

## STANFORDIAN THOUGHTS

A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Stanford  
by Christopher Howell

### 2. Chamber Music with Strings

[My first article in this series](#) was dedicated to a single piece which has not yet been recorded – “Phaudrig Crohoore”. Most of the works I discuss now have been recorded at least once, while those unrecorded have been promised – though the waiting has become worryingly long. My intention here is really to set out the state of play – what has been done and what still needs to be done. I am not venturing on a listener’s guide to Stanford’s chamber music. Most of the recorded works have been reviewed in these pages. I shall link previous reviews and, where I have nothing to add, I shall pass on. I shall also comment on a few recordings that are circulating less officially, derived from broadcast performances. Not all of these are on open-access sites, but if you are interested in out-of-the-way repertoire, you will probably know as well as I do where to look.

#### Two or more strings and piano

Stanford’s production for more than one string instrument and piano has the easily remembered pattern of three trios, two quartets and one quintet.

In my [review](#) of the Gould Trio’s recording of the **First Piano Trio** and the Second Piano Quartet (Naxos 8.572452), I noted that all these works had now been recorded. I will refer readers to this review for a discussion of the First Piano Trio and also for a comparison between the recordings by the Gould and Pirasti Trios. The Gould Trio’s recording of the Second Piano Trio and – augmented once again by the violist David Adams – the First Piano Quartet (Naxos 8.573388) did not actually bring anything new to the catalogue, therefore. It did mean, though, that the Gould became the first single group to record all three

piano trios and both piano quartets. Moreover, the previous recordings of the first two piano trios and the first piano quartet, by the Pirasti Trio, were issued on a label, ASV, that ceased to operate in 2007. Since 2015, Presto Classical has been restoring ASV records to the catalogue – see Rob Barnett’s [selective stroll](#) through their initial release. As far as I can see, the Pirasti Stanford recordings have not reappeared. A quick check with Amazon suggests that it may not be too difficult to find them. I [reviewed](#) these discs back in 2002.

Michael Cookson gave a [warm welcome](#) to the Gould CD of Piano Trio no. 2 and Piano Quartet no. 1 and, in general terms, I have nothing to add. He did not make a comparison with the Pirasti performances so it may be interesting to see where such a comparison leads.



**STANFORD**

**Piano Trio No. 2**

**Piano Quartet No. 1**

**Gould Piano Trio • David Adams, Viola**





Stanford's **Piano Trio no. 2 in G minor op.73** was completed in January 1899 and dedicated to "my friends Heinrich Barth, Emanuel Wirth and Robert Hausmann", a trio based in Berlin. It was first performed, though, by the London Trio on 13 July 1899<sup>1</sup>. It was published by Bosworth.

Porte's comment<sup>2</sup> is worth quoting in its entirety, since it has the virtues of both total accuracy and total imbecility.

*This is a typical Stanfordian work. It is sonorously scored, classical in outlook, and contains many passages of an expressive and somewhat poetical freshness. There are no very special features to note, but the work is one that makes a useful and interesting item.*

Accuracy, because it is indeed an excellent piece, imbecility because the same thing could be said of

well over a hundred pieces of Stanford, so Porte leaves as none the wiser as to what, if anything, differentiates this one from the other hundred or so.

The first movement is marked *Allegro moderato* in 4/4. I had known this piece from the score for well over a decade before I ever heard it, and I had always supposed this marking to mean what it says – a warm, leisurely Brahmsian ramble. I was therefore highly disconcerted when I found the Pirasti Trio pitching in at a passionate two-in-a-bar. Surely this had to be wrong?

The Gould Trio take a somewhat slower, though still fast-flowing, tempo. This gives the music more breathing space. So am I happier now?

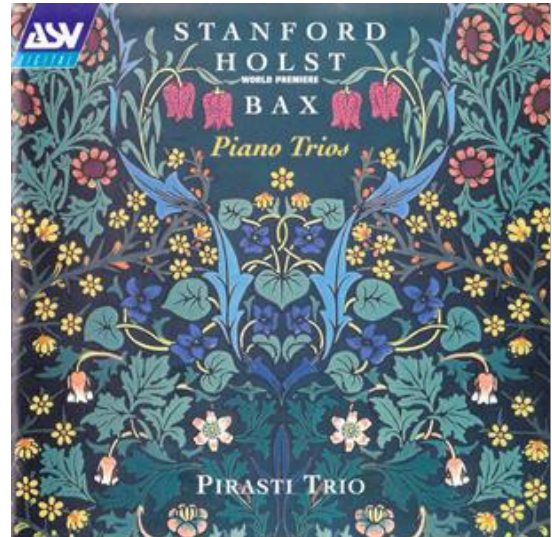
Things do not always look the same sixteen years later. I realise I had not given the Pirasti due credit for taking the bold solution. Bold, not just in tumbling in full tilt, but also in allowing a wide range of tempi. By the time they have reached the second subject, they are relishing the music at about the tempo I would have wished from the beginning, and are actually slower than the Gould, who keep the music flowing at a more classically even pace. The Pirasti pianist, Jeffrey Sharkey, is more ready than the Gould's Benjamin Frith to insert little expressive commas, to point to a magical pianissimo or a change of direction. This ASV disc is also particularly well recorded in the Conway Hall – the other ASV disc has a boomier church acoustic. Frith's piano sounds a little plummy in comparison, and possibly does not do full justice to the fine artist we know him to be.

