

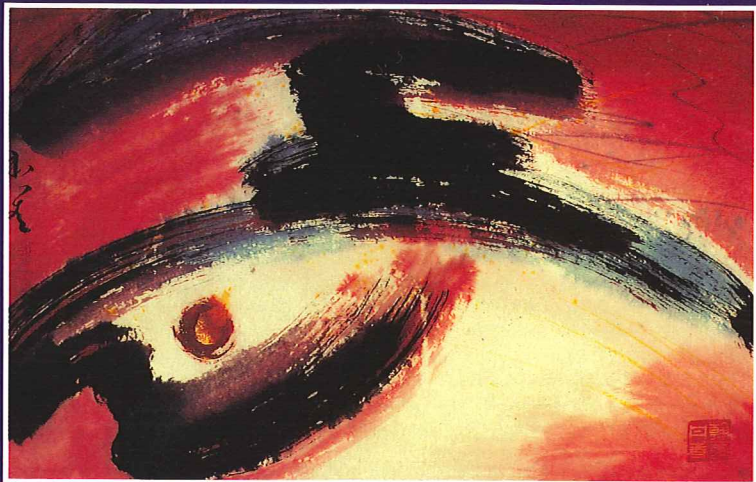
MARCO POLO

LATIN-AMERICAN CLASSICS

DDD

8.223390

Heitor  
**VILLA-LOBOS**  
String Quartets  
Nos. 11, 16 and 17  
Danubius Quartet



## Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887 - 1959)

### String Quartets Nos. 11, 16 and 17

"I love to write quartets. One could say that it is a mania." Villa-Lobos made this confession, quoted by Pierre Vidal, in Paris in the spring of 1958. He had completed his seventeenth and final quartet the year before and had begun to sketch an eighteenth. It is usual to think of Villa-Lobos's prodigious output in orchestral terms, and it may come as a surprise that chamber music forms a substantial part of his work. Of that chamber music string quartets are by far the major constituent, and within the broader context of the twentieth-century string quartet, dominated by Bartók and Shostakovich, Villa-Lobos's seventeen quartets must be considered a significant, though poorly acknowledged, contribution.

Villa-Lobos attributed his knowledge of the string quartet to the study of Haydn. Whether or not one accepts the veracity of his claim, any attempt to find traces of the Viennese master in the Brazilian's work would be in vain. There are no stylistic connections, and sonata form itself is all but absent. The keys to Villa-Lobos's quartet idiom lie elsewhere. A primary source of inspiration is the rich and diverse musical folklore of Brazil, which the composer discovered between the ages of 18 and 25, when he traveled extensively through the Northeast, the Amazon basin and the South with touring theatrical companies. Even earlier he had come to know the lundu, the chôro, the maxixe and other forms of "urban folklore," better described as the popular music of the times. To those Brazilian impressions may be added a taste for Renaissance polyphony, the *ricercare*, Bach's fugues and Franck's cyclical principle, the last acquired most likely through self-study of d'Indy's *Cours de composition musicale*. In this highly personalized scheme of things the Viennese classical structures and especially the sonata held little attraction for Villa-Lobos. Instead the mostly self-taught composer found his own, non-academic solutions to the problems of form and unity. His frequent

reliance on imitation—the successive entry of a theme in all four voices—affirms an innate feeling for fugal thought. Variation, which substitutes for development, creates a sense of continuity, often transforming one musical idea into another in a “stream of consciousness.” In his study of the quartets, published in 1978 by the Museu Villa Lobos, Arnaldo Estrella describes this as “a flowing brook, a constant becoming.” Conversely, variation also creates contrast, a stylistic device that Villa-Lobos achieved even more dramatically through abrupt juxtapositions. Finally it must not be forgotten that the composer began his professional life as a cellist in small ensembles, “orquestrinas,” that entertained in cafés, music halls and theatres. Many ideas in the quartets seem conceived in terms of the cello; even when introduced by another instrument, they attain fullest expressivity when heard in the cello part. Villa-Lobos’s experience as a string player may also account for the uncommon sonorous combinations and instrumental techniques that impart a further dimension of originality. That is often most evident in the scherzos, which give freest reign to his exuberant flights of fancy.

