composer exposes his concept of the relationship between the musical partners: the piano opens the proceedings, the strings provide the final note of each “verse”, allowing it to resonate. Viewed in fast motion, these sustained notes form a descending line in semitones which, as a component and means of expression, keeps gaining in significance. The real main theme following this introduction is designed according to the model of summons (piano) and response (strings); when the theme returns in its entirety, the roles are reversed.

In the exact, filigree and carefully proportioned design of both the quintet as a whole and also its individual movements, Saint-Saëns looks towards those works which were most respected amongst sophisticated cultivars of chamber music: compositions by Franz Schubert, Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann. The slow introduction, nonetheless based on the principal metre of the rapid first movement, reminds us of Schubert’s String Quintet, whose opening movement features a slow introduction and a fast main section without any change in the speed of the beat. Robert Schumann is evoked through several particularities, including in the introduction with its repeats at crucial points of the musical form; Saint-Saëns exceeds his role models by repeating the introduction at the end of the third movement – almost as a prelude to the finale – and before the closing section of the finale. The “ghost scherzo” (third movement) is reminiscent of Schumann’s Piano Quartet: an urging *perpetuum mobile* in a predominantly low register, where everything is in motion and melodies take on the form of fragments or motifs, appearing in transitional sections. The significance of the fugal technique in the finale recalls Schumann’s Piano Quintet. The slow movement, a song without words, could be inspired by similar pieces by Felix Mendelssohn.

The two middle movements together have roughly the same duration as the opening movement. By joining them without a break and by certain motivic links, Saint-Saëns underlines the fact that, as contrasting character pieces, they form a unit – the *perpetuum mobile* from the scherzo, for instance, already appears as a colour towards the end of the slow movement. The highly developed sense of form, conveyed by the work’s proportions, as well as the tripartite structure of the four movements, confirm Saint-Saëns as looking towards classicism; the expressivity of his composing has taken on romantic impulses.

The String Quartet Op. 112

String quartets cast in E minor take on a special significance during the nineteenth century. Giuseppe Verdi’s only contribution to the genre, written in 1873 and premiered in Paris in 1876, bears confessional traits, pointing towards his *Quattro pezzi sacri*; this manifests itself even more strongly in Bedřich Smetana’s Quartet *From My Life*, which the Czech composer wrote in 1876, two years after losing his hearing. Even Beethoven’s Op. 59,2 (1806) and Mendelssohn’s Op. 44,2 (1837) contain striking characteristics which come close to a personal statement or message. Saint-Saëns’ First Quartet, Op. 112, on the other hand, seems to be inspired by entirely external circumstances: he fulfilled a wish of the Belgian violinist

Eugène Ysaÿe. One might have expected him to have written a piece in the tradition of the “Quatuors brillants” for this remarkable virtuoso. However, only the episodes between the main thematic portions and the last section of the finale live up to this musical format. The closing movement thus becomes a highly animated finale in the classical tradition – despite the key that customarily expressed melancholy and defiance. The *élan* of the finale is amplified by the fact that Saint-Saëns places the slow movement into penultimate position – a *cantabile* pause before storming into the end.

Although the Quartet contains the same classical movement types as the early Piano Quintet, Saint-Saëns realised an entirely different dramaturgical concept in this work. The central movements, whose order is now reversed, are no longer linked as a contrasting unit, but act as a response to, or preparation for, the outer movements. The scherzo develops the advancing moments of the first movement, intensifying them – by persistent syncopations in the main section and the compositional technique of the fugue in the middle section. At the same time, form and complexity of the motivic texture are noticeably simplified. The scherzo therefore represents an acceleration and a withdrawal in one. The slow movement stylises human singing in its calm, simple and also virtuoso, artistic manner. This focuses the entire musical texture on the top part, referring to the prominent, *concertante* role of the first violin in the episodes of the finale.

Saint-Saëns prefaces the first movement with a long introduction. It creates motion not through tempo but by shaping its counterpart, a questioning standstill. Twice a long sustained note appears, supported, in the middle, by a dissonant chord. According to traditional rules, a dissonance has to be resolved directly or indirectly, and the chord should bear some form of sensible relation to the home key. In this case, however, the dissonance is fixed only after fifty bars – this is preceded by motivic floating and searching; thereafter, the harmonic idiom engages in strange oscillations based more on the old church modes than the more modern major-minor system. It thus takes a long time for the initial questions to be answered: this occurs in the form of the fast main section and its first theme, which leads Saint-Saëns to draw remarkable conclusions from the introduction. It consists of two sections; the first one is characterised by rapid figures whose objective is hard to gauge. The second one features resolute, march-like rhythms: pushing forwards and motion govern the first section, inner strength the second. The secondary theme displays a vocal character, its soaring beginning prepared by the main theme. The “upwards” gesture defines its depiction by the cello, followed by the viola, second violin, and finally the first violin. In the central section of the movement, the development, the second part of the main theme erupts in a fugue, bringing new thoughts into play. In all a highly artful movement whose idiosyncratic classicism and bold harmonies surely contradict the “conservative” label often attached to Saint-Saëns. The composer dedicated this work not only to Eugène Ysaÿe, the virtuoso, but, first and foremost, to Ysaÿe, the knowledgeable musician. This also constitutes an avowal: an avowal towards art.

