

MARCO POLO

LATIN-AMERICAN CLASSICS

DDD

8.223392

Heitor
VILLA-LOBOS

String Quartets
Nos. 5, 9 and 12

Danubius Quartet



Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887 - 1959)

String Quartets Nos. 5, 9 and 12

"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 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 travelled 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, nonacademic 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, “orquestras”, 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 through 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.

Composed in São Paulo in 1931, the fifth string quartet or *Quarteto Popular No. 1* is among the most immediately appealing of all Villa-Lobos's quartets and at the same time is one of the most inventive. Its firm tonal sense and clearly drawn melodies, some of popular origin, coexist with extraordinary creativity and imagination. Departing from the composer's usual and simpler ternary pattern, the quartet's first movement consists of seven parts, arranged to suggest an overall tripartite structure. First a theme derived from an old round, "Fui ao Tororó, buscar água, não achei", appears in G major over an insistent rhythm. A related idea follows in harmonics. The third idea is a simple melody in G major with pizzicato accompaniment. A brief restatement of the initial theme rounds off the "exposition", if that term may be so loosely applied. The central part of the movement (and its fourth constituent) is a haunting 4/4 *modinha* in F minor; its A-B-A structure has a rapid, syncopated dance as the contrasting element. Three more ideas form the closing part of the movement: a 4/4 theme in B minor over a rhythmic accompaniment, a brighter 2/2 theme in D major, and finally a 12/8 *presto* epilogue in E minor, based on material related to the quartet's opening. The second movement borders on the miraculous. To begin, it quotes the first part of a nursery tune, "Cai, cai balão", in dazzling fashion with descending scales and polyrhythms. Modulation from

F major to D minor brings a soulful melody (foreshadowed in the first movement right after the *modinha*), while fantastic *sul ponticello* effects and swirling figurations create an air of profound mystery. The third movement throws out more reminiscences of children's songs. The outer contrapuntal sections frame two touchingly lyrical inner episodes. Animated and vigorous, the final movement continues to mine the folkloric vein and sustains the popular tone through a commingling of melody and driving rhythms. Formally it consists of an exposition, repeated, followed by a simple tune in harmonics and an abbreviated repeat of the primary material.

If the fifth is one of Villa-Lobos's most accessible quartets, the ninth presents a forbidding personality. Composed in 1947 and premièred two years later, this quartet without key signatures can loosely be designated "atonal". The atmosphere is intellectual, the construction is cyclical and the thematic material is chromatic in the extreme. Announced at the outset, an insistent motif with wide intervallic jumps forms the generative cell for most of the first movement. A second motif plays a definite secondary role here but reemerges with greater importance in the finale. Like the first movement, the second follows Villa-Lobos's customary three-part form. The first section conveys a searing nostalgia that borders on expressionism, while the contrasting episode offers greater tonal and rhythmic definition. The principal theme of the third movement derives from the chromatic germ cell of the quartet's opening, and so does the subject of the freely fugal *più mosso* middle section. This movement occupies the position of a scherzo, but its earnest demeanor suggests no such character. The brief finale begins with a 5/4 *pianissimo* figure related to the secondary motif of the initial movement. There is a lively sense of rhythmic play here, perhaps as compensation for the foregoing movement's seriousness. The brighter tone of the violins is contrasted with the darker colours of the viola and cello in virtuosic polymetres and relentless energy suggestive of machinery. The overall sense is one of resolution. Even when the chromatic germ cell makes one last reappearance, the context is nearly tonal.

Less severe than the ninth, the twelfth quartet is also atonal, even though three of its four movements end in C major. It was composed in 1950 and first played the following year by the Quarteto de São Paulo. The energetic and astringently dissonant *Allegro* abounds in rhythmic and melodic ideas that clash, conciliate and coalesce, forming one of Villa-Lobos's finest quartet movements. The slow movement follows the usual ternary pattern. The first part is an expressive introduction and *modinha*, first heard in the viola. The cheerful, folklike second part begins abruptly and breaks off just as abruptly before an abridged repeat of the introduction and *modinha*. A lively, good-natured theme and a primitivistic drumming figure constitute the main part of the scherzo, while the rhapsodic trio is richly sonorous with an underlying sense of motion. Fast, contrapuntal music forms the outer parts of the concluding *Allegro* and encloses two contrasting episodes, one lyrical, the other rhythmic in nature.

David Nelson

Danubius Quartet

The Danubius Quartet has won considerable acclaim since its establishment in 1983. With the violinists Gyöngyvér Oláh and Adél Miklós, violist Cecilia Bodolai and cellist Ilona Ribli, 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.

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

|

8.223392

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

8.223392

STEREO

Playing
Time:
65'14"

MANUFACTURED IN GERMANY.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, BROADCASTING
AND COPYING OF THIS COMPACT DISC PROHIBITED.
© 1993 HNH International Ltd.
© 1993 HNH International Ltd.

Heitor
VILLA-LOBOS
(1887 - 1959)

String Quartets (Complete)
Nos. 5, 9 and 12

Danubius Quartet



A co-production with
Records International

String Quartet No. 5 (1931)

- | | | |
|---|--|--------|
| 1 | Poco Andantino - Un poco vivo - Tempo Primo - Lento - Allegro vivace - Vivo - Presto | (6:07) |
| 2 | Vivo e energico - Lento - Tempo Primo - Molto lento | (4:02) |
| 3 | Andantino - Tempo giusto e ben ritmato - Adagio - Andantino | (3:06) |
| 4 | Allegro | (3:24) |

String Quartet No. 9 (1945)

- | | | |
|---|---|--------|
| 5 | Allegro - All(egr)o vivace | (5:28) |
| 6 | Andantino vagaroso - Quasi animato - Tempo I | (8:29) |
| 7 | Allegro poco moderato / com bravura / - Più mosso - Tempo I | (7:03) |
| 8 | Molto allegro | (4:41) |

String Quartet No. 12 (1950)

- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 9 | Allegro | (5:37) |
| 10 | Andante malinconico - Poco più mosso - Tempo I | (7:07) |
| 11 | Allegretto leggiero - Poco vivace - Tempo I - Quasi vivo | (4:43) |
| 12 | Allegro ben ritmato - Poco meno - Allegro più mosso | (4:41) |

Recorded at the Rottenbiller Street Studio, Budapest
from 18th to 23rd May, 1992.

Producer: Ibolya Tóth

Engineer: János Györi

Music Notes: David Nelson

Cover Painting by Benjamin Chai

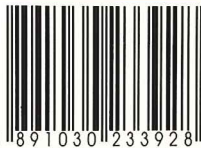
Distribution:

MVD Music und Video Distribution GmbH,

Oberweg 21c, Halle V,

82008 Unterhaching-München, Germany

MADE IN GERMANY



4 891030 233928

DDD

IFPI 9158

MARGO POLO

VILLA-LOBOS: String Quartets Nos. 5, 9 & 12

8.223392