Amidst the baffling, sometimes uneven profusion of the Brazilian’s music, the seventeen string quartets maintain a consistently high quality and become in later years his chosen medium of expression. Chronologically they form four groups. The first four quartets were composed between 1915 and 1917, a period of much other chamber music, including the second Sonata-Fantasia for violin and piano, two cello sonatas and the second piano trio. Thereafter a fourteen-year hiatus intervenes in the quartets. That period from 1917 to 1931 saw the creation of major orchestral works, among them Uirapuru, Amazonas and the six orchestral Chôros. Much of that time was spent in Paris, where Villa-Lobos came into contact with Ravel, Dukas, Falla, Schmitt, Honegger, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Casella and Varèse—contact that obviously bore fruit. His return to the string quartet in 1931 produced one isolated example, the fifth. For the next seven years he energetically focused on the development of musical education in Brazil, composing a multitude of choral pieces. The sixth quartet, also isolated, appeared in 1938, and four more years

were to pass before Villa-Lobos's involvement with the quartet resumed and intensified. From 1942 onward he produced eleven quartets in fifteen years.

Musically the quartets belong to three periods. To the early period belong the first four quartets. Of these, the first has little in common with the others. It is in fact a six-part suite with a folkloric veneer; its three successors, with few traces of national flavour, move tentatively toward the originality that Villa-Lobos was seeking. The fifth and sixth form an overtly nationalistic pair, even indicated by the designations *Quarteto Popular No. 1* and *II Quarteto Brasileiro*. In a practice unusual for Villa-Lobos the fifth quartet quotes actual folk melodies, but the sixth absorbs folkloric elements into a broader musical spectrum and, significantly, marks the maturation of his quartet idiom. The seventh to the seventeenth quartets belong to the third phase, wherein national elements become increasingly universalized and find ultimate expression in the rarefied atmosphere of the final masterpieces.

Quartet No. 11 dates from 1947. The *Quarteto Jacovino* gave the premiere in 1953 in Rio de Janeiro. There is a strong sense of tonality throughout, established in the second bar, where the second violin and cello play a C major scale in contrary motion. The scale forms a significant element of the principal theme, which expands lyrically after its initial statement. A contrasting section, primarily chordal and derived from the opening theme, ends with a secondary, syncopated idea, later seen to anticipate the beginning of the finale. (A notable feature of the eleventh quartet is its thematic integration.) The reprise, a fifth higher, is followed by a coda that closes the movement by emphatically restating the initial theme. The playful scherzo, utilizing brilliant coloristic effects, suggests a rustic origin. The dominant tonality is again C major, with atonal diversions, especially in the central episode, which is related harmonically to the chordal section of the first movement. The soulful character of the *modinha*, common to many of Villa-Lobos's later slow movements, defines the *adagio* of the eleventh quartet. Here, introduced by the cello's pensive narrative, the first violin expresses sadness and withdrawal. In the

customary ternary form, this elusive movement grows tense in the more dramatic middle part. The muscular finale, reminiscent of the composer's orchestral panoramas, brings an abrupt shift of mood. There are thematic links, however, to what has gone before. The main theme, as already mentioned, derives from a motif in the first movement, and its melodic and harmonic fourths link it to the preceding adagio as well. A short intermediate section, from which the fourths are nearly absent, offers momentary contrast. After the reprise a transcendently virtuosic coda with multiple superimposed fourths ends the quartet in reaffirmed C major, but one clouded with unresolved dissonances.

Composed in Paris in 1955, Quartet No. 16 was first performed in 1958 by the Quarteto do Rio de Janeiro (formerly the Iacovino). Throughout, Villa-Lobos's Brazilian soul bursts forth with spontaneous invention and daring. The moderately paced allegro is lyrical and tinged with nostalgia. Soon the first violin enters into dialogue with the cello, whose theme proves the generative force of the movement. Thematic richness, incisive rhythms, balanced interplay of the instruments and unflagging invention make this one of Villa-Lobos's finest quartet movements. Instead of a literal reprise, the first section reappears a fifth higher and substantially modified, followed by a vigorous coda. The slow movement has a startlingly disconsolate air, heightened by the dramatic *sforzando* chords that accompany the principal melody, derived from the cello theme of the first movement. The faster middle section expresses nobility of spirit, and after a truncated repeat the movement ends quietly. The swift scherzo, perhaps Villa-Lobos's best, gives free reign to fantasy, conveyed by the most sophisticated means: complex rhythms and polyrhythms, masterly polyphonic intertwining and superb writing for the instruments, alone and together. From the finale's opening one senses unbridled invention. Ideas succeed one another abruptly: there are evocations of the Carioca choro and the modinha, cadenza-like passages for the first violin and an overall impetuosity that propels the music along to its bravura conclusion.