Habakuk Traber

Translation: Viola Scheffel



Giovanni Scaglione, cello | Simone Gramaglia, viola | Paolo Andreoli, violin | Andrea Lucchesini, piano | Cristiano Gualco, violin

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

During the past ten years the Quartetto di Cremona has matured into a string quartet of international renown, combining the Italian culture of string playing with an awareness of historical performance practice. As a quartet of the younger generation, the Quartetto di Cremona has acquired an excellent national and international reputation. Having for many years performed at the great international halls, it is often regarded as the successor to the famous Quartetto Italiano. The musical style of the Quartetto di Cremona is marked by a fruitful tension between Italian and German-Austrian influences. Following their academic studies the players continued their training with Piero Farulli of the Quartetto Italiano. He strongly favoured intuitive playing and a fervent, emotional, romantic and “Italian” approach to music. Afterwards the musicians pursued their studies with Hatto Beyerle of the Alban Berg Quartet. As an expert in the classical era, he represents a clear, classical, “German-Austrian” style, focusing on faithfulness to the original, form and structure as a basis for musical interpretation and inspiration.

Both teachers have left a lasting impression on the quartet and significantly influenced its musical style. The players naturally unite both poles, combining boisterous enthusiasm with a distinct sense for musical architecture, cultivating the fusion of structure and expression, external shape and internal passion.

The Quartetto di Cremona has performed at major festivals in Europe, South America, Australia and the United States, including Beethovenfest in Bonn, Bozar Festival in Brussels, Cork Festival in Ireland, Turku Festival in Finland, Perth Festival in Australia and Platonov Festival in Russia. They have performed at such prestigious international concert halls as the Konzerthaus Berlin, London’s Wigmore Hall, Bargemusic in New York and Beethovenhaus Bonn.

Since 2010, the Quartetto di Cremona has been Ensemble in Residence at the Società del Quartetto in Milan and as such it is featured in numerous concerts and projects. In 2014, the 150th anniversary of the society, the co-operation culminated in performances of the complete Beethoven String Quartets; in 2016 a similar project will bring the complete Mozart String Quartets on stage.

The quartet collaborates with artists such Pieter Wispelwey, Angela Hewitt, Larry Dutton, Antonio Meneses, Andrea Lucchesini, Lilya Zilberstein and Lynn Harrell. Its repertoire ranges from the early works of Haydn to contemporary music; here their particular interest lies in works by Fabio Vacchi, Michele Dall’Ongaro, Helmut Lachenmann and Maxwell Davies.

The musicians are also dedicated to teaching, giving master-classes throughout Europe. In 2011 the quartet was entrusted with the leadership of the String Quartet Course at the Accademia Walter Stauffer in Cremona, closing a circle, for all four members received their initial training at this institution.

ANDREA LUCCHESINI

Trained under the guidance of Maria Tipo, Andrea Lucchesini gained international recognition at a very young age when he won the “Dino Ciani” International Competition at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. Since then he has performed throughout the world with leading orchestras under conductors such as Claudio Abbado, Semyon Bychkov, Riccardo Chailly, Dennis Russell Davies, Charles Dutoit, Daniel Harding, Vladimir Jurowski and Giuseppe Sinopoli.

His wide-ranging repertoire includes works from classical to contemporary music. In 1994 he was awarded the Accademia Musicale Chigiana International Prize by European music critics; in the following year he received the Franco Abbiati Prize from Italian music critics.

A milestone of his professional life is the close collaboration with the composer Luciano Berio with whom Lucchesini witnessed the creation of his challenging work for solo piano, *Sonata*, which Lucchesini performed worldwide.

Equally important are his performances of the complete cycle of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas in the major international concert venues.

Numerous recordings document his artistic career.

Since 1990 the pianist has dedicated his attention also to chamber music exploring various formations and varied repertoire, including his collaboration with cellist Mario Brunello.

Andrea Lucchesini is passionately dedicated to teaching. He currently teaches at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole where he was also artistic director from 2008 until 2016. He was appointed Accademico di Santa Cecilia in 2008. He is frequently invited to give master classes at major music institutions throughout Europe and serves as a jury member in numerous international piano competitions.

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Quartetto di Cremona

recording: March 29 - 31, 2016

recording location:

'Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'Arte', Poirino

The 'Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'Arte' was established in 2004 with the aim to promote contemporary art and music. Based in Banna (Poirino, Italy), it administers a number of programs, such as workshops, residencies and commissions for young artists and composers with the supervision of leading figures of the art and music world.

instruments:

violin I: Giovanni Battista Guadagnini, 1776 Turin

violin II: Paolo Antonio Testore, 1750 Milan

viola: Gioacchino Torazzi, Turin, Italy ca. 1680-1720

violoncello: Dom Nicola Amati, 1712 Bologna

double bass: Fausto Casalini (early 20th cent.), Faenza

recording format: pcm, 96 kHz / 24bit

recording / executive producer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

recording engineer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Bernhard Hanke

editing: Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer

photos: Francesca Ricciardi

art direction and design (incl. editing of cover photo): AB•Design

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