

THE  
SILVERTRUST  
GUIDE TO

*The Silvertrust  
Guide to the  
Literature for  
Larger String  
Ensembles*

THE STANDARD  
STRING SEXTET

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# A Guide to the String Sextets, Octets and Beyond

By Raymond Silvertrust

## Introduction and Preface

The main objective of this guide is to provide both professional and amateur chamber music players, as well as concert-goers, with a practical guide to the string sextet, octet and nonet literature. But it is a special type of guide which up until now has not existed in English; a guide which can be used as an aid to exploration of the wider world of chamber music, most of which, in my experience, is virtually unknown to professional musicians as well as the listening public. However, this guide is by no means a mere compilation or an encyclopaedia of works, nor is it an academic treatise which analyses how a composer actually wrote his music.

When it comes to string sextets and beyond, one is very unlikely to be able to attend a concert where even one such work is performed. And it is even more unlikely that an entire concert will be devoted to such works. If one is lucky enough to hear a string sextet or octet performed live, most likely it will be in a concert by a string quartet that has invited a guest violist and cellist or bassist to perform one work. The other two works on the program will be for quartet. The reason for this is, in part, because there are no permanent string sextets or octets. What is surprising is that when the extra cost of the additional players is factored in, that only one such work is played. This may be explained by the fact that permanent quartet ensembles do not wish to take the time to learn very many works which are not part of the string quartet repertoire. On occasion, however, perhaps at a festival, a group of players will be assembled ad hoc, and one will get the chance to hear an entire concert of sextets or less likely, octets.

So then, supposing a sextet or octet has been programmed, what will it be? There are only three sextets that one is likely to hear performed live. Two are by Brahms, his Op.18 and his Op.36. The third possibility is Dvorak's Op.48. And while it cannot be argued that the Brahms String Sextets are not among the very best, the same cannot be said for the Dvorak which only gets an outing, despite the fact that there are many better works, because it is by him. As for octets, generally an ad hoc group will be assembled, or less occasionally two string quartets join forces for the undertaking. And there is only one work you are likely to hear, the Mendelssohn Op.20 Octet. In decades of regular concert going in Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, Zurich, Amsterdam, London and Chicago, as well as sporadic attendance at several other places, I have rarely heard any other works performed live other than those mentioned.

In my guides to the piano trio and string quartet literature, I take issue with the fact that only a few works are regularly presented and with good reason. There are several permanent string quartet and piano trio ensembles and these are the two most commonly programmed ensembles at chamber music concerts. Hence, there are many opportunities to hear other than ultra famous works. But this is not the case when it comes to string sextets or octets. And I take no issue with the fact that only a few famous works are presented because there are so few opportunities to hear them performed live in concert. It makes sense to present one of the most famous.

So in reality, the only way that the chamber music player is going to become exposed to the literature for larger string ensembles, whether amateur or professional, is either by playing the works or listening to recordings.

If you are not at all familiar with the string sextet or octet literature, then by all means your first adventures should be to explore the sextets of Brahms and the Mendelssohn Octet.

Those who are already familiar with these works and who are looking for something new, something fresh and appealing, I hope will want to dip into the wider literature and it is for these players and listeners that this Guide is being written. There are many excellent works, some masterpieces in their own right, awaiting a hearing. Of course, not every rediscovered work by a little known composer is a masterpiece, but one must remember that not everything that even Dvorak wrote, and I include his string sextet in this category, is a masterpiece. The sad thing is that many marginal chamber works get performed simply because they are the work of composers who became famous by virtue of writing operas or symphonies, while a truly superb piece of chamber music by a composer, such as Reinhold Gliere or Joachim Raff, whose metier was chamber music, sits awaiting to be discovered.

There have been many composers posterity has forgotten whose music has literally been brought back to life through the efforts of devotees. For example, it seems incredible that Bach could have been consigned to oblivion at the start of the nineteenth century, yet this was the case, at least as far as public performance went. It took a Mendelssohn to get Bach's music back into the concert hall. In part, this was due to changing musical fashion and tastes. Schubert could not get his quartets or his symphonies published during his own life time and was virtually unknown for anything other than his lieder until 40 years after his death. After the First World War, literally dozens of 19th century romantic era composers, who were well known up until that time, were consigned to the dustbin of musical history in the wake of a strong anti-romantic sentiment. Judging from what commentators of that period have written, no Romantic composer's reputation was left entirely intact by this reaction. Mendelssohn and Schumann were downgraded while lesser luminaries such as Raff, Hummel, Herzogenberg, Kiel and Rheinberger to name only a few, were relegated to an existence in encyclopaedias and musical dictionaries. After the Second World War, the big names gradually bounced back but it was not until the 1960s, and almost exclusively thanks to the record industry, that the public was able to hear the music of other composers from the Romantic period.

It is not only the Romantics who, *en masse*, were consigned to the historical role of musical footnote, there are many fine composers from the classical period whose reputations were all but snuffed out as the decades passed by the sheer brilliance of Mozart and Haydn. For decades during his lifetime and after his death, the quartets and quintets of Franz Krommer were regarded as good as or even better than those of Haydn and the best after those of Mozart. The works of once famous classical era composers such as Paul and Anton Wranitzky or Karl von Dittersdorf to

name but a few, were held in high esteem by men such as Beethoven. They all wrote several very charming works, some of which qualify as masterworks and which would be welcomed by listeners and players alike.

With regard to the more famous works, some of which I have already mentioned, little space is devoted to discussing them other than, in most cases, simply to mention their existence for the sake of completeness. Much has been written about these works, and there is little, if anything new, that I could add. With regard to atonal and so-called experimental music, we must acknowledge that the listening public has now been exposed to it for more than a century and for those who wish to know the truth, the verdict is in. Despite many fervent supporters and committed performances by professional groups, great as they may be on paper to a musicologist or the student of music theory, these works are not an experience the average listener or player generally wishes to repeat. And for this reason, such works are not included in this guide. Why it has come to pass that so many composers felt that traditional tonality and melody should be abandoned is not a subject for this guide. But music goes on. Popular music continues to enthral, be it from India, America, Europe or Arabia. The music which most wish to hear is music that can be sung, music which is tuneful.

In authoring a guide such as this, the reader has the right to inquire as to the qualifications that the writer brings to his or her task. I have had the opportunity to play several times a week and perform chamber music for the past 40 years, mostly in amateur groups, but occasionally as a member of a professional or semi-professional ensemble. Along the way, I developed a love of the broader chamber music literature to which I was first exposed through the medium of phonograph records. To my chagrin, years of concert-going made clear that I was unlikely to ever hear such music performed live, either because the professionals did not know of the music or because the music was unavailable. When I realized this state of affairs, I undertook to obtain some of the music I had heard on disk so that at least I could play it. To this end, I began to search music stores, antiquarian dealers and libraries both in America and Europe. Later, I used my briefly held position as chamber music critic for a classical music radio station to further the cause of lesser known but fine chamber music by encouraging many of the groups passing through our city to examine them. I have, on occasion, sent copies of some of these works I unearthed to well-known ensembles currently performing. Additionally, I have served as the editor of and a frequent contributor to *The Chamber Music Journal* for more than 25 years and was the director of the International Cobbett Association for Chamber Music Research for a similar period or time.

Over the years, it occurred to me that a guide such as this was needed by players and possibly by listeners. Guides to chamber music have appeared from time to time, but have been little more than detailed analyses of a few famous works. In contrast, Cobbett's marvellous and mammoth *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* is just that, an encyclopaedia, not a practical handbook that the performer, whether professional or amateur, can rely upon in navigating the literature.

Despite the fact I recognized the need for a different kind of guide, I did not initially consider the possibility of undertaking it myself until a number of my chamber music friends and col-

leagues, after regularly hearing me complain such a book was needed, suggested I had the knowledge and experience and urged me to write it myself. To this end, I have been fortunate in having had the opportunity to play thousands of pieces of chamber music by several hundred composers and with a strange sense of foresight, I had in many instances made notes on the pieces played. I have also been fortunate in collecting a large number of little known works over the years through my searches. Finally, I have had the opportunity to hear many works that I would otherwise never have encountered through the medium of records.

As to the question of whether a work is a good one and deserving of attention, the answer unfortunately must be subjective. There is, as they say, no accounting for taste and intelligent men can differ on such things. Fashion and tastes change over time as well. My judgments as to the value of most of the works discussed obviously comes into play and I make no apology for them. At the same time, unlike late 19th century Viennese music critics, such as Eduard Hanslick, I do not consider myself a Tsar on the question of Musical Worth. Therefore, I have taken considerable pains to arrive at a composite judgment based not only on my own feelings but also the opinions of my fellow players and performers and in many instances the audiences in front of whom I have had the opportunity to perform. This fact has allowed me to be able to comment with some confidence on whether a given work might be well received by an audience or would be fun for an amateur group to read through or to work on.

Still, no one person is going to know it all and I make no claim to this. Even *Cobbett's Cyclopedic*, with its several hundred contributors, is incomplete. This fact, in and of itself, was enough to make me consider the hopelessness of what seemed a daunting undertaking and for a long time, I thought of abandoning it. However, upon reflection I concluded my ultimate goal was to broaden the general public's knowledge of chamber music and to rescue as many unjustifiably ignored works as I knew about. It is hoped this guide will serve as a catalyst by informing chamber music lovers about the music.

When record collectors buy records from those companies offering new selections, they increase the chances that previously unrecorded works will see the light of day. When professional chamber music groups are urged by their audiences to present a wider offering of works from all periods, concert halls will be filled with the sounds of new and long-forgotten works. Inevitably, a by-product of this will be that music publishers will bring out modern reprints and publish new music which in turn will increase its availability among amateur players. (This is something which I have already undertaken by founding a publishing firm, Edition Silvertrust, which has, to date, made over 2,000 chamber works available) So it is with this goal in mind that I offer the reader this guide.