The long and short of it is that the Gould take a non-interventionist view, which you (and even I) might theoretically applaud. But the Pirasti's bold approach gets rather more out of the music. There is a risk that the Gould's mellifluous flow creates the impression that, as Porte put it, "there are no very special features to note". Michael Cookson drew a comparison with Mendelssohn. I wonder if he would have felt the same if he had heard the Pirasti rather than the Gould?

<sup>1</sup> See Jeremy Dibble: *Charles Villiers Stanford, Man and Musician*, Oxford University Press 2002, p.318.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Porte: *Sir Charles V. Stanford*, Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1921, p. 69.

Jeremy Dibble, in his notes for the Gould disc, remarks that “There is a Beethovenian pathos about the slow movement ... which is deeply introspective in tone and demeanour”. Dare I suggest that he wrote this having got to know the work through the Pirasti recording? Sharkey’s playing of the opening solo does indeed strike a note of Beethovenian depth. Frith plays it more in the manner of an easy-flowing Mendelssohn Song without Words. And so it goes on. The Pirasti almost tumble over one another in the presto third movement, then listen to how Sharkey points the lyrical tune that starts lower down the first page. Frith just lets this happen. The Gould are more than adequately vivacious, but ... The Pirasti find more brooding, latent power in the strange introduction to the finale – this introduction, at least, is surely a “special feature” that Porte might have noted. They then pitch in boldly and rumbustiously when the finale proper gets going. This time, Stanford has marked it *Allegro con fuoco* in 2/2, so the Pirasti surely have it right. The Gould’s more jaunty performance is, once again, very good but ... At the very end, the Pirasti give the “big tune” full treatment. The Gould keep it a little more refined. Each solution is consistent with what has gone before.



I do not wish to suggest the Gould do not give a good performance. But they sound as if they are enjoying yet another nice piece by Stanford, while the Pirasti seem convinced they have discovered a masterpiece. With the result that their listeners might think so too.

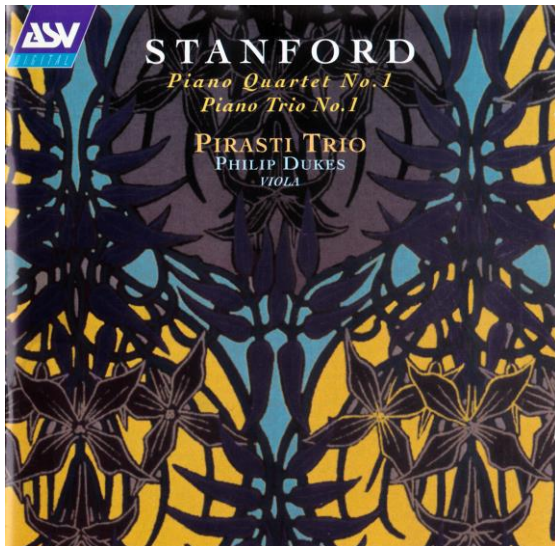
I shall also refer readers to my [review](#) of **Third Piano Trio** and also to the review by [Michael Cookson](#). The Gould recording remains the only one. It comes with Stanford’s three chamber works with clarinet – the Sonata, the Three Intermezzi and the two Fantasies for clarinet and string quartet. This is very convenient if you do not have the clarinet works, but has the drawback that many collectors will have acquired the Sonata, in particular, several times over.

The **Piano Quartet no. 1 in F op.15** is a relatively early work. It was completed in April 1879 and dedicated to Ernst Frank, the German conductor and composer whose efforts resulted in a production of Stanford’s opera *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan* in Hanover in 1880. He is not to be confused with the violinist Herman Franke, who played in the first performance of the Quartet at a Richter Festival Concert in London on 8 May 1879. The pianist on this occasion was Xaver Scharwenka. Franke himself ran a series of chamber concerts and gave the Quartet at least twice more during the 1880s<sup>3</sup>.

Just as the First Violin Sonata op.11 had been an advance on the First Cello Sonata op.9, so did the First Piano Quartet represent a further step forward in the handling of larger forms and confident scoring. The various episodes in the first movement seem not entirely integrated, but there is a most ear-catching moment at the start of the development. After a delightful Scherzo and a Poco adagio which derives considerable passion and depth from a theme that is inherently not particularly promising, the Finale depends overmuch on the catchiness of its themes. It should nevertheless send the listener home in good spirits.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Dibble, *ibid.*, p.105.





The winds of impetuous youth blow strongly through the Pirasti's performance of all three fast movements. The Gould find a measure of elegance, which has its own rewards, and Frith manages to make Stanford's heavier piano writing not sound clumpy. This is very clever of him because, at least on a modern piano – Stanford's detested "battleship grand" – it actually is a bit clumpy. Still, we may suspect that Scharwenka, too, managed to make it not sound so. The Pirasti, though, find magic rather than placidity in the trio to the Scherzo.

