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GLAZUNOV

Complete String Quartets • 1

String Quartets
Nos. 1, 2 and 3
'Slavyanskiy'

Tippett
Quartet



Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov (1865–1936)

Complete String Quartets • 1

Alexander Glazunov was born in St Petersburg on 10 August 1865, where he studied piano at nine, and then composing from eleven. Mily Balakirev soon recognised Glazunov's talent and brought him to the attention of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov in 1879. Two years later and Glazunov was being considered more a junior colleague than a student. The premiere of his *First Symphony* [Naxos 8.553561] in 1882, when he was barely 16, brought widespread praise for both composition and composer. It additionally secured him support from wealthy industrialist and amateur musician Mitrofan Belyayev, who had founded an influential publishing house, and took the young composer on tour throughout Western Europe in 1884. During this period he met with Liszt in Weimar, at which town his *First Symphony* received its Western premiere.

Glazunov emerged out of a creative crisis around 1890 with new-found maturity and, over the ensuing decade, was at the height of his creative powers while enjoying great international acclaim, which included honorary doctorates from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Concerts devoted to his music were given in St Petersburg and in Moscow to mark his 25th anniversary as composer. Glazunov made his conducting debut in 1888 and directed his *Second Symphony* [8.553769] at the World Exhibition in Paris the following year. In 1899, he was made a professor at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, becoming director in 1905. He remained so until the Bolshevik Revolution on 7 November 1917, with his *Second Piano Concerto* [8.553928] being premiered at the first concert given in Petrograd after that date.

Despite hardships suffered in the ensuing Civil War, Glazunov directed concerts in factories and barracks, alongside reorganising what became the Leningrad Conservatory, where he supported students such as Dmitry Shostakovich. His innate conservatism was attacked by academics and officials who advocated the communist ideology, and he took advantage of the opportunity to travel in 1928 for the Schubert centennial celebrations in Vienna, conducting his works in Paris then throughout Europe and the United States. The following year he made the first complete recording of his ballet *The Seasons*, then in 1934 wrote his final major work, the *Concerto for Alto Saxophone* [8.557063]. He died in Neuilly-sur-Seine on 21 March 1936; 36 years later, his remains were reinterred at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in Leningrad.

His eight symphonies represent the essence of his achievement, but Glazunov's seven string quartets are hardly less significant and extend over the entirety of his output. Even before the *First Symphony* had launched his career in March 1882 he had several acknowledged works to his credit, among them the *First String Quartet* which he designated his *Op. 1*. Composed during 1881 and 1882, its St Petersburg premiere, held on 25 November at a concert of the Imperial Russian Music Society, was well received – not least for the teenager's skill when fusing nationalist sentiment with classicist discipline, as Tchaikovsky (whose three quartets all date from the previous decade) freely admitted. It was awarded the Glinka Prize in 1884.

The first movement commences with an eloquent melody across all four instruments, which comes into its own at a later stage. It is followed by a lively theme whose rhythmic forthrightness contrasts with the more supple contours of a folk-inflected idea that dominates the brief development, after which the latter themes are reprised prior to an inward recall of the introductory melody and decisive payoff. The ensuing *Scherzo* (surely modelled on the second movement of Borodin's *First Symphony*) centres on two themes, vivacious and genial, which are alternately developed across its course before the earlier theme is made the basis for an assertive coda.

A 'romance without words', the slow movement features a wistful melody that expands over the ensemble, gaining in fervency while it does so, before it subsides in a mood of unforced repose. It remains for the *Finale* to secure a measure of overall unity with its lightly tripping main theme, again indebted to folk sources, and which finds contrast in the lilting theme that follows. A striking transition for pizzicato violins over cello presages eventful development underlining the teenage composer's mastery of modulation between keys, after which the themes are recalled as the music gains impetus then winds down into the return (announced by forceful pizzicatos) of the introductory melody, which brings this work bracingly full circle.

Completed in 1884 and premiered in St Petersburg in 1885, Glazunov's *Second String Quartet* marks an appreciable advance over its predecessor in terms of formal integration as well as its expressive range. It was in 1884 that the composer embarked on his first tour of Western Europe with his patron Belyayev, which not only involved meeting Liszt (to whose memory he dedicated his *Second Symphony* two years later) but also attending that year's Bayreuth Festival, though Wagner remained aesthetically contentious for Glazunov throughout much of his career, and his quartet is mindful to keep any more radical tendency firmly under wraps.

The opening movement begins with a good-natured theme soon heard over the ensemble. Its underlying restraint is shared by that of the second theme (viola and cello to the fore), while the development conflates elements of both prior to an intensified reprise that evolves these themes further, before a coda of affecting poise. The ensuing *Scherzo* (which recalls that of Borodin's own *Second String Quartet*) alternates between its impetuous opening idea and a theme of appealing elegance. Both themes are duly recalled, with that of the latter curtailed as the music embarks upon a strenuous amalgam of both themes, which makes for a decisive close.