I had originally intended to try to include whether a work had been reprinted or generally available and or had been recorded in recent times, i.e. during my active musical life, beginning circa. 1960. But works go in and out of print, sometimes quickly, as do recordings. And such information for those reading this guide years in the future would no doubt be next to useless. Nonetheless, if they have been available in recent times, there is a good chance, especially via the internet, that musicians and record collectors will be able to track down a copy of what they are looking

for. As a reference resource, I think it is important to take the long view. More rediscovered works have been reprinted and recorded during the past 30 years (1988-2018) than at any other time.

While it is arguable that there is no point in discussing works which the player is unlikely to ever get a chance to play, I have, nonetheless, included many such works that I consider to be of merit and which I have found at antiquarian music shops. In my experience, if one is persistent, there is a good chance of finding out of print works. There is also the possibility of obtaining such works through university and national libraries. And now, there are several websites digitalizing and making available parts and scores of thousands of works which have never been reprinted.

I wish to briefly acknowledge all of those who have been of especial help to me over the years and without whom this work would not have been possible. Most of these individuals have been my fellow chamber music enthusiasts who joined me in playing through a huge amount of chamber music. Some professionals, some are teachers, and some introduced me to works which I had not known. I must begin with my son and daughter: Skyler Silvertrust and Loren Silvertrust. Both are violinists and together, with an army of violists, cellists and bassists we had the chance to dive deeply into the literature for larger string ensembles. Among those who joined me on this adventure are Gordon Peterson, Morton & Lura Altschuler, Henry Coretz, Eric Eisenstein, Kathleen Tumminello, Richard Sherman, Jean Mielke, Thalia Collis, Kristen Wilkinson, Dr. Prof. Hugo Zeltzer, Willi Boskovsky, Walter Willinhanz, Herman Essak, Thomas & Margaret Evans, Beverly Bloom, Girard Miller, Dr. Maurice Burke, Francis & Irene Peterson, Dr. Nicholas Cunningham, Dr. James Whitby, Eugene Chang, J. Steven Moore, Andrew Green, Sylvie Koval, Sally Didrickson, Tom Weyland, Siegfried Moysich, Carl Fox, Dr. Bernard Resnick, Mordy Rhodes, Lillian Cassey, Joseph Kirschner, Edward Torgerson, Darlene Rivest, Gunther Fonken, George Smith, Alan Garber, Gerda Bielitz, Beverly Kaushagen, Steven Spiegel, Rose Ross, Samuel & Paula Golden, Dr. Iris Cosnow, Frank & Paula Tachau, members of the Con Brio Quartet, Die Musikfreunde Quartet, The Melos Quartet of Stuttgart, The Hinman Quartet, the Larga Quartet and Quartetto Bel Canto.

#### **Origins of the Modern String Sextet and Octet**

When one speaks of the string sextet, generally one means a work for 2 Violins, 2 Violas and 2 Cellos. There are works for other combinations such as 2 Violins, 2 Violas, Cello and Bass or 3 Violins, 2 Violas and Cello but they extraordinarily rare and nowadays few take it upon themselves to play such rare works although I have included a few that may be of interest.

It is Luigi Boccherini who is generally credited with having composed the first string sextets, a set of six which were composed in 1776 and published four years later in Paris. Virtually no other composer from the classical era seemed interested in the form other than Anton Wranitzky who composed at least one such work. The string sextet had to wait until the 19th century and the romantic era to come into its own. As for the octet, though he may not have written the first, it can be said it was the Mendelssohn Octet, which if not the first, was the one that made the format for 4 violins, 2 violas and 2 cellos the standard.

*Raymond Silvertrust  
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# I. The Standard String Sextet

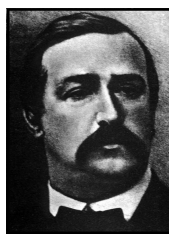
## Works for 2 Violins, 2 Violas & 2 Violoncellos

**Georges Alary** (1850-1928) was born in the French town of Aurillac. He studied composition under Saint Saens and Henri Reber at the Paris Conservatory, winning several prizes. He pursued a career as a conductor and teacher. He composed two works for string sextet. The first was his **Thème varié avec intermède, Op.17**, which dates from the mid 1880s. It is a work which is not difficult to play and sounds well. The substantial theme is tranquil and charming in the form of a country folk melody. A set of four engaging variations follow. His **String Sextet in F Major, Op.35** dates from 1890 and was dedicated to Brahms. It won him the prestigious Prix Chartier for chamber music in 1895. Like his earlier work, this work is straight forward, plays with little difficulty and sounds good. It certainly is a candidate for concert performance but not beyond amateur players. The opening movement, Allegretto, shows the influence of Brahms but through a French prism, so to speak. The dedication, which in and of itself and even more this influence, was rather extraordinary during the French impressionist period. The second movement, Kavatine, andante, is lyrical. This is followed by an Intermezzo, ben moderato. A relative and modern descendant of the minuet. A magnificent lilting finale, Allegro assai, tops off this fine work.



Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), the Italian cello virtuoso who spent most of his life in Spain working for the royal court, wrote six string sextets, not counting five others which he called Notturmi. These six, now known as Op.23, were published as a set in 1776 and have traveled under the opus number of 24, given to it by Boccherini's Paris publisher Sieber. Although not so titled in the modern Zanibon and Silvertrust editions, the sextets were, in the original, called sestetti concertanti, which gives us a good clue as to the style of their construction. As with string quintets, it might be said that Boccherini was more or less pioneering the form. If you are familiar with his more popular quintets, you will have some idea of what these works sound like. They are in concertante format, which for the most part means that one voice has the melody while the others are accompanying. However, with Boccherini, the accompaniment—unlike his German contemporaries—is interesting, both rhythmically and harmonically and not just the mere repetition of linked eighth or sixteenth notes. Also of note is the fact that all of the voices are treated more or less equally. That is to say, they are all given solos. The second violin part quite often is equal in difficulty to the first violin part and not infrequently rises to a virtuosic level, as does the part of the first cello. Nor does he forget the violas, which are regularly kept quite busy. Hence to make these sextets go, you need to have especially strong players on those parts. It must be admitted that there is a certain sameness to these works, at least to the extent that I would not want to spend an evening, as I once actually did, playing three of them. One is enough. I have played all six and cannot say one stands out from the rest. Each one has some pretty good movements, and each has some very average stuff. The melodies are gentle, with considerable subtlety, but not particularly memorable. As a listener, they are a perfect background for lying upon a divan and having a servant lower grapes into one's mouth. Boccherini's overall sonic signature is unique

and for the most part, he does not sound like anyone else but himself. These sextets are certainly good to play from time to time as a divertissement. Modern editions are available from Zanibon and Silvertrust. If at this point, you are asking—well, why should I play these? The answer is because they are good enough to deserve it and because all of the other sextets are from either the early, mid or late romantic period.



A considerable amount of **Alexander Borodin's** music is known to the general public although they may not know that it is his. Music from his Second Quartet, as well as from his opera Prince Igor and certain other pieces, have been used on several occasions in films and Broadway musicals. Even classical music fans know little of the man who composed such beautiful music other than the fact that he was a chemistry professor who dabbled in music. But even this is not entirely accurate. Born out of wedlock, Borodin (1833-87) was known to be the son of the Georgian Prince Luka Gedeonishvili. The Prince once remarked that while he had meant to marry Borodin's mother, he just never got around to it. Rather than naming the child Alexander Gedeonishvili, the boy was registered in the name of one of his father's serfs, one Porfiry Borodin, in what was then the standard practice. His mother, who was wealthy in her own right, was able to have private tutors educate the boy at home. At the age of 8, he showed an interest in music, and at one hearing could reproduce on the piano without having had lessons, what he had heard played a few hours before by a military band. His mother immediately engaged one of the band members to give him flute lessons. Later, Borodin taught himself the cello so that they could play chamber music. During this time he received some rudimentary composition lessons from local teachers. During the late 1850's he made two trips to western Europe. During the second of these, from 1859-62, he pursued post doctoral studies in chemistry at Heidelberg. Upon returning to Petersburg in 1862, he met Balakirev, Mussorgsky and Rimsky Korsakov. Under their guidance, he began composition in earnest but because he had never had a proper compositional foundation, he did not find composing particularly easy. Many of his works could not have been completed without the extensive help he always received from his friends, Rimsky Korsakov in particular. Most of Borodin's chamber music was composed during the early part of his life, especially during the years 1853-1862. Borodin, in later life, may not have taken these early works seriously and at least once referred to them as "petits péchés de jeunesse." Certainly, he made no effort to have these pieces published but nonetheless he did not make any effort to destroy the manuscripts which were used in performance on several occasions in various concerts. Sometime around the middle of the 20th Century, it became clear to Russian musicologists that many of these works are far better than mere amateur attempts. This certainly applies to the **String Sextet in d minor** of which, unfortunately, only the first two movements survive. First published by the Soviet State Music Publishers in 1946, it is thought to have been composed during 1860 while Borodin furthered his chemistry studies in Heidelberg, where he divided his time between the laboratory and frequent chamber music evenings. Borodin himself referred to the Sextet

as ‘Mendelssohnian.’ although this is not entirely apparent. Even though only the first two movements of this extraordinary piece have survived, the Sextet still stands as a tribute both to Borodin’s musical imagination as well as his compositional skill. As such, it demolishes the argument often bandied about by Tchaikovsky that Borodin could not finish a measure without help from Rimsky Korsakov. While it is true that he did receive help, especially in his later years with the opera Prince Igor and also true that after his death, Korsakov and Glazunov did complete several works which he had nearly finished, after hearing this Sextet—especially the first movement—it is impossible to maintain that Borodin was without substantial compositional talent. There are three separate themes in the first movement, Allegro. The first theme is quite sprightly. The second subject is richly textured and characterized by jumps of wide intervals. The tonal quality Borodin produces here bears more than a passing resemblance to Tchaikovsky’s *Souvenir d’Florence* written some 30 years later. While in no way implying that this Sextet is the equal of Tchaikovsky’s, one cannot but wonder if Tchaikovsky perhaps had heard the Borodin performed in concert. A beautiful third theme provides a contrast both in mood and tempo: The part writing throughout is not just good, but superb. Each voice is given very serious consideration and has many opportunities thematically. The interweaving of the theme from voice to voice is a tour de force. In 1860, no major composer had written a string sextet for more than 50 years. Brahms had not yet written his Op.18, nor Dvorak his Op.48. Only Spohr had tried his hand with his Op.140 and it is unlikely Borodin had come across it. The second movement, Andante, is quite short. It is based on a sad but fetching Russian folk melody given forth by the first violin: Three variations follow, each lovely. The use of pizzicato is remarkably effective. All too soon the movement and the Sextet end. One can only dream of the remaining two movements which are now lost. Even in its two movement form, every sextet party should make this work’s acquaintance.