In the Poco adagio, the Gould's slightly more mobile tempo is arguably preferable, especially in the middle section. Moreover, from here to the end of the movement, the Gould seem genuinely inspired by the music, perhaps outplaying the Pirasti. In this case, therefore, preference for the Pirasti, if any, has to be more marginal.

Just to complicate matters even more, there is a third performance to be considered. This is by the Ames Piano Quartet and comes as part of a package of British piano quartets. It offers the sole recording for some of these, such as the Mackenzie, so the British music enthusiast will need this too. But I think any chamber music lover of any description will need it, for the performance is simply magnificent. The opening is striking for its rhythmic clarity and a verve that seems, not imposed from without but to arise from the score. The pianist makes his part sound limpid and they are quite free at times, without distorting anything. The episodes of the first movement all fit together in their hands and indeed, for the first three movements they have you thinking this is a masterpiece. Above all, they seem to know how to make it sound like itself, not like echoes of other composers. But not even they can make the finale sound equal to the rest, for all their joyous verse.



The **Piano Quintet in D minor, op.25**, was completed in March 1886, very early in the month it would seem, since Stanford arranged for Joachim, the dedicatee, to hear a private run-through on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The premiere took place in Cambridge on 10 June. Joachim was not able to come – the first violin was Gompertz while Stanford himself took the quite demanding piano part. Dibble documents a number of performances over the next few years, Joachim and Madame Neruda (Lady Hallé) being among the violinists who graced it with their presence, while Dannreuther played the piano part at least twice<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, it was the first chamber work of Stanford's to be published in Great Britain, by Novello – previously he had had to look to Germany. Thomas F. Dunhill placed this Quintet

<sup>4</sup> Dibble, pp.173-4.

“at the head” of Stanford’s works for Strings and piano<sup>5</sup>, and it continued to be played regularly until the appearance of Elgar’s Piano Quintet (1918). Given the excellence of Stanford’s work, it is not clear why it had to be either/or.

In a certain sense, I could content myself with a Porte-like inanity and just say it is all beautifully constructed – and it is. For the first three movements, this music has all the marks of a masterpiece. You can trust it to do the right thing, as one felicitous idea follows another, ranging in mood from rolling grandeur to intimate musing. Stanford may not have invented new forms, but his use of existing ones, such as sonata form, could be intuitive and personal. A whole article might be dedicated to his treatment of the moment of recapitulation – the first movement of this Quintet contains a particularly bewitching example. The hop-jig Scherzo has aroused particular comment, Irish as it comes, no doubt, but I also hear touches of proto-Elgar in the theme (bars 6-7). Dunhill was not so sure about the finale and I had my doubts at first, but I find it increasingly satisfying.

Another question worth examining is Rodmell’s claim that the slow movement has a “startling quote from Mendelssohn’s ‘Wedding March’ towards the close (possibly a reference to Francis Jenkinson and Stanford’s sister-in-law Marian, who married after a long and halting courtship in July 1887”<sup>6</sup>. A motive somewhat resembling Mendelssohn’s “Wedding March” is indeed worked into the music at various points. I have to say I did not notice it myself at first, but [my colleague Michael Cookson did](#), and it is one of those things that, once your attention has been drawn to it, looms larger every time. Accident or design? I have myself discussed Stanford’s sporadic habit of implying private programmes through the use of [musical quotation](#), so I should be the last to carp if somebody has found another example. If you are looking for a programme based on a successfully concluded love affair, you might also find in the phrase beginning with a falling octave and then rising with a chromatic note, a diatonically corrected glance at “Tristan und Isolde”. What is quite extraordinary is the deeply intimate moment (4:45 in the Hyperion recording) where Stanford appears to quote the Intermezzo from Puccini’s “Manon Lescaut”. Puccini wrote this three years after the Stanford, so any quotation would be the other way round. It seems highly unlikely that Puccini ever heard the Stanford Quintet, though. Another curious hint of a quotation comes in the finale, where the main theme seem to weave bits of “The Star-Spangled Banner” into the texture, though the phrase itself is also similar to one from Boyce’s “Hearts of Oak” which Stanford later used as a leitmotiv for “The Battle of the Baltic”. “The Star-Spangled Banner” was not then the American National Anthem, though it was gaining ground in the USA as a patriotic piece. Originally, though, the tune was an “Anacreontic Ode” by the English composer John Stafford Smith. Either way, any connection with Jenkinson, or Stanford himself, escapes me though, in view of Jenkinson’s classical leanings, the connection may be there.

There is, though, a tragic sequel to this. Francis John Henry Jenkinson (1853-1923) was a Scotsman who arrived in Cambridge at about the same time as Stanford. Described as classicist, bibliographer and University librarian, he remained in Cambridge in this latter role for the rest of his life. He married Marian Wetton, sister to Stanford’s wife Jennie, on 6 July 1887. If we accept the theory that the Quintet contains a reference to Francis and Marian, we might suppose that the wedding had been finally announced while Stanford was at work on it. Stanford himself played at the wedding. The march chosen, though, was Parry’s from “The Birds”<sup>7</sup>. This was a natural choice under the

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Dunhill, article contributed to Harry Plunket Greene, *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Edward Arnold 1935, pp.222-235. Dunhill’s comments in the chamber music are a slightly revised version of his article in *Cobbett’s Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Rodmell: *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Ashgate 2002, p.118.