The slow movement is arguably among the highlights of Glazunov's earlier output. Starting with a hymn-like theme, heard in eloquent four-part writing, it unfolds with a seamlessness that touches on relatively distant harmonies and takes in unexpected expressive asides as it heads toward a rapt restatement of this theme, then reaches a climax of real fervency before subsiding towards an ethereal calm. From here the *Finale* begins with a theme of genial cast that soon takes on greater incisiveness before making way for an equally relaxed second theme, with the cello then launching an intricate development. A graceful transition on the first violin leads to a frequently altered reprise, out of which a coda emerges to bring about the resolute ending.

Having a relatively protracted genesis, the *Third Quartet* emerged between 1886 and 1888, each of its movements originating in the Thursday and Friday gatherings which Belyayev and Glazunov held for the benefit of their peers. Only after its St Petersburg premiere in 1888 was the piece given a numeric title as, while less cohesive than its predecessor, its four movements amount to far more than the informal suite as originally designated. Although his *Second Symphony* represents the culmination of Glazunov's early nationalist phase, the present work stands as its effective endpoint: less ambitious, but its evocativeness of content is never in doubt.

The work begins with a moderately-paced movement that wears its Slavonic influence but lightly, its genial opening theme finding deft contrast with one of similar tempo though wider expressive range. Impulsive development follows, then there is a cursory recall of both themes prior to the relaxed conclusion. Called *Interludium*, its successor functions as a slow movement whose melody (there being no other heard during its course) unfolds in stepwise motion, as might a hymn or sacred song, though there is no lack of emotional underpinning in music that continues on its seemingly predestined way to a conclusion of noble finality.

Designated *Alla mazurka*, what follows is as much an intermezzo as a *scherzo* – the heavy inflection of folk music evident in its melodic modality or drone-like harmony. The latter is at the fore of the trio section with its heavy rhythmic accents; after which, the opening section returns much as before though with a delightfully insouciant coda. Subtitled *Une fête slave*, the finale is ostensibly a sequence of variations around the lively folk-like theme stated at its outset. These serve a double function, in that they evoke character studies as might have been encountered at such a festival, but also afford the limelight to each of the four instruments. At length the music amasses a heady impetus that continues through to its ebullient conclusion.

Richard Whitehouse

Tippett Quartet



Photo: Cathy Pyle

The Tippett Quartet has performed and broadcast throughout the UK, Europe, Canada and Mexico, and its broad and diverse repertoire highlights the ensemble's unique versatility. It has an impressive catalogue of recordings, and has given numerous world and UK premieres. The quartet released an acclaimed recording of Penderecki's *Quartets* (Naxos 8.574288), and was awarded *Gramophone* magazine's Recording of the Month for its recording of Górecki's *String Quartet No. 3* (8.574110). The release of the complete Korngold *Quartets* (8.574428) was received to great acclaim, being chosen as Chamber CD of the Month in *BBC Music Magazine* and also included in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* Top 10 Classical Recordings of the Year. The Tippett Quartet has collaborated with composer/soundscape artist Matthew Herbert on a reimagining of Beethoven's *Op. 135* and has performed with The Royal Ballet. In 2011 the quartet celebrated the anniversary of the iconic film composer Bernard Herrmann with a series of concerts and radio broadcasts, and it can be heard as a featured artist in the films *Knives Out*, *Glass Onion* and *Wake Up Dead Man*. The complete cycle of Glazunov Quartets is the quartet's next exciting project. www.tippettquartet.co.uk

Alexander Glazunov's seven string quartets extend over the entirety of his composing career and are equal in significance to his symphonies. Fused with nationalist sentiment and Classical discipline the *First String Quartet* secured the Glinka Prize for the teenage composer in 1884. The advances in expressive range and formal integration in the *Second Quartet* include a rapturous slow movement considered a highlight of his earlier output, while the *Third Quartet* has become known as 'The Slavonic' for its evocative folk-music character.

Alexander Konstantinovich
GLAZUNOV
(1865–1936)

	String Quartet No. 1 in D major, Op. 1 (1881–82)	22:23
❶	I. Andantino moderato	8:12
❷	II. Scherzo: Vivace	3:35
❸	III. Andante	3:45
❹	IV. Finale: Moderato	6:51
	String Quartet No. 2 in F major, Op. 10 (1884)	30:37
❺	I. Allegro non troppo	6:38
❻	II. Scherzo: Allegro	5:35
❼	III. Adagio molto	9:32
❽	IV. Finale: Allegro moderato	8:52
	String Quartet No. 3 in G major, Op. 26 'Slavyanskiy' (‘The Slavonic’) (1886–88)	27:53
❾	I. Moderato	5:36
❿	II. Interludium: Moderato	4:36
⓫	III. Alla mazurka: Allegretto	6:17
⓬	IV. Finale: Allegro moderato ‘Une fête slave’	11:24

Tippett Quartet

John Mills, Jeremy Isaac, Violin

Lydia Lowndes-Northcott, Viola • Bozidar Vukotic, Cello

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