**Hakon Børresen** (1876-1954) was born in Copenhagen and studied with Johann Svendsen at the Royal Danish Conservatory. His opera, the *Royal Guest*, is widely regarded as the best early 20th Century Danish opera and he is generally considered one of Denmark’s leading 20th century composers. His **String Sextet, Op.5 in G Major** dates from 1901 and was dedicated to Edvard Grieg, who spoke highly

about it. The opening Allegro moderato, *ma energico*, begins quite like Svendsen’s own Octet, with a powerful, energetic and Nordic-sounding main theme. This is a very big movement, full of lovely melodies and at times unexpected and quirky rhythms. It is followed by an Allegro which, though not so marked, is a nicely conceived and somewhat genial scherzo. A sedate Adagio is characterized by very long-lined melodies. It is a rather reflective and introspective piece. The finale, Allegro molto vivace, opens in much the same fashion as the first movement. Both the first theme and second themes sound Nordic, and Svendsen’s compositional technique can also, at times, be heard. But there are some original touches here and there. This Sextet, while not on the same level as those of Brahms or Tchaikovsky, is still a first rate work which deserves a place in the front rank of such pieces. It makes a nice addition to the scanty sextet literature. It is good to hear and fun to play.

**Johannes Brahms’** (1833-1897) two string sextets, **No.1 in B flat Major, Op.18** and **No.2 in G Major, Op.36** are among the very best ever written. As noted in my introduction, if you have not played any sextets, this is the place to start. They are perhaps his finest chamber music works, superior to his quartets and even his two string quintets. He seemed to need the extra voices. There is no point in me writing any more about these two sextets as pretty much everything which can be said has been in books and articles which are readily available. There are dozens of recordings.



Born in Sussex, **Frank Bridge** (1879-1941) learned to play violin from his father, and had much early exposure to practical musicianship, playing in theatre orchestras his father conducted. He studied violin and composition, the latter from Charles Stanford, at the Royal College of Music. He later played viola in prominent quartets and was a respected conductor.

When Frank Bridge’s chamber music first appeared, it was a revelation to amateurs as well as professional players. His **String Sextet in E flat Major** was begun in 1906 but was not completed until 1912. In those six years, his style had evolved considerably. By the time he came to complete the Sextet, his tonal universe had moved well beyond Brahms and was influenced by French impressionism. The first movement, Allegro moderato, opens with a majestic soaring melody which immediately establishes the character of the work. The music unfolds at a leisurely pace. Bridge relies more on the richness of the tonal texture rather than in contrasting tempi changes. The second subject is tender and romantic. The second movement, Andante con moto, consists of an expressive intermezzo followed by a lively scherzo in the minor. The finale, Allegro ben moderato, begins with a striking chromatic passage. Soon, he reintroduces material from the earlier movements but dressed up differently. This marvelous Sextet, though important in its own right, is important historically for its place among British chamber music works. It is post-Brahmsian and though it shows some influence of French impressionist ideas, is developed entirely originally in Bridge’s own idiomatic style. It is without doubt one of the best early 20th century sextets, a work suitable to both professionals and experienced amateurs alike.



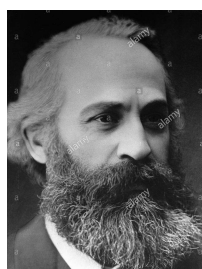
**Ferdinand David** (1810-1873) was born in the same house in Hamburg as Felix Mendelssohn, but one year later. The two became colleagues and friends. David studied violin with the famous virtuoso Louis Spohr. He served as concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under the baton of Mendelssohn and held the position of Professor of Violin at the Leipzig Conservatory. He was also the leader

of a prominent string quartet for several years. Among his many famous students were Joseph Joachim and August Wilhelmj. His name has endured as the editor of several famous chamber music works as well as pieces for the violin. Among his compositions still in use are his *Advanced School of Violin Playing and Art of Bowing*. His **String Sextet in G Major, Op.38** dates from 1861. It goes without saying that he knew how to write for string instruments and the parts are not awkward. The work, in four movements, shows the strong influence of Mendelssohn. Unfortunately, it is, in my opinion, uneven in quality. The first movement, Alle-

gro assai, though bustling, sounds rather busy and the thematic material is unconvincing. The first violin is given unnecessary virtuosic passages, somewhat awkward and not at all easy to pull off without varying the tempo. The second movement, Adagio, is a Mendelssohnian song without words featuring a nicely executed dialog between the first violin and first cello. The third movement, Allegretto grazioso e vivace, which sounds as if Mendelssohn himself could have written it, is nonetheless excellent and without doubt the most effective movement of the Sextet. The finale, Molto allegro agitato ed appassionato, is also pretty good but requires a virtuoso technique in several passages for an effective performance. While the Sextet certainly has its moments, it cannot be recommended for concert performance and comes off rather poorly by comparison with several works listed herein.



**Alexei Davidov** (1867-1940 sometimes spelled Davidoff or Davydov) was born in Moscow. His uncle Carl Davidov was a famous cello virtuoso, composer, and for a while, head of the St Petersburg Conservatory. Alexei pursued joint studies in mathematics and music, the latter at the St Petersburg Conservatory with a concentration in cello and composition. He helped found the St Petersburg Music Society, but did not compose much, working primarily as a businessman. His **String Sextet in E flat Major, Op.12** dates from 1905. He may have been inspired to write the Sextet by his uncle's string sextet of 1880 (see below). One wishes he would have composed more after hearing this work, which has many pleasing melodies, makes a good impression and presents no technical difficulties. The opening movement begins with an atmospheric Largo introduction, which leads to the main section Allegro energico, the rousing main theme to which has an interesting question and answer series of episodes. A more lyrical and lovely second theme follows and the coda reintroduces the theme of the Largo. The second movement is an agitated Scherzo with a nicely contrasting trio section. The third movement is characterized by frequent tempo changes. It begins with a religious sounding Largo, followed by an elegant Un poco mosso and then a passionate Piu mosso e agitato and then closes again with the Largo. The finale, Allegro, alternates between a energetic main subject and a more lyrical and graceful second theme. This is a work certainly worth playing. Suitable for both amateurs and pros who wish to perform it in concert where it will make a good impression.



**Carl Davidov** (1838-1889 sometimes Karl and Davidoff or Davydov) was born in the Latvian town of Goldingen (today Kuldiga). He attended Moscow University and then studied cello with the prominent cellist Carl Schuberth in St. Petersburg, who recommended he attend the Leipzig Conservatory, then considered the best in the world. There, he studied with Friedrich Grutzmacher and became principal cellist of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra before returning to Russia and pursuing a career as a touring virtuoso, teacher and composer. His **String Sextet in E Major, Op.35** dates from 1880 and was dedicated to the famous violin teacher Leopold Auer, a professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Despite the fact that Davidov was a virtuoso, the cello parts are not treated in any special fashion and are not anymore difficult to play than one would expect in a standard sextet. Although he was a Russian national, his family

were ethnic German Jews and his outlook, especially after studying in Leipzig, was that of the German Romantic movement. The opening Molto Allegro, has for its main theme a broad and impressive subject with an attention-grabbing rhythm. A second melody is more lyrical. A very effective Allegretto, resembling an intermezzo, begins the second movement. It is full of charm and the pizzicato accompaniment in the cello is noteworthy. Several tempo changes follow, keeping the listener's interest. Next comes a superb Adagio which could be styled a romance. A fugue appears in the middle. The powerful finale, Molto vivace brings Mendelssohn's bustling movements to mind, but it is not without its lyrical moments. This is a fine work which should appeal to amateurs as well as professionals.