<sup>7</sup> H.F. Stewart: *Francis Jenkinson, Fellow of Trinity College and University Librarian, A Memoir*, Cambridge University Press 1926, p.24

circumstances, since Jenkinson had advised Parry over the Greek word setting for the vocal parts of this score.

This marriage may have been the fruit of a long engagement, but the idyll was short-lived. Marian fell ill almost immediately and died six months later on 5 January 1888, still in her thirtieth year<sup>8</sup>. Jenkinson eventually married again, in 1902<sup>9</sup>. If the optimistic finale of the Quintet was intended to express the happy conclusion of a difficult love story, it must have had a bitter taste for Stanford in the wake of this tragedy.



The Hyperion recording, by Piers Lane and the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet, was warmly welcomed by Michael Cookson, as referenced above. I was set on the present trail by the discovery that an alternative performance, from a 2004 concert by the Ensemble Liverpool, has appeared on YouTube. The life of a piece of music depends on its being performed – dusting these works over, recording them and then putting them back on the shelf, honour satisfied, is tantamount to admitting they are no more than “historically interesting” anyway. So four cheers, at least, for the Liverpool initiative.

That said, for repeated listening you need the Hyperion. The Ensemble Liverpool has a viola player, David Ruby, with a fine, burnished tone. We may be hearing from him in a solo context one day. Their first violin, Elita Bungard, is an excellent player but perhaps more in a chamber context. The second violin, Tony Burrage, and the cellist, Michael Parratt, get round the notes but seem unable or unwilling to play out. Unless they overcome this, their future is more likely among the orchestral rank and file. I see that Burrage and Ruby are currently members of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, while Bungard is with the Royal Scottish National, so I suppose this ensemble has had to be discontinued. The pianist, John Peace, is proficient. A somewhat uneven sound picture, then. The leading violin enters a bar early during the development of the first movement and sticks to her error for about a page. It can easily happen during a live performance, as can certain lapses of intonation at strenuous moments.

Nonetheless, those who have the Hyperion recording might give this a listen for it hints, impressively in spite of everything, at a different view. For better or worse, the exposition repeat in the first movement, given by the Vanbrugh, is missing in Liverpool. Their performance is barely a minute shorter even so, the slower tempi lending the music a rugged grandeur where the Vanbrugh sometimes spin it along in a more Mendelssohnian manner. In particular, the almost hymn-like weight they give to the finale makes for a more convincing conclusion than the energetic dance we get from the Vanbrugh. It would be nice to have an interpretation along these lines on an official disc.

### Strings

While all the chamber works involving piano are available on disc, things are moving more slowly with the eight string quartets and two string quintets. A Hyperion disc of the first two string quartets

<sup>8</sup> Rodmell relates the circumstances of Marian’s death and its effect on the Stanford family on p.136.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. <http://trinitycollegechapel.com/about/memorials/brasses/jenkinson/>



by the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet proved not to be the start of a full cycle. A cycle has now been announced by the Dante Quartet on Somm, and will include the quintets as well. However, the first issue, of the Fifth and Eighth Quartets, has been without sequel for sufficiently long as to set alarm bells ringing, hopefully false ones.

The Hyperion recording of the **first two Quartets** has been enthusiastically reviewed for MWI by [myself](#), [Michael Cookson](#) and [Rob Barnett](#), so I will not dwell on these here.

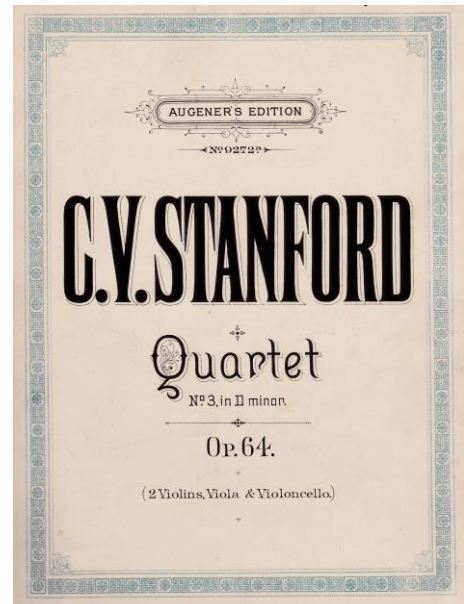
Stanford's string quartets from no. 3 onwards were not helped by the extremely negative opinion expressed in Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music (1929). The entry on Stanford was written by his pupil Thomas F. Dunhill who was seemingly under the impression that there were only six string quartets, even though Porte (1921) had listed all eight of them. "The later string quartets," he remarks, "only two of which appear to be published, are decidedly less attractive. Number 3... suffers from a paucity of themes which arrest attention. The technique is unimpeachable, but the melodic invention shows a falling off from the earlier quartets, which, if not strikingly original, had certainly an easy grace and fresh good humour to commend them". This would have mattered less had Cobbett not been so widely respected and consulted.