The sixteenth and seventeenth quartets attain a level of universality that places them among the masterpieces of twentieth-century chamber music. Villa-Lobos attached great importance to Quartet No. 17, which he never heard in performance. Composed in 1957, it had its première on 16 October 1959 by the Budapest Quartet in Washington, D.C. It shows Villa-Lobos at the apex of his creativity, invigorated with a sense of renewal and set out on new paths. Greater simplicity, concision, lucidity and severity mark this quartet. Rhythmic motifs play an important role in the structure; harmonic colors arise from open fourths and fifths, often juxtaposed bitonally; and the three-part form, common to all movements, is handled with greater freedom than ever before. The first movement displays an uninterrupted flow of melody, given mostly to the first violin, and it attains a cohesion not found in the earlier quartets. A valedictory quality pervades the slow movement, wherein Villa-Lobos expresses his profound feelings in the objective light of classicism. The scherzo in marked contrast projects unfettered joy in a torrential outpouring fraught with daunting technical difficulties that make no show of virtuosity for its own sake. The robust finale gives release to extended melody that flows in a seemingly inexhaustible current. In the central intermezzo the first violin sings out over serene harmonies, and after the recapitulation the quartet ends in revitalized affirmation that cannot fail to thrill.

### **Danubius Quartet**

The Danubius Quartet has won considerable acclaim since its establishment in 1983. With the violinists Judit Tóth and Adél Miklós, violist Cecilia Bodolai and cellist Ilona Wibli, and the artistic direction of the distinguished violinist Vilmos Tátrai, the quartet won awards at Trapani, Evian and Graz in the earlier years of its foundation, and has recorded, among other works, the String Quartet No. 1 of Reményi for Hungaroton, the complete String Quartets of Villa-Lobos for Marco Polo and for Naxos the Mozart and Brahms Clarinet Quintets. The Danubius Quartet has given recitals in Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia, Italy, France and Switzerland and appeared at a number of international festivals.

8.223390

VILLA-LOBOS: String Quartets Nos. 11, 16 &amp; 17

MARGO POLO

COMPACT  
disc  
DIGITAL AUDIO

8.223390

STEREO

DDD

Playing  
Time :  
66'23"A co-production with  
Records International

Heitor  
**VILLA-LOBOS**  
(1887 - 1959)  
String Quartets (Complete)  
Nos. 11, 16 and 17  
Danubius Quartet

**String Quartet No. 17 (1957)**

- |          |                            |        |
|----------|----------------------------|--------|
| <b>1</b> | Allegro non troppo         | (6:13) |
| <b>2</b> | Lento                      | (5:34) |
| <b>3</b> | Scherzo: Allegro vivace    | (2:49) |
| <b>4</b> | Allegro vivace (con fuoco) | (4:29) |

**String Quartet No. 11 (1947)**

- |          |                                |        |
|----------|--------------------------------|--------|
| <b>5</b> | Allegro non troppo             | (6:46) |
| <b>6</b> | Scherzo vivace                 | (5:03) |
| <b>7</b> | Adagio                         | (7:39) |
| <b>8</b> | Poco andantino (quasi allegro) | (7:20) |

**String Quartet No. 16 (1955)**

- |           |                              |        |
|-----------|------------------------------|--------|
| <b>9</b>  | Allegro non troppo           | (5:29) |
| <b>10</b> | Molto andante (quasi adagio) | (5:57) |
| <b>11</b> | Vivace (Scherzo)             | (3:52) |
| <b>12</b> | Molto allegro                | (4:36) |

Recorded at Hungaroton Studio in Budapest from 15th to 16th October, 1990 (Tracks 1 - 4),  
28th to 30th January, 1991 (Tracks 5 - 8) and 11th to 15th February, 1991 (Tracks 9 - 12)

Producers: Ibolya Tóth (Tracks 1 - 8), András Soós (Tracks 9 - 12)

Engineers: István Berényi (Tracks 1 - 4), János Györi (Tracks 5 - 12)

Music Notes: David Nelson

Cover painting by Benjamin Chai



4 891030 233904

DISTRIBUTED BY: MVD MUSIC AND VIDEO DISTRIBUTION GMBH, Made in Germany  
OBERWEG 21 C-HALLE V, D-8025 UNTERHACHING, MUNICH GERMANY

DDD

© 9158

MARGO POLO

VILLA-LOBOS: String Quartets Nos. 11, 16 &amp; 17

8.223390

MANUFACTURED AND PRINTED IN GERMANY (FRG).  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, BROADCASTING  
AND COPYING OF THIS COMPACT DISC PROHIBITED.  
© 1992 HNH International Ltd.  
© 1992 HNH International Ltd.