**Ernst von Dohnanyi** (1877-1960 Ernő Dohnányi in Hungarian) is generally regarded, after Liszt, as Hungary's most versatile musician. He was active as a concert pianist, composer, conductor and teacher and must be considered one of the chief influences on Hungary's musical life in the 20th century. Certainly, his chamber music is very fine, with most of it being in the masterwork category. Yet, sadly and inexplicably, it has virtually disappeared from the concert stage. Dohnanyi studied piano and composition in his native Pressburg (Bratislava) before entering the Budapest Academy. His first published work, his Piano Quintet No.1, was championed by no less an authority than Johannes Brahms. Upon graduating in the spring of 1897, Dohnanyi embarked on a dazzling career as a concert artist, often playing in chamber ensembles. Later, he also devoted considerable time to teaching and conducting. Dohnanyi's **String Sextet in B flat Major** was one of the pieces the 17 year old submitted as part of his entrance examination to the Budapest Music Academy. He had completed it in 1893. Dohnanyi later revised it in 1896, after two years of study with his composition teacher Hans Koessler. In 1897, he entered the Sextet for the Chamber Music Prize in the Royal Hungarian Millennium festivities which celebrated the founding of Hungary. It did not win, although he did win the Symphony Prize and the Overture Prize. Still not satisfied with the result, he revised the Sextet once again during 1898-99. It begins with an Allegro ma tranquillo. This is a big, spacious and at times genial movement, but the one thing it is not, is tranquil. The promising opening theme, first stated by the two cellos, is dark, brooding and mysterious. When it is restated by the higher voices, it becomes more vibrant and less mysterious. The second theme is brighter and lovely, and has a Schubertian quality to it. As the movement progresses, one hears the hand of Brahms, which rests somewhat heavily upon the composer. The instruments are very well handled and the part-writing is quite good. The fleet, short second movement, Scherzo, Allegro vivace, is Mendelssohnian in nature, light and airy. Certainly Brahms never wrote anything like it. The trio, is a rich string chorale, darker and quieter in nature, and provides excellent contrast. After the return of the scherzo, surprisingly, there is a highly lyrical and passionate second trio led by the cellos. This is truly an outstanding movement, perfect in every way. The third movement, Adagio quasi andante, is rather sedate and seemingly inspired by late Beethoven. The first cello is given the lead on several occasions to state the more poignant melodies. The writing is generally rich and quite dense, but at other times is almost ethereal. The first theme to the finale, Animato, reminds one of a Mendelssohnian or Schumannesque march. The second theme is, at first, lighter, but it blossoms forth



with some tonally advanced writing, more typical of Dohnanyi's middle period. Certainly worth your attention.

The **String Sextet in A Major, Op.48** of **Antonin Dvorak** (1841-1904) is among the top four sextets performed and recorded. (the other three being the two Brahms sextets and Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir d'Florence*) Much has been written about it and you can read it elsewhere. Acknowledging that taste is individual and subjective, it is my considered opinion that his sextet does not belong in this elite group and would not be there had he not become one of the most famous composers of the 19th century. It is not a bad work, but the melodic material cannot compare with his Op.97 String Quintet, his Op.81 Piano Quintet and his late string quartets. Of course, you should play it or listen to it and make up your own mind.



**Eduard Franck** (1817-1893) was born in Breslau, the capital of the Prussian province of Silesia. He was the fourth child of a wealthy and cultivated banker who exposed his children to the best and brightest that Germany had to offer. Frequenters to the Franck home included such luminaries as Heine, Humboldt, Heller, Mendelssohn, and Wagner. His family's financial position al-

lowed Franck to study with Mendelssohn as a private student in Dusseldorf and later in Leipzig. As a talented pianist, he embarked upon a dual career as a concert artist and teacher for more than four decades during the course of which he held many positions. Although he was highly regarded as both a teacher and performer, he never achieved the public recognition of his better known contemporaries such as Mendelssohn, Schumann or Liszt. As fine a pianist as the first two and perhaps even a better teacher, the fact that he failed to publish very many of his compositions until toward the end of his life, in part, explains why he was not better known. Said to be a perfectionist, he continually delayed releasing his works until they were polished to his demanding standards. Schumann, among others, thought quite highly of the few works he did publish during the first part of his life. Like Brahms, Franck wrote two string sextets. **String Sextet No.1 in E flat Major, Op.41** was published in 1882. In this sparkling work, we are never far from the influence of Franck's great teacher and inspiration, Mendelssohn. This influence shows itself not only melodically but also in the lightness of touch which Franck employs. It stands in stark contrast to the heavy, full-bodied sextet writing of Brahms. Here, we find clarity of line and a surprising weightlessness, especially for an ensemble two thirds of which are lower voices. Yet at the same time, Franck differs from Mendelssohn in how he makes the most of the sonic possibilities of a large ensemble. The opening theme to the first movement, Allegro, is genial and somewhat relaxed. But slowly tension is built, primarily by means of the rustling notes which are passed from voice to voice. A very Mendelssohnian technique. The quiet second movement, Andante, ticks along peacefully until the first violin brings forth a melody of extraordinary beauty. Next comes a lively and energetic scherzo, followed by an exciting finale, Presto, which is filled with élan and fetching melodies. This is a first rate work which would go well with the heavier Brahms sextets. **String Sextet No.2 in D Major, Op.50** was not published until after the composer's death with the result that the proofs were not carefully checked and it was printed with serious errors, including missing measures. I found this out by playing it from a copy of the original and I wondered if as a result whether

it was ever performed. The Second Sextet, though it shows some of Mendelssohn's influence, has much less than the first. The opening Allegro is spacious and written on a large scale. The elegiac second movement, Adagio molto espressivo e sostenuto, is truly superb. The third movement, Allegro, is a masterful scherzo which starts heavily but evolves into an elves dance. In the finale, Franck presents a tribute to Mendelssohn, but this cannot take away from the fact that it is an effective tribute. Another first rate sextet to investigate and easier to play than Brahms.



**Niels Gade** (1817-1890) was born in Copenhagen and began his career as a concert violinist, later taking a position with the Royal Danish Orchestra. Mendelssohn, who was much impressed by and premiered Gade's First Symphony, invited him to teach at the famous Leipzig Conservatory. After Mendelssohn's death in 1847, Gade was appointed director of the Conservatory and also con-

ductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra. In 1848, he returned to Copenhagen when war broke out between Prussia and Denmark. In Copenhagen, Gade became director of the Copenhagen Musical Society and established a new orchestra and chorus. He was widely regarded as Denmark's most important composer from the mid-Romantic period. He taught and influenced several Scandinavian composers, including Edvard Grieg, Carl Nielsen and Otto Malling. His own music often shows the influence of both Mendelssohn and Schumann. Try as I might, I have never been able to get real excited about Gade's chamber music. It certainly is not bad, it is all right, well-put together and so on, but it's the thematic material that fails to impress. His **String Sextet in E flat Major, Op.44** dates from 1865. Like many of his other chamber music works, it plays well, sounds good and has reasonably good part-writing for all. It can certainly be recommended to amateurs as it presents no technical problems, but it is too weak for the concert hall. Personally, if you have access to either of the Franck Sextets as well as several others mentioned in this guide, I would not recommend it. But if you only have the 2 Brahms sextets available and a copy of the Gade laying around, then by all means play it.



**Louis Glass** (1864-1936) was born in Copenhagen. He was almost an exact contemporary of Carl Nielsen and like Nielsen was a student of Niels Gade. However, Glass also studied at the Brussels Conservatory where he became enamored of the music of Cesar Franck and Anton Bruckner, both of whom stylistically influenced his writing.

For several years, he was one of Denmark's leading concert pianists until a paralysis in one arm made him retire from the stage. He then devoted himself primarily to composing. He composed in most genres and wrote several chamber music works of worth. His **Sextet in G Major, Op.15** dates from 1893. The powerful opening movement, *Molto allegro marcato*, begins in a rather turbulent fashion and starts off as a quick restless and thrusting march. Tonally, it is interesting that there is much, especially the treatment of the attractive second theme, which reminds one of early Nielsen. But in view of the fact that Nielsen had only just begun to compose, perhaps it might be that Nielsen was influenced, during this period, by Glass rather than the other way around. They were both active and living in Copenhagen at the same time. The coda is quite dramatic and exciting.

The second movement, *Andante con moto*, begins in a quiet and reflective mood and, though it occasionally rises in volume with the promise of drama, remains primarily a peaceful idyll. The following Scherzo begins in the same turbulent and thrusting style as the first movement, however, almost immediately, Glass adds some quite original and exotic tonal color which creates an entirely different mood. The trio section provides excellent contrast and is full of pathos. The finale, *Allegro giocoso*, has none of the angst or anger of the earlier movements. Somewhat jolly, its use of syncopation is quite effective. There are quite a number of themes, including the main theme from the first movement, which one traverses before coming to the effective but somewhat orchestral conclusion. Highly recommended to both professionals and experienced amateur players.



**Reinhold Gliere** (1875-1956) today is primarily known for his symphonies, ballets and operas, however, he was also a composer of superb chamber music, most of it written early in his career during the dying days of the old Russian empire. One can hear the influence of Sergei Taneyev, Anton Arensky and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, all of whom he studied with, as well as that of Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and Liadov. He wrote three very fine string sextets. **String Sextet No.1 in c minor, Op.1** was published in 1902. The opening *Allegro* begins in highly dramatic fashion with a unisono passage in all the voices. The main theme is truly impressive and is followed by a warm, appealing lyrical second subject. The writing is full of excellent effects. The spirited second movement, *Allegro vivace*, is a playful perpetuo mobile. The *Andante* which follows has a broad, song-like melody with ostinato accompaniment. The faster and quite dramatic middle section provides fine contrast. The finale, *Allegro vivace*, also begins in unisono fashion, the main theme is characterized by its powerful dance rhythm. This work presents no special technical difficulties and is highly recommended to amateur players and is strong enough to withstand performance in the concert hall. **String Sextet No.2 in b minor, Op.7** dates from 1904. This is also a work which can be recommended for concert performance. Gliere shows here that he is even more of a master of his material, The first movement begins with a short atmospheric *Andante* and is followed by an *Allegro* marked by its rhythms and rich themes. The development is full of surprises and the coda is extremely fine. The second movement, an *Andante*, has a noble folk tune for its main theme, in some ways reminiscent of the famous *Andante cantabile* of Tchaikovsky's first string quartet. In the middle, there is a dramatic, agitated section. The spirited third movement, a *Vivace*, is very Russian sounding indeed, its appealing melodies are made even more impressive by the effective use of dynamics. The finale, an *Allegro*, opens with a dance-like main theme and is followed by a magnificent contrasting subject. Superb compositional technique is found in a powerful fugue and effective prestissimo coda. In all a stronger work, and perhaps not surprisingly so, than his first. **String Sextet No.3 in C Major, Op.11** dates from the following year 1905. It is packed with a treasure chest of wonderful musical ideas. The writing is so powerful it approaches the orchestral in nature. It is a work with which every friend of chamber music should become familiar. The joyful themes to the opening *Allegro* are inspired by Russian folk melody and reminiscent of the tonal coloring of Borodin. The lyrical, elegiac and emotionally charged second movement, *Larghetto*, is an excellent

example of Gliere's technical mastery. The singing quality of the strings approaches that of the human voice. The third movement, *Allegro*, is a very Russian scherzo. with folksong melodies, alternating with ever faster dance episodes. The superb finale, *Allegro vivace*, begins in festive fashion. It is here in particular that the brilliance and richness of the tone Gliere elicits approaches the orchestral in its intensity. This is one of the real jewels of the sextet literature and it is this one I would add to the must-play list along with those of Brahms. It does not present any extraordinary technical problems and is very grateful for all.