**String Quartet no. 3 in D minor op.64** was completed on 30 September 1896. It was dedicated to the Joachim Quartet, who gave it in Berlin and also programmed it in London on 2 April 1898, during their first visit to the city. In the meantime, the Gompertz Quartet had taken it up, giving the première in London on 11 November 1896. It was repeated on 9 March and 1 December 1897<sup>10</sup> and a score and parts were issued by Augener in 1897. So things looked promising for a while.

As of now, the only way to hear this work is in a performance downloadable from IMSLP by Steve's Bedroom Band. This ensemble sounds like a group of talented students, very musical and used to playing together, but overstretched by Stanford's often considerable demands.

Looked at on paper, the opening theme of the first movement might seem to give Dunhill reason. It is well, therefore, that we can actually hear it in a sympathetic if not immaculate performance. The abrupt nature of the initial gesture, with its swells and sforzatos underpinned by very personal harmonies, spilling into a cadenza-like flourish followed by a peremptory passage with moments of unexpected dissonance, is surely arresting in just the way Dunhill said it was not. The secondary material, though more lyrical, is not allowed to flower unduly but not, I feel, from failing melodic invention. Stanford is concerned here to construct a rigorously argued movement where nothing asserts itself unchallenged for very long.

The second movement is on the lines of a Brahmsian intermezzo. Here, I think, Steve and his companions might have made it soar a little more in its lyrical moments, and dug more into the threatening rhythms that later undermine it. It sounds a little static here.



<sup>10</sup> Dibble, pp. 287, 288, 299

The third movement has features of the *caoine*, or Irish lament, which Stanford incorporated in several of his works, most famously the Clarinet Sonata. It makes a fair impact here, but I feel the music has dramatic and emotional qualities that could be further tapped.

The finale is a vigorous dance. It is clearly the most taxing movement and the blind listener to Steve's Band might think he was hearing something much more modern. On the other hand, the players quite rightly take its challenges head on, at a good tempo and with zippy rhythms, so the proper character comes across. I hope I do not sound patronizing towards this performance. Do-it-yourself recordings of rare works can do more harm than good, and a dead-pan professional reading would have been no better. Steve and friends are to be thanked for leaving no doubt as to the value of this music.

Though we do not yet have a recording of **String Quartet no.4 in G minor, op.99**, there is one piece of good news. Thanks to an American doctoral dissertation, a score and parts, together with a discussion of the work, can be found on Internet<sup>11</sup>. Presumably you would need permission from Dr. Ferguson to use this material except privately but still, this is a great step forward. Somewhat curiously, Dr. Ferguson states that she chose this Quartet because it was the last Stanford Quartet that remained unpublished. I wish she had found space, even in a footnote, to tell us who has published nos. 6 to 8 and where I can buy my copies. I found no trace of any such publication on Internet.

**String Quartet no. 5 in B flat op. 104** is subtitled "In memoriam Joseph Joachim". Joachim had been a friend of Stanford's since his earliest years and probably done more than anybody to establish Stanford's name at home and in Europe. The quartet was first performed in Leeds on 4 March 1908, with a performance in London the following day and a Berlin première a week later<sup>12</sup>. Parts were issued in 1908 by Stainer and Bell. This was the last of Stanford's string quartets to achieve publication during his lifetime.

Outward grief is reserved for the *Adagio pesante* third movement. Stanford might easily have provided a funeral march on the lines of that for "Becket", or another *caoine* to follow that of the third quartet. Instead, the music expresses almost violent protest and a raw emotion unusual in Stanford. There is very little let-up till the end. For the rest, Stanford made it clear<sup>13</sup> that the work was not "meant to be sad". Sadness never seems far below its skin, though. The varying moods of the first movement suggest a series of happy memories flooding the grief-struck mind. The second movement is a sighing intermezzo that finds serenity in the beautiful central theme. The broad, song-like theme of the finale seems to smile through tears. Each movement ends with a quotation from Joachim's own Romance op. 2/1, a favourite encore piece of the violinist. It slips in perfectly, and we realize that much of the thematic material heard previously is derived from it. The finale also incorporates a nervous, rising phrase that Joachim was wont to playing while warming-up before a concert. This wide-ranging, deeply-felt work is likely to increase in stature the more one hears it.

The recording downloadable from IMSLP by Steve's Bedroom Band gave a more than decent idea of what the music was about. I imagine that Steve and his friends would be neither surprised nor offended if I say that their valiant efforts have been comprehensively superseded by the Dante Quartet (SOMMCD 0160). Apart from complete technical security with a wider dynamic range and

<sup>11</sup> Ferguson, Colleen Renee. "Charles Villiers Stanford String Quartet No. 4 in G Minor, Op. 99 a critical performance edition." DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) thesis, University of Iowa, 2015. <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/3082>.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Dibble: booklet notes for Somm CD

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Herbert Thompson, 28 February 1908, quoted by Dibble



tonal palette, the Dante give the music just that little bit more space to emerge and express itself. It comes across as a lived-in interpretation rather than a sympathetic reading. The disc also includes the Joachim Romance which Stanford quotes.

**String Quartet no.6 in A minor op.122** still holds its secrets, though Rodmell notes that a performance was given at Bracknell on 20 July 1980.