**Heinrich Hofmann** (1842-1902) was born in Berlin and studied there at the Neue Akademie der Tonkunst with the Theodor Kullak and Siegfried Dehn. At first, he embarked upon a career as a pianist and teacher. However, by the late 1860's, his operas and his choral and orchestral works began to achieve great success and for the next two decades, he was one of the most often per-

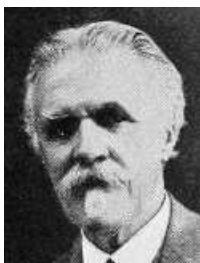
formed composers in Germany and much of Europe. Success came at a price. Although hailed by some critics, such as Hermann Mendel, as a of real talent and one of the most important emerging composers of his time, many others, jealous of his rocketing success or determined to protect their favorites (such as Eduard Hanslick was of Brahms), derided him for his "fashionable eclecticism". While his works broke no new ground, on the other hand, they were masterfully conceived, beautiful and well-executed. This is especially true of his chamber music. His **String Sextet in e minor, Op.25** was composed in 1874. It shows the influence of both Mendelssohn and Wagner. Finely written and with no real technical difficulties, it is certain to make friends of both players and listeners with its appealing melodies. Players will appreciate its wonderful treatment of all of the instruments, which have grateful parts to play. The first movement, *Allegro appassionato*, features two bold but lyrically melodic themes which are cleverly developed and presented. The second movement, *Adagio*, is an elegiac romance. The third movement, *Vivace*, is a scherzo with an appealing middle section. The finale, an *Allegro*, not only features an effective fugue but has a charming Irish folk tune for its second subject. Good enough for concert performance, it should not be missed by amateurs as well.



**Joseph Holbrooke** (1878-1958) was born near London in the town of Croydon. Both his parents were musicians and his early lessons were with his father. He was sent to the Royal Academy of Music in London and after graduating worked as a pianist and conductor, all the while composing. Eventually his big works for orchestra and chorus and his operas brought him a measure of

fame, however, after the First World War, he and his works fell into obscurity. He composed a considerable amount of chamber music, most of which is of a high quality and awaits rediscovery. His **String Sextet in D Major, Op.43** was completed in 1902. It had to wait two years before it was performed. A printed score did not appear until 1924, but no parts were printed at that time. The few performances since that time were made off of copyist's parts of the score. And when, the parts were eventually published, they were not printed but were off of clean handwritten copy made by a copyist. The opening movement begins with a slow,

ominous introduction, Adagio espressivo e molto sostenuto that then leads to the main section, which is upbeat, jovial and occasionally rather intense. The middle movement, Andante mesto, has the subtitle 'Unhappy Childhood', which though it begins in a somewhat melancholy manner, does not really convey very much unhappiness. There is a quicker middle section which is altogether more positive. The finale, Molto vivace, is full of energy, thrusting and powerful and with a strong triumphant atmosphere. This is a very worthwhile work and a handsome addition to the string sextet repertoire. It would do well in concert and should be considered by experienced amateurs.



**Vincent d'Indy** (1851-1931) was born of aristocratic stock. His musical talent was recognized by his grandmother who raised him and saw that he received piano lessons from famous teachers. Despite this, he was sent to law school in Paris. Instead, d'Indy, who was intent on becoming a composer, joined a Parisian orchestra as a timpanist to learn music "from the ground up." Both Massenet and Bizet were

impressed by his early compositions and encouraged him to show his work to César Franck. Franck did not share their enthusiasm and was reputed to have told d'Indy, "You have ideas but you cannot do anything." Apparently those ideas were enough, however, to convince Franck to show d'Indy how to do things, as he took the latter on as a pupil. Though d'Indy was to assimilate and be influenced by many different sources, Franck and his music left the most telling mark on him. d'Indy's reputation, during his own lifetime was considerable, having founded, in 1900, what was to become the most important music school in France after the Paris Conservatory—The Schola Cantorum. His **String Sextet in B flat Major, Op.92** indubitably sounds like the work of a young man, but at the time it was composed, he was seventy six years old. d'Indy's style underwent a considerable change in the years following his retirement and move from Paris to the south of France. Here, he composed a series of works which are straight forward, youthful in spirit and generally bright and gay in mood. The Sextet is in the form of a suite. The opening movement, Entrée en Sonate, begins with a bright, formal introduction. The main part of the movement is based on three different melodies which are closely related in mood and thematic material. The second movement, Divertissement, is a brilliant scherzo. It begins energetically, full of forward motion, but without warning is interrupted by a striking interlude, made spooky by the use of harmonics and ponticello. The third movement, Thème, Variations et Finale, begins with the statement of a slow, somewhat diffident melody. Several ingenious and finely contrasting variations follow. Here is an important addition to the Sextet repertoire, a bright and attractive modern French work, which should win friends among both professionals and amateurs.



**Julius Klengel** (1859 –1933) was born in the German city of Leipzig. He came from a musical family. His father was a keen amateur player and his grandfather was a composer. For several years, no less than 7 members of the Klengel family played in the famous Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. A gifted cellist, Julius Klengel enjoyed a career as a soloist, orchestral player, teacher and composer. He served for

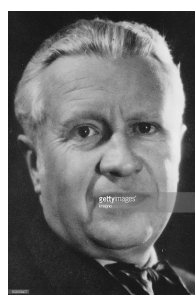
more than 40 years as the principal cellist of the LGO and also

became a professor of cello at the Leipzig Conservatory. Among his many students were Emanuel Feuermann, Guilhermina Suggia, Paul Grümmer, Gregor Piatigorsky, and William Pleeth. Klengel composed his **String Sextet, Op.60** in 1924. It is not surprising that a man entirely familiar with classical and romantic works, with long service as a string quartet player, produced a string sextet, with such a wealth of appealing ideas. Certainly, it would do well if given concert performance. It also should not be missed by amateurs as it poses no insurmountable technical problems. One of the many excellences of the work is the fact that none of the movements is long-winded. The first movement, Allegro pathetico, is really magnificent, full of real passion and rhythmically interesting. The second movement, Andante is in Lied form, filled with noble, lyrical melody. Next comes an original sounding Scherzo with Slavic tinges. Particularly noteworthy here is the pizzicato accompaniment in the second cello. The fleet-footed finale, Allegro, is jovial and quite effective. The only knock against this work is the fact that he composed in 1924 and not in 1890 which is what it sounds like.



**Hans Koessler** (1853-1926) was a master composer who wrote some of the most outstanding music that you have never heard. Koessler was born in the town of Waldbeck in upper Bavaria. He studied organ and composition with Joseph Rheinberger in Munich, holding a number of positions in Germany before moving to Hungary to become Professor of Organ, Composition and Choral direction at the Music Academy of

Budapest in the early 1880's. He stayed there until his retirement in 1908. Bartok, Kodaly, Dohnanyi, Leo Weiner and Imre Kalman were all among his many students and he was widely regarded as the finest teacher of composition in Austria-Hungary during the 1890's and the first part of the 20th century. Without doubt, the best unknown late romantic string sextet is his **Sextet in f minor** which dates from 1902 and unfortunately has never received the attention it deserves. It is multi-faceted and highly original throughout, beautiful sounding and grateful to play. The opening movement begins with a very atmospheric Adagio non troppo introduction which is followed by a gradual transition to the tempo of the main section, Allegro. This movement is packed full of lovely melodies. Koessler follows this up with a Hungarian Scherzo and a very melodic trio section. The slow movement, a warm-blooded Adagio, has Schumann for an antecedent. The Finale, Allegro con brio, is no ordinary finale. It makes incredibly clever use of counterpoint in presenting its high-spirited and at times humorous themes. This is a work not to be missed.



**Egon Kornauth** (1891–1959) was born in the town of Olmütz in Moravia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He studied cello and piano attending the Vienna Conservatory where he studied composition with Robert Fuchs, Guido Adler, and Franz Schmidt. After teaching music theory at Vienna University from 1919, Kornauth embarked on an international career as pianist, accompanist and conductor. In post-war Austria, Kornauth became director

of the Salzburg Mozarteum. **His String Sextet in a minor, Op.25** bears the dedication, *To the memory of the year 1918-1919*. It is in three movements, straight forward and not at all hard to play from the standpoint of technical difficulties, howev-

er, it does require due care by experienced ensemble players, and especially to intonation. It can certainly be recommended for experienced amateurs and concert performance. The first two movements were composed during the summer of 1918, while it looked like Germany still had a chance to win the First World War. The finale was composed the following year by which time Germany had not only lost the war, but its Monarchy had been dissolved, and chaos reigned throughout the country. The opening movement, *Allegro, allegro assai*, is full of energy but the mood is agitated, dour and at times morose. The second movement, *Andante*, is in the form of a song without words. It is lyrical and calm. In the finale, *Allegretto*, there is no sense of what has happened to Germany, rather, the main theme is uplifting, almost celebratory. Perhaps, Kornauth who was in his late 20s at the time he wrote the Sextet, was glad to see the Wilhelmine era disappear.



**Erich Korngold** (1897-1957) was born in the Moravian city of Brunn then part of the Austrian Habsburg Empire (today Brno in the Czech Republic). He grew up in Vienna where his father was a music critic for one of Vienna's leading papers. Recognizing his son's extraordinary talent, Korngold's father took him to see Mahler when the boy was nine. Mahler declared him a genius and other noteworthy musicians such as Humperdinck and Richard Strauss held that he was the greatest child prodigy since Mozart. Mahler saw to it that Korngold studied with Vienna's best teachers—Robert Fuchs, Hermann Grädener and Alexander Zemlinsky. Korngold became one of Europe's leading operatic and instrumental composers as well as conductors and subsequently served as a professor of composition at the Vienna Conservatory. In the 1930's he was invited to Hollywood and thereafter became one of the leading film composers of his time. After 1946, he left the film industry to concentrate on composing absolute music. Korngold's **String Sextet in D Major, Op.10** was completed in 1915 and premiered two years later to great acclaim with critics calling it the finest such work since Brahms. The style is post Brahmsian late romantic. In four movements, Korngold's operatic talent is foreshadowed almost immediately in the very lyrical and romantic first subject. A calmer melody serves as the second theme. The second movement is an *Adagio*. It is tinged with sadness and introspection but it is not funereal. Next comes an *Intermezzo* which in many ways recalls the days of Golden Vienna at the end of the 19th century. The rousing finale alternates between a sense of urgency and a mood of jubilation. There is no question that this Sextet is a masterpiece, one of the very finest in the literature which deserves a place on the concert stage. It must be admitted, however, that it is a work beyond the reach of all but the most experienced of amateurs with excellent technical ability.



**Arnold Krug** (1849-1904) was born in Hamburg. He began his music studies with piano lessons from his father, who was a music teacher. Later, he was sent to the Leipzig Conservatory where he studied with Carl Reinecke and then went on to Berlin, where continued with Friedrich Kiel and Eduard Franck. After completing his studies, he taught in Berlin before returning to Hamburg where he remained for the rest of his life. His **String Sextet in D Major, Op.68** was known as the "Prize Sextet" be-

cause Krug won the Stelzner Prize for chamber music with this composition. Alfred Stelzner was an inventor of two instruments--the Violotta and the Cellone--which he believed would create a revolution in composing for string instruments. The Violotta, tuned an octave below the violin, was said to fill the gap between the viola and the cello. The Cellone was a big cello, tuned two octaves below the violin, or a fourth below the cello, and meant to fill the gap between the cello and the kontrabass. Stelzner vigorously promoted his instruments and sponsored competitions. One such competition was sponsored by the Dresden Conservatory in 1896, the competition in which Krug won his prize. The Prize Sextet was originally for 2 Violins, Viola, Violotta, Cello and Cellone, but the publisher of the work wisely hedged his bets and produced an edition for the standard combination of 2 Violins, 2 Violas and 2 Cellos. The Sextet clearly belongs in the front rank of such works and is well written from start to finish. The themes are skillfully presented and the work is quite sonorous. The first movement, *Allegro*, begins with a short but powerful introduction which gives the impression of storms ahead. Instead, the main melody is quite genial and broad. Later, Krug cleverly weaves the introduction into the second theme and uses it as part of the coda. The second movement, *Adagio tranquillo*, is characterized by a calm, deeply felt melody, which is interrupted by a urgent and highly dramatic middle section. There is no scherzo, but the lively first theme to the finale, *Allegro*, seems to fill this gap. A quieter and more lyrical second theme provides excellent contrast. The Sextet deserves concert performance and can certainly be recommended to amateurs.



**Max Lewandowsky** (1874-1906) was born in the German city of Hamburg. Despite the fact that he was, though not famous, a fairly well-known performing musician, conductor and composer within Germany and England during the last five years of his life, very little information about him is available. He is thought to have studied piano with Arnold Krug and possibly Hans von Bülow in Hamburg and most likely studied composition as well with Krug and perhaps with Josef Foerster and Gustav Mahler. Other sources suggest he may have studied composition with Heinrich von Herzogenberg at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. What is known is that he performed as a pianist and served as a conductor in both Berlin and London. It is also known that several of his works from chamber music, to symphonies to vocal works were performed both in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Although he seems to have been most active in Berlin, he died in his home town of Hamburg in a boating accident. His **String Sextet in c minor, Op.5** dates from 1904. The opening movement, *Allegro assai*, literally begins with a bang. The main theme which is immediately introduced is dramatic and riveting, full of forward thrust. A genial second theme is more lyrical and relaxed. The lovely second movement, *Andante sostenuto*, is a cross between a romantic serenade and an intermezzo. Next comes a nervous Scherzo, *allegro molto vivace*, in the tradition of Mendelssohn. It is coupled with a slower, lyrical and quite appealing trio section. The finale, *Allegro moderato ma energico*, begins with a lugubrious but very powerful march-like theme, which quickly picks up speed and forward motion. A languid second subject provides excellent contrast. This is a first rate work, an excellent addition to the string sextet literature. It is sure to make a strong impression in the concert hall and should not be missed by amateurs as it presents no technical problems.



**Mihály Mosonyi** (1815-1870), who until he changed his name in 1859, was known as Michael Brand. Born in the Austro-Hungarian town of Frauenkirchen (Boldogaszonyfalva), he studied piano and composition with unknowns and learned what he did from studying the Viennese Classics along with textbooks by Anton Reicha and Johann Nepomuk Hummel. Up until 1859, he wrote in the German Romantic style. **The String**

**Sextet in c minor** dates from 1844, well before his Hungarian conversion and there is nothing Hungarian-sounding about it. The big opening Allegro agitato begins in dramatic fashion with a gripping theme. Schubert and Beethoven seem to have been the models, tonally-speaking. However, it would be a mistake to consider it imitative. The music is quite fresh and original sounding. The part-writing also is quite good. The ensuing Adagio begins in an almost Mozartean fashion. Its main theme is very charming. What follows appears to be a set of variations, really finely executed. A first rate Scherzo, allegro comes next. It has some very interesting and briefly jarring tonalities. A canonic episode is also quite arresting. The middle section has some very original harmonic effects. The main theme to the finale, Allegro furioso, is not as captivating as the earlier ones, but the rhythmic drive serves as compensation. The powerful and highly dramatic coda is handled quite deftly. In all, this is really a first rate work. It's worth considering when composed, no well-known composer of the 19th century had yet to write a string sextet.



**Per August Ölander** (1824-1886) was born in the Swedish town of Linköping. His early music lessons were with his father, a violinist and parish organist. He attended the University of Uppsala and although he took some music lessons from the school's music director, it was not his main area of study. Because it was virtually impossible for musicians in Sweden during this time to earn a living solely through music, like so many others,

he supported himself by means of working in an entirely different area unrelated to music. He served for most of his life as an officer in the customs office. He did not ignore music altogether, working as a violinist and music critic. He played second violin in a prominent string quartet and may have had a few composition lessons from the first violinist but was largely self-taught as a composer. Hence, it was quite surprising when his opera *Blenda* won the first prize in the 1876 Royal Competition by acclamation; the jury was unanimous. He was not a prolific composer, writing just the one opera, a few other vocal works, a string sextet and several string quartets. His **String Sextet in D Major** dates from 1850. It begins with a substantial and very beautiful Andantino introduction which leads to the main section, a lively Allegro full of fetching melodies. The second movement is an attractive Mendelssohnian Scherzo which is followed by a languid Intermezzo, showcasing the tonal qualities of the various voices, especially those of the cello and viola. The exciting finale, Allegro vivace, bursts out of the starting gate full of energy. Gorgeous cantilena melodies provide excellent contrast. This is a first rate string sextet, presenting no technical difficulties, from the time of Schumann and Mendelssohn which not only has wonderful melodies but also excellent part-writing, with solos for all.



During the last ten years of his life and for the three decades following it, **Joachim Raff** (1822-1882) was regularly mentioned in the same breath as Wagner, Liszt, and Brahms as one of Germany's leading composers. The experts and the public judged him to be the equal to such past masters as Mendelssohn, Schumann and Tchaikovsky. Incredibly, by the 1920's his music had all but disappeared from the concert

stage. It seems virtually unimaginable that a composer whose talent was recognized and whose music was admired by Mendelssohn and Liszt, could become a mere footnote, yet this is what became of Raff and his music for most of the 20th century. Only now is he being rediscovered to the delight of those fortunate enough to hear his music. He wrote a great deal of chamber music, and, in my opinion, much of it is very good indeed. His **String Sextet in g minor, Op.178** certainly begins in a very promising fashion. The opening Allegro is quite exciting and has a beautiful main theme. It does require technically competent players to pull off the accompaniment which is full of rushing passages. The short but excellent scherzo which follows begins in a Mendelssohnian fashion and quickly turns into a wild tarantella interspersed with an equally wild Hungarian melody. The trio, with its guitar-like accompaniment in the lower voices, is particularly effective and quite original. A big slow movement, Larghetto, is a theme and set of variations. If Raff meant for this movement to be the showcase of the sextet, he miscalculated. The theme, though pleasant, is unexceptional. As for the variations, there simply are too many and while several of them are quite good, a number of weaker and less interesting ones are included. Though it is not a bad movement, it is rather too long. The somewhat Mendelssohnian finale is fairly short. It quickly establishes tension. The thematic material is average, which is somewhat of a problem since it follows the excellent material found in the first two movements. Although it is a shame that the best material comes first, there is much fine writing in the last two movements and the finale is both exciting and commendably short. Amateurs of good technical ability will certainly enjoy the work.