**String Quartet no. 7 op.166** was probably completed in early 1919 – it was played at the Royal College of Music on 27 February 1919<sup>14</sup>. No further performance is known until 28 January 1974, when the Alburni Quartet played it at the Savile Club to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Stanford's death. Stanford had been a member and regular attendee of this club. The work was broadcast for the first time on 22 February 1974 by the Alburni Quartet. This could have been recorded at the Savile Club performance, but there is no indication of an audience presence, so presumably the Alburni Quartet set it down in the BBC studios shortly afterwards. As I note below, in 1968 the BBC were under the impression that this quartet was "still missing". According to Jeremy Dibble, both these late quartets were available on hire from Stainer & Bell. Possibly the BBC's interest led somebody in the publishing house to make a second search for a score they had failed to locate in 1968. The MSS of both works are now safely housed in the Newcastle Stanford Archive. What we need now are published scores and parts. The Alburni recording can be found on at least one members-only site offering rare material, but be careful. The version I found plays about a semitone flat. Even the simplest CD-burning programmes usually allow you to correct this, but you do need some musical knowledge to correct it "correctly". If you cannot, hearing the piece in B minor may not be the end of the world, but the tempi will be too slow. Properly adjusted, and maybe with a little work at the equalizer, you will find a reasonable off-air cassette sound, usable until a modern version appears.

The seventh quartet lasts barely more than 22 minutes, making it considerably the shortest of the six known to me. It therefore anticipates the taut, pithy world of the late Fantasies. More specifically, it may anticipate the world of the unpublished piano Sonatinas, in the sense that it views the world of the Haydn/Mozart string quartet while interpreting it in a late romantic idiom. The opening movement makes us of basic, fragmentary themes, rarely opening into lyrical effusion, and is constructed according to exemplary sonata-form principles. If you close your ears to this aspect, though, the sheer range of material employed may lead you to hear it as a highly spontaneous affair. Its learning need trouble only the learned. There will be no doubt, surely, of the broad warmth of the second movement and the high energy of the scherzo, while the finale is altogether remarkable. It seems to represent an attempt – ultimately successful – to assert an Irish jig against grim odds. This movement should bring the house down. In contrast with the private, confessional mode Stanford often adopted in his string quartets, this one is firmly "public" in tone. It should be well received by audiences, and its brevity should make it not too difficult to programme.

Without either a score or an alternative recording, I can only say that I cannot imagine a better performance, though there is every reason to suppose, on the basis of their previous offerings, that the Dante Quartet, or the Vanbrugh if they wished to return to the fray, could equal it. To hear the music in state-of-the-art sound would be a treat. How sad – and strange – that the Alburni themselves did not keep it in their repertoire.

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<sup>14</sup> Rodmell tells us, on p.320, that it was completed on 27 February 1919, but in his worklist he states that the MS is undated. According to Dibble, p.449, the work was performed at the RCM by a quartet of students on 27 February 1919, so logically it was completed sufficiently before this date to copy out a set of parts

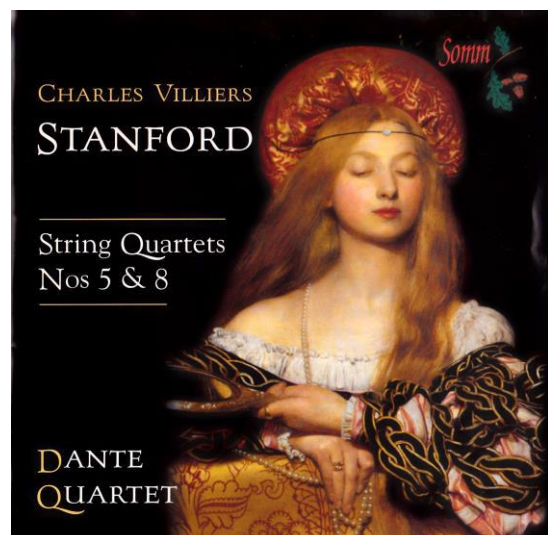
Unless you keep diaries and jealously conserve them over the years – I do not – you are unlikely to know what you were doing at 11.30 on 20 March 1968. For most of my life I could not have told you either, but I now know that I was in the sickroom of my boarding school, getting over a bout of 'flu. I must have been on the up, since I was granted a small radio, and I was the sole sufferer that day, so I did not have to divide my pleasures with contemporaries for whom radio meant only Radio Luxemburg. So there I was, just coming up to fifteen, besotted with music and mad on Dvořák in particular. And also a voracious reader on matters musical who had read in Eric Blom's *Music in England* (Pelican 1942 p.169) that Stanford "narrowly missed, one cannot quite tell why, becoming an Irish Dvořák". That sounded intriguing, but I was hardly aware of the rarity and importance – for my later years – of what I was hearing when the first ever performance was announced of Stanford's **Eighth String Quartet in E minor, op.167**. The performers were the London String Quartet – Carl Pini and Ray Gillard, violins, Christopher Martin, viola and Anthony Pini, cello. I liked what I heard, though I remember I was a bit puzzled by the last movement.

This performance was broadcast at least twice more. While I was at University one of my most-valued piano teachers, RAM Professor Alexander Kelly, who knew of my interest in Stanford and shared it up to a point – he was more drawn to Mackenzie – wrote to me that he had heard a very fine Stanford string quartet on the radio. I wish I still had the letter, but he seemed quite bowled over, adding that it was magnificently constructed and played with passion by a quartet led by Carl Pini. I see from BBC Genome that he must have heard this on 20 November 1972.