**Max Reger** (1873-1916) was born in the small Bavarian town of Brand. He began his musical studies at a young age and his talent for composition became clear early on. His family expected him to become a school teacher like his father and to this end he passed the necessary examinations for certification. However, before he landed his first teaching job, he met the eminent musicologist Hugo Riemann, who was so impressed by

Reger's talent that he urged him to devote himself entirely to music. Reger studied with him for nearly five years. By 1907, Reger was appointed to the prestigious position of Professor of composition at the Leipzig Conservatory. In addition to this, he was widely regarded as one of the best living conductors and organists. The **Sextet in F Major, Op.118** is one of his late works which he finished in 1910. I would be the first to tell you that this is not an easy work to play. And, I realize that for many, Reger is an acquired taste. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that it is a very original and well executed work. The opening movement, Allegro energico, begins *ff* and literally explodes with tremendous power. It is followed by several other very interesting themes all of which are in one way or another based on the main

theme. The second movement, a fast moving Scherzo, vivace is somewhat unusual with regard to its various modulations through which it passes. Reger is said to have been experimenting with a new idea. Today, after all of the works of the serial composers, it does not sound quite so daring to our ears. The center of gravity for the Sextet is its slow movement, Largo con gran espressione. This is music full of deeply felt emotion. It bears with it that transcendental sense one so often finds in the slow movements of Bruckner's symphonies. The finale, Allegro con moto, is of an altogether lighter nature relieving the religiosity of the preceding Largo. It is also a good movement but, following on the footsteps of such an outstanding and deeply felt movement, it does give the impression of being a little "light-weight", perhaps a term which is not entirely suitable to describe Reger's music. All in all, this is a very good sextet, but unless the players are quite strong sight readers, it's a good idea for everyone to have a look at their parts beforehand and if possible get a recording.



**Prince Heinrich XXIV Reuss of Köstritz** (1855-1910), was born in the Prussian town of Trebschen. The Reusses were a large old German noble family with several branches and literally dozens of princes called Heinrich. There was even another Prince Heinrich XXIV, but he was "of Greiz", hence the need for the lengthy name. Our Prince Reuss after initially studying music with his father, who had been a student of Carl Reissiger, took a law degree. However, subsequently he devoted himself to music, studying composition privately with Heinrich von Herzogenberg who introduced him to Brahms. Although Brahms never formally gave lessons to Reuss, according to the prince he gave the young composer numerous suggestions and considerable help which as far as Reuss was concerned almost amounted to the same thing. Though not a prolific composer, he did pen six symphonies as well as a considerable amount of chamber music, including five string quartets, two string sextets, three piano trios, a piano quartet, a piano quintet as well as several instrumental sonatas. His style can be summed up as an amalgam of Brahms, Herzogenberg and to some extent Dvorak and Mendelssohn. His works were premiered to critical acclaim and were held in high regard for many years before disappearing from the repertoire after the First World War. His **String Sextet No.2 in b minor, Op.17** is a first rate work of art which need not fear comparison even with the sextets of Brahms. Completed in 1901, this is a piece which every chamber music lover should get to know. It is a work of superb craftsmanship which is tonally beautiful throughout and is comfortable to perform. The first movement, Allegro non troppo, has for its main theme a melody which resembles that of the form of a legend. The second subject is graceful and fresh and its appeal is heightened by the pizzicato accompaniment. The development shows that the composer is a master of counterpoint. The second movement, Andante con moto, is a deeply felt and atmospheric song without words, which charms by its simplicity. The main section of the Allegretto quasi andantino which follows calls to mind corresponding movements from Brahms Second Symphony and First Serenade but is certainly not imitative. There is a whimsical trio section and clever Vivace coda. The finale, Allegro ma non troppo e grazioso, shows, like Brahms, the composer's affection for Hungarian gypsy melody. Not only is this well done but the contrasting musette section makes a good impression as well.

This is a masterpiece which belongs in the front rank of string sextets. Made for string players, it almost plays itself and is in no way technically difficult.



In 1876, **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov** (1844-1908) composed his five movement String Sextet in A Major. The main theme of the opening Allegro vivace is extraordinarily nice. Korsakov must have thought so too because he repeats it way too many times. Additionally, he could have done more to develop it. Despite this, there is much to admire here. The second movement, Rondo fugato, is from the technical standpoint, quite an achievement. The melodic material, though hardly above ordinary, is well-suited for a fugue and Rimsky creates a rather clever double fugue. Surprisingly, another quick movement, Scherzo, Vivace alla Saltarello, follows. The main theme is good, but again is repeated too often. The second theme is pedestrian. Korsakov makes up for this with his Andante espressivo. Here, the first cello is given the lead. It not only presents the hauntingly beautiful main theme, but also takes the lead in the very sophisticated development. The somewhat Russian-sounding finale, Allegro molto, though a bit thin melodically, is handled effectively. Not really strong enough for the concert hall, although the Andante espressivo could certainly be used as an encore, it can definitely be recommended to amateurs. It plays easily and presents no technical difficulties.



**Anton Rubinstein** (1829-1894) was one of the great piano virtuosos of the 19th century with a technique said to rival that of Liszt. He also gained renown as a composer and conductor. Rubinstein was one of those rare concert virtuosos whose contribution to music went far beyond performing. In 1862, he founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory and served as its first director. His efforts in developing Russian musical talent were perhaps the greatest of any single individual. Not only did he introduce European educational methods but he also established standards that were as rigorous as any conservatory in Europe. While Rubinstein's compositions were extremely popular during his lifetime, after his death, they were criticized because they showed "no Russian influence" and were viewed as derivatives of prominent European contemporaries, especially of Mendelssohn. However, this not entirely accurate. Although he was not part of the so-called emergent Russian national school as led by Rimsky Korsakov, it is not true that there is no Russian influence to be found in his music. This influence is just not as pronounced as in the works of Borodin, Musorgsky or of Korsakov himself. Rubinstein was a prolific composer writing in nearly every genre. Chamber music figures prominently amongst his works. He wrote 10 string quartets, at least 5 piano trios, a string quintet and a string sextet as well as several other chamber works. His **String Sextet in D Major, Op.97** dates from 1877. It is not an easy work to bring off and even the second violin part is devilishly difficult. The opening movement has several sections—Andante, Con moto, and Un poco animato. The main theme is appealing and charming but the development section seems almost too complicated and difficult to follow. The first subject of the second movement, Andante, is

in the form of a simple song-like melody. It is interrupted by a highly dramatic and agitated middle section. In the next movement, Moderato, parts of the theme are thrown back and forth between the different voices. The finale begins with a powerful Andante introduction which leads to an exciting Allegro vivace, the main theme to which resembles a folk tune. This is big work and may make a lasting impression in the concert hall, but amateurs who are not of the highest technical caliber and excellent ensemble players should be forewarned, it is not an easy work. And in my opinion, unnecessarily difficult.



When most people hear the name **Peter Schickele** (1935-) they think of his creation, the infamous P.D.Q. Bach, his famous comedy parody of the Baroque. But Schickele, who was born in Ames, Iowa and trained at the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied composition with Roy Harris, Darius Milhaud and Vincent Persichetti among others is a serious composer with over 100 works to his credit. His **String Sextet**

in six movements dates from 1990. This is a completely tonal work. The first movement, Moderately fast, opens with a whiff of sound reminiscent of Brahms. Schickele writes that he had the Brahms String Sextet No.2 in mind when he began. But this is no mere copy of Brahms, far from it. There are all sorts of interesting effects. For example, there is the short, nervous second movement; a slow movement with American plains folk influence, then a fast-paced movement showing the influence of jazz, and then a lovely disembodied waltz movement. This is a magnificent work, a super work, but it requires super players.



**Arnold Schoenberg** (1874-1951) was born in Vienna. As a youth he studied cello and violin. His father's death, when he was a teenager, forced him to get a job as a bank clerk. He studied counterpoint and composition privately with the composer Alexander Zemlinsky but was largely self-taught. Schoenberg's **Verklärte Nacht** (Transfigured Night), originally for string sextet dates from 1899 and was later orchestrated by him in

1917. It is perhaps the best known of his works from his early period, before he eschewed traditional tonality. It was the orchestral version in which work achieved fame. In this setting, with the massed strings, there is a torrent of sound and tremendous power, however, though highly dramatic, it loses the sense of intimacy of the original. Schoenberg set to music Richard Dehmel's poem of the same name. The poem tells of a poignant conversation between two lovers, a man and a woman, as they walk through the moonlit woods on a cold, clear winter night. Tormented by guilt, the woman confesses that she had become pregnant by another man before she had met her lover. After sobbing, the woman falls silent. Her lover replies that because their love is so strong, the unborn child will become his. Redeemed by his love and forgiveness, the woman's heart is lightened. The lovers embrace, and as they continue their walk, the night takes on a transfigured aura. Played without break, the music mirrors the five sections of the poem: an introduction, which sets the scene in the shadowy forest; the woman's depressed trudge and anguished confession; the man's deep-toned, comforting forgiveness; the enraptured love duet in an optimistic major mode; and the ethereal apotheosis, representing the "transfigured night" itself. Dehmel after hearing a

performance, congratulated Schoenberg on his marvelous rendering of his poem. It is a masterwork but requires players of a very high level technically and of ensemble experience.