I caught it again myself a little later. This was on a programme introduced by Jack Brymer, pretty well retired by then as clarinettist but an avuncularly engaging radio announcer. He began by saying how much he enjoyed playing Stanford's Clarinet Concerto – unfortunately, no recording of this by Brymer has come my way – and said of the quartet that "there's a strong air of Irish blarney about it". I hope I have remembered his words reasonably well. This broadcast, I see from BBC Genome, was on 11 July 1977. My mother was listening with me. She always took my interest in Stanford with a pinch of salt, and was not a great fan of string quartets, but she thought the first movement, in particular, was "terrific". I recall that I found the finale more satisfactory the second time round.

An off-air taping of the original broadcast, complete with announcements, can be found at a members-only forum. As with the seventh, it plays a semitone flat so should only be downloaded by those equipped to correct this. Since there is now an excellent new version, you may feel disinclined to bother anyway. The introduction is a reminder of just how forgotten Stanford was in 1968. The speaker begins by saying that, "according to some authorities, Stanford wrote only six string quartets, but in fact he wrote eight, of which the seventh is still missing". This latter point has been discussed above. We may wonder which authority might have been intended, since *Porte*, and *Grove V* which basically took its worklist from *Porte*, listed all eight quartets. The answer is presumably the influential *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* which, though published in 1929, attributed only six quartets to Stanford.

While Quartet no. 7 was succinct and "public", no. 8 is more discursive and confessional. Important as the tonal procedures documented in Dibble's notes to



the Somm recording undoubtedly are, Brymer's "strong sense of Irish blarney" might be more helpful for listeners approaching it for the first time. In the outer movements especially, nothing is quite what it promises to be. Short, pithy motives suddenly soar into brief bursts of lyricism, while songful episodes are rounded off with a throw-away phrase, as if Stanford is shaking his head and saying "begorra, me bhoy". The finale evokes almost frenzied folksy dancing, but also relapses into uncertainty and the work closes with a return to its troubled opening. Though not strictly a cyclical piece, another reference is the motto phrase of the Allegretto second movement, which derives from the closing gesture of the first movement. While Stanford is using a masterly formal control over his material, the often ambiguous nature of the material itself means that what he is actually saying is highly personal. There is a more marked Irish tone here than in the 7<sup>th</sup> Quartet, too.

The London String Quartet convey all this perfectly, though there are one or two awkward moments of intonation in high-lying octave passages between the two violins. However, nice as it is to feel one can listen to the actual first performance, it has to be said that the Dante Quartet, in the new recording, show equal understanding and have managed to sort out those few intonation problems that dogged the 1968 version. Moreover, their actual interpretations are not notably different, so there is no particular reason to return to the old one for the sake of an alternative view. With excellent modern recording, the new Somm belongs in the library of anybody not allergic to romantic chamber music.

**String Quintet no.1 in F, op.85**, is the pairing for the RTÉ Vanbrugh's recording of the Piano Quintet. They are joined this time by Garth Knox as second viola. I have already linked above Michael Cookson's welcoming review and I would like to comment on just two points, one raised by Michael, one not.

Firstly, Michael notes that "something seems to go awry in the proceedings for a few bars between 04:03-04:18". Since I have the score and he probably does not<sup>15</sup>, I wished, for the record, to see whether this is so. My first impression was that something a little strange was indeed going on. After some careful listening, I concluded that the Vanbrugh's reputation emerges unscathed, but so does that of Michael's ears. The matter is technical and complicated, so I shall have to address myself mainly to those able to read a score, for whose benefit I reproduce below the incriminated passage.

This is actually an extreme case of a willingness Stanford often showed in his writing for chamber music with strings, possibly derived from his work editing Purcell, to indulge in false relations that are perfectly logical in themselves, but remarkably dissonant in the context of a warmly romantic style. In the first bar of the extract, the first violin's B natural clashes with the second violin's C, while in the second bar, the upper strings clash Es and E flats and Fs unconcernedly. At the end of this bar, a D, an E flat and a C are heard together. Then, in the third bar, the viola's B natural clashes with the second violin's C, and does so at a distance of a semitone, rather than a major seventh, where the wider spacing would have attenuated the dissonance somewhat.

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<sup>15</sup> I understand that a score was never published, and Dibble (p.350) confirms this. Houghton published the parts in 1905 and Edinburgh University, where I studied from 1971 to 1975, had a set of them in the Reid Library. During my years there, I constructed a score from the parts.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a string quartet, consisting of five staves. The notation is dense and complex, featuring many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, often beamed together. There are several dynamic markings: 'poco sostenuto' appears on the second, third, and fourth staves; 'pp' (pianissimo) is on the first staff; and 'dim.' (diminuendo) is on the first staff. The score is numbered '204' on the right side. The handwriting is in black ink on white paper.

In truth, Stanford's string quartet writing abounds in similar cases, but they are rarely so concentrated into one space as to induce the ear to suppose something may be wrong.

The other question could be said not to regard the Quintet directly. It is nevertheless a matter of some curiosity that the second movement was transcribed for organ by Stanford and was published, not as an arrangement of the Quintet movement – the sort of thing any composer might do with a potentially popular piece – but in the guise of a new work, the Canzona op.116 no.2. This was the second of two pieces, *Te Deum* and *Canzona*, published by Schirmer in 1910. Now that the organ version is available – see [review by John France](#) – listeners can conveniently compare the two versions. For the convenience of those who read music, I include examples from the scores, but I shall try to keep my comments accessible to those who do not. I am a little puzzled that none of the written material on Stanford discusses this patent case of recycling<sup>16</sup>.

For the first section – to bar 23 – the transcription is a literal one such as any of us might have done. The music transfers from string quintet to organ with only the smallest adjustments. It is in the central section that Stanford gives us a valuable lesson in practicalities. The rumbling, rhythmic ostinato that starts at the *poco animato* on the lower strings – a sort of grim premonition of *Drake's Drum* – could theoretically have been transferred to the organ pedals. Indeed, as a nifty piece of heel-and-toe work, it might have been rather fun to do. But the organ, since it is not touch-sensitive, could never give the figure the sort of incisiveness that a viola and cello, playing in octaves, can provide. Moreover, however well the organist coped with it, any moderately resonant church acoustic would reduce the whole thing to an inchoate, growling dissonance. So Stanford took the bold solution that an arranger would hardly venture on any music but his own, substituting a striding arpeggio in dotted rhythm – compare bars 24-25 in my two examples.

<sup>16</sup> I have not seen Dibble's notes for the recording of the *Canzona* but John France's review, which quotes Dibble's description of the piece, makes no reference to the fact that it was not originally composed for organ. At the time I wrote my own article [Stanford and Musical Quotation](#), originally published in *British Music News* in 1997 and available on MWI since 2003, I was not aware of this particular recycling.



Stanford: String Quintet no.1 op.85, movement II, bars 21-29:

The image displays a handwritten musical score for a string quintet, covering bars 21 through 29. The score is arranged in three systems, each containing five staves. The first system (bars 21-23) features a complex rhythmic texture with triplets and sixteenth notes. The second system (bars 24-26) includes a section marked 'poco animato' and 'arco.' with a forte dynamic. The third system (bars 27-29) continues the rhythmic intensity with dense sixteenth-note passages. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, f, f<sup>z</sup>), articulation (pizz, arco), and performance instructions (poco sostenuto, poco animato). The manuscript shows signs of being a working draft, with some ink bleed-through and corrections.

Stanford: canzona op.116 no.2, bars 22-29:

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a rising motive on the upper strings. The tempo is marked 'a tempo' and 'Più animato'. The score includes a guitar part marked 'Gt. f'. The second system continues the piece with a rising motive on the upper strings.

The rising motive on the upper strings depends, for its effect, in the entry of each instrument one after another. Single notes of this kind would have been ineffective on the organ, so Stanford goes for a more homophonic grandeur. At bar 29 he has also adjusted the harmonies. A fascinating piece of recomposition.

The latter part of the movement requires less rewriting, though he jettisons a piece of canonic imitation that a conscientious arranger of somebody else's music might have felt duty bound to incorporate somehow.

Why this recycling? Or rather, since composers often arrange their works for different instrumental combinations, why did he not publish it as an arrangement of the Quintet movement, incidentally providing a publicity shot for the Quintet itself?

The Quintet had been published in 1905 by Houghton, a short-lived concern to which Stanford turned after a quarrel with Boosey. Houghton had apparently promised to issue the Second Quintet too<sup>17</sup>, but it remained in manuscript. From 1907, he found a new outlet in the fledgling Stainer & Bell company. Since his friend Harry Plunket Greene and an ex-pupil, Richard Walthew, were on the Board and the Selection Committee, only business acumen barred the way – and did so increasingly strongly – to the automatic issue of new works as they fell from his pen<sup>18</sup>. By the beginning of the First World War, Houghton was in serious difficulties and, in an attempt to stave off failure, announced its intention to sell the rights to several of Stanford's more remunerative works, including

<sup>17</sup> Dibble, p.350.

<sup>18</sup> Dibble, p.383.

the First Irish Rhapsody. Stanford saw no option but to buy the rights himself, borrowing money from a friend in order to do so. He subsequently placed the works in question with Stainer & Bell. The Te Deum and Canzona, though, were issued by Schirmer in 1910, so at the time of the Canzona's publication, the Quintet was still in the hands of Houghton, listed in their catalogue but to all intents and purposes buried there. This must have irked Stanford, since the Canzona, as he renamed the movement, is a songful piece with some potential for popularity. Publication of the reworking by Stainer & Bell might not have gone undetected, but Schirmer were safely on the other side of the Atlantic. At some stage, it appears from Porte<sup>19</sup>, these Schirmer publications – there were a few more – were available in Great Britain through Winthrop Rogers, but the Te Deum and Canzona remained among Stanford's least known organ pieces. Anyway, nobody seems to have noticed till now. It will be interesting to see, when the recording of **String Quintet no. 2** finally arrives, whether it, too, contains some music we know already.

***Christopher Howell © 2018***

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<sup>19</sup> Porte, p.89.