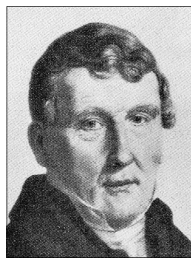


**Erwin Schulhoff** (1894-1942) was born in Prague. He began studying piano at the Prague Conservatory, and at the suggestion of Dvorak, who heard the boy play shortly before he died, recommended that Schulhoff move to Vienna to continue his studies, which he did for two years. Then on the Leipzig Conservatory where he studied composition with Max Reger. In Cologne in 1913, he was

able to study privately Debussy for a brief period of time. His **String Sextet** was begun in Dresden in 1920, but not completed until 4 years later. It is a profound work of four movements, and although not truly atonal, bears a certain kinship with Schoenberg's music. A three-note cell (C-D flat-G) is significant throughout the piece. The brooding mood of the work yields a bit in the second movement to a calmer cantilena, but the third movement, a fiendish 5/8 Burlesca is tense and riveting. The last movement is a more lyrical meditation upon earlier material. The work was said to reflect the cynicism which infected Schulhoff's music after serving in the Austro-Hungarian army on the eastern front during World War I and then later as a prisoner of war. It is not an easy work to play and certainly not immediately ingratiating, nor was it meant to be, but it cannot be denied that it is powerful and effective.



**Otto Siegl** (1896-1978) was born in the Austrian city of Graz. He studied violin and composition at the Graz Conservatory, the latter with Roderich von Mojsisovics, and then in Vienna with Egon Kornauth. He worked as a violinist, conductor and held the position of professor of music at conservatories in Cologne and Vienna. His **String Sextet, Op.28** dates from 1924. It is not traditionally tonal. Though most accurately described as atonal it is not part of the 12 tone school of Schoenberg and at times flirts with traditional tonality. Not at all an easy, in part because the time signature changes often, sometimes every two or three bars. It is an interesting but not particularly enjoyable work.



**Louis Spohr** (1784-1859 also known as Ludwig) was born in the German city of Braunschweig. From early childhood, he showed a great aptitude for the violin. He studied with the virtuoso violinist Franz Anton Eck in St. Petersburg and ultimately became one of the leading violinists in the first half of the 19th century. But he was also an important composer and conductor. Spohr wrote in virtually every genre,

not the least being chamber music. He composed some 36 string quartets, 7 string quintets, five piano trios, four double quartets and several other chamber pieces. He was no longer young when he penned his **String Sextet in C Major, Op.140** in 1848. He was one of the few since Boccherini to have composed in this genre. Unfortunately, like so many of his works, we find that otherwise fine writing is marred with the insertion of passages of which he as player excelled but which do little to advance the music. The thematic material of the first movement is lovely though

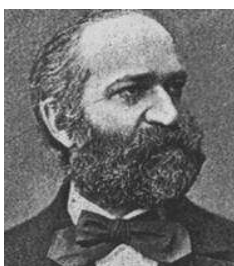
thin. Spohr tries to fluff it out by excessive reliance on trills which quickly becomes pretty tiresome. The slow movement is altogether better. The final two movements, a scherzo, in the form of a mazurka, and a presto, are actually cleverly combined into one movement. This is an enjoyable work, at times good, but certainly not great. Suitable for home music making but clearly not for the concert hall.



**Vaclav Stepan** (1889-1944) was born in the town of Pecky, near Prague, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His family moved to Prague when he was young and he studied piano and composition. The latter with Vizeslav Novak. An eye infection resulted in blindness in his right eye. His **String Sextet, Op.11** dates from 1923. It is a tonal work most of the time. The time signatures and tempi change frequently. It is in one long move-

ment and rather difficult to play. Certainly beyond all but the best amateur players. It is an original sounding work which would make a strong impression in the concert hall if presented.

**Peter Tchaikovsky's Souvenir d'Florence**, it one of the greatest works for string sextet. And like the two sextets of Brahms should be on every chamber music player's list of string sextets to try. But be forewarned, it requires players of real technical accomplishment, a level or two above what those sextets of Brahms do. And the first violinist and first cellist, if not professionals, need to be of the highest technical ability to do a good job. Much has been written about the Souvenir elsewhere. It is justly famous and there is little if nothing more that I can add here other than to recommend it to you.



Not long ago, the author of the jacket notes to a CD of Thieriot's chamber music wrote, "*One no longer knows the name Ferdinand Thieriot who emerged from the circle around Johannes Brahms...*" If it can be said that **Ferdinand Thieriot** (1835-1919) emerged at all, his emergence was brief and unnoticed, at least by English speaking musicians and listeners. He is unknown to ei-

ther the Groves or New Grove, and not to be found in Baker's Dictionary. Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey, while producing a list of his chamber works, has but one sentence about him, which is in part misinformation: "German composer, pupil of Brahms and Rheinberger." Though he was an admirer and friend of Brahms, he was not a student of the great man. Thieriot did study with the same teacher in Hamburg that Brahms had: Eduard Marxen. Thieriot eventually followed Brahms to Austria where he first gained a reputation as a cellist. It was on Brahms recommendation that Thieriot was appointed Director of the Music Society of Steiermark in Graz. Later, he held similar positions in Leipzig and Hamburg. Thieriot wrote a considerable amount of chamber music including an octet for strings and winds, a string octet, thirteen string quartets, a quintet for piano and string quartet, four piano trios, two piano quartets, a quartet for flute and string trio, and a quintet for piano and winds. His **String Sextet in D Major** was called Op. Post. by his publisher. However, there is no indication that this is a late work but simply one which was discovered after the composer's death. In Thieriot's case, a huge

amount of music was discovered in 1983, including 11 string quartets, this work and many others. It is in four movements, well-written with excellent part writing. But it suffers from a lack of memorable thematic material in my opinion. I would date the work from roughly 1885-1895, although tonally it could have been composed earlier. In the first movement, Allegro, we hear, at times, vague echoes of Mendelssohn. The melodies, however, are rather ordinary and nothing about themes stands out. The second movement, Intermezzo-Allegro vivace, again is well-written, and there is considerable forward movement, but the melodic material is weak. The Adagio non troppo which follows is the best movement of the work, but it cannot be classified as particularly fine. The middle section, however, is effective. The finale, Allegro vivace, is no different from the earlier movements—fine part-writing and a nicely constructed movement, tonally attractive but the melodic material is totally bland and unmemorable. Certainly not a candidate for concert and there are too many other works out there which are better and deserve your attention before this one.



**Nicolai von Wilm** (1834-1911) was born in the old Hanseatic city of Riga, today's capital of Latvia, but then part of the Russian empire. In the 19th century, Riga was still predominantly a German city and Wilm's family was ethnic German. He first learned piano and then studied that instrument as well as composition at the Leipzig Conservatory. Subsequently, he worked as a music

director in Riga and St. Petersburg after which he moved to Wiesbaden in Germany where he remained for the rest of his life. He was a prolific composer who wrote in most genres, but the bulk of his music was for piano, although he did not ignore chamber music writing several works for strings. Wilm's **String Sextet in b minor, Op.27**, dating from 1882, is a nice work. Beautiful sounding and cleverly written, the sextet is light hearted in spirit. It opens with a Larghetto introduction which leads to the main section Allegro vivace. The first theme is a lilting melody. The main subject of the second movement, Andante espressivo, is of an elegiac nature, while the second melody is more exuberant with the aroma of the coffee house. Next comes a fleet scherzo, Allegro molto, with a sweet melody in the contrasting trio section. The finale, Allegro con brio, is march-like and energetic. Not at all difficult to play, this is a work which can be recommended to amateurs, though not for concert performance.



**Anton Wranitzky** (1761-1820 Antonin Vranicky in Czech) was born in the Moravian town of Neureisch in the Austrian Habsburg Empire, today Nové Říše in the Czech Republic. He was the younger half-brother of the composer Paul Wranitzky, who was the better known of the two, although both were in their time fairly well-known, especially in Vienna but also throughout Europe where

their music was often performed. Anton's first music lessons were from Paul. He studied philosophy in Olmütz (Olomouc) and subsequently from 1778 to 1782 jurisprudence and music in Brunn (Brno). After that, he followed his brother to Vienna, where starting in 1783, he took composition lessons from Mozart, Haydn and Georg Albrechtsberger. A talented violinist, he worked as a freelance musician until 1790 when he was hired by



Prince Lobkowitz, the patron of Haydn and Beethoven, and eventually became Kapellmeister or Music Director of the Prince's orchestra. In 1807 he became the orchestra director of the Imperial Court Theater and in 1814 he became conductor in the Theater an der Wien. He knew all of the major musical figures in Vienna and was often engaged by Beethoven to conduct premieres of his symphonies. His **String Sextet in G Major** has no opus number and is one six such works composed around 1780, which probably makes it the earliest for such an ensemble after those of Boccherini which were written a few years before. It is worth pointing out that there is virtually no likelihood that Wranitzky ever heard any of Boccherini's sextets, and this one sounds absolutely unlike that composer. The style is that of the Mannheim School. The opening Allegro is rather orchestral sounding and could just as easily have been played by a string orchestra. The melodic material though pleasant is ordinary, the kind one hears in divertimenti designed to be talked over, at least nowadays. Next comes an Andante. What I said about the first movement also applies here. Lastly we have an Adagio, allegro finale. The adagio introduction really does little to make one anticipate the main section. Though pretty simple, and made trite by its 6/8 rhythm, the same criticism applies to the allegro. Other than for historical purposes, I cannot see any reason to play or to revive this work.