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Schubert String Quintet | String Quartet 'Death and the Maiden'
Quartetto di Cremona | Eckart Runge

FRANZ SCHUBERT

**String Quintet in C major,
Op. 163 (D. 956)**

- I. Allegro ma non troppo 19:43*
- II. Adagio 14:25*
- III. Scherzo. Presto – Trio. Andante sostenuto 10:14*
- IV. Allegretto 9:30*

**String Quartet No. 14
in D minor (D. 810)
'Death and the Maiden'**

- I. Allegro 11:53*
- II. Andante con moto 13:36*
- III. Scherzo. Allegro molto – Trio 3:49*
- IV. Presto 9:04*

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Cristiano Gualco, violin
Paolo Andreoli, violin
Simone Gramaglia, viola
Giovanni Scaglione, cello

ECKART RUNGE cello (D. 956)



Described as “an excellent ambassador of Italian string quartet culture” (Fono Forum), the Quartetto di Cremona is proudly champions its unique Italian character, whilst also nurturing its profound relationship with the Austro-German repertoire. Having completed its recording series of the complete Beethoven string quartets, it seemed natural to move on to Franz Schubert, a composer to whom the four musicians feel a strong affinity in terms of performance aesthetics, technical qualities and musical sensitivity. In their interpretation of the famous string quintet, all this strongly connects them to Eckart Runge, himself a string quartet performer of thirty years as cellist of the Artemis Quartet and a versatile soloist, about whom the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung said: “If his sound does not make you cry, you have no heart.”

Schubert’s Chamber Music legacy

Franz Schubert’s profound connection with chamber music began in his early youth, when he played the viola in his family’s string quartet with his father and brothers. This music-making in such a natural, familial environment had a powerful effect on the composer, who had a particular passion for string chamber music for the rest of his life – almost a kind of spontaneous continuation of the domestic family tradition. That passion continues up until Schubert’s very last works, of which the *Death and the Maiden* and the *Quintet in C major* are two exquisite and marvelous examples. The *Death and the Maiden Quartet* in particular can be considered the definitive synthesis of the two compositional genres in which Schubert excelled: the string quartet and the *Lied*, both emblematic of the intimate manner in which he expressed his inner voice. At the same time, the *Quintet* with two cellos offers stunning testimony of his personal musical poetics and contains all its most unmistakable characteristics.

“Der Tod und das Mädchen” – Death and the Maiden

A musical expression of the inevitable reflection on mortality that every human being must face over the course of their lives, Schubert’s *String Quartet No. 14 D. 810* uses its tonic key of D minor to evoke its programmatic “story.”

D minor, in fact, is the funereal key *par excellence* (a famous example is Mozart’s *Requiem*). The piece opens with a short motif played fortissimo and in unison by all four instruments. This incisive and authoritative opening phrase returns throughout the first movement, which is built on two alternating themes – the first dark and lacerating, the second lyrical and hesitant – subjected to continuous modulations and coloristic variations up until the final coda which recaps the sense of pain and unease that pervades the whole quartet. The second movement, *Andante con moto*, unfolds as a “theme and variations” based on melodic material taken from Schubert’s *Lied “Der Tod und das Mädchen,”* composed in 1817 on a text by Matthias Claudius. The theme is characterized by its dactylic rhythm (long-short-short), an evocation of the menacing “heartbeat” of Death coming to claim the Maiden. In its exposition the theme is presented with a resigned sadness, largely due to its dark and melancholy instrumental texture, while the following five variations explore its many expressive possibilities. In the first variation, for example, the theme (in the second violin supported by the viola) appears as a sonorous foundation for the blossoming flourishes of

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the first violin and its inevitable progression up into its high register, marked by pizzicati in the cello – whose deep-voiced timbral capabilities are showcased when it takes up the theme in the second variation. The characters of the final three variations could not be more varied: in the third, the rhythmic scansion of the theme predominates, repeated insistently by the four voices together; the fourth variation briefly opens up to serenity and calm thanks to the sunny, peaceful tonality of G major. This strongly contrasts with the atmosphere of the final variation in which the “heartbeat” of Death becomes aggressive and ever more dramatic in its obsessive repetition, leading up to a final coda in which the main theme of the *Lied* is repeated once more by all four instruments in an atmosphere of total, resigned acceptance of the fate that awaits all human beings. The short *Scherzo* that follows is in tripartite form, with a middle *Trio* section whose broad lyricism and soft luminosity (thanks to its key of D major) contrasts vividly with the peremptory and aggressive main theme of the *Scherzo*, deriving from the contrast in timbre between the two violins on the one hand and the viola and cello on the other, and characterized by a pervasive rhythmic reiteration. The whirlwind *tarantella* rhythm that opens the *Presto* final movement brings to mind an ever-more-frenzied *danse macabre*, with Death dancing with the Maiden until she is completely spent. Added to this is the second theme, played by the four instruments in unison, based on the rhythmic motif of the first movement: the two motivic ideas and different rhythmic contexts are developed and variously intertwined, giving rise to an unstoppable musical torrent that becomes still more feverish in the *Prestissimo* finale, with its increasingly forceful sonority culminating in two unison closing chords played fortissimo.

String Quintet in C major, D. 956

Following directly from the series of late string quartets, the *Quintet in C major* is considered the synthesis of the most emblematic traits of Schubertian poetics, explored through a highly unusual ensemble. Although string quintets are found in the work of composers from Luigi Boccherini to George Onslow, the usual quintet setup includes a second viola (as with Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms) rather than a second cello. This makes Schubert’s decision to highlight the cello’s deep, burnished and enchanting tones a clear statement of purpose. Naturally, Schubert uses the peculiar ensemble in a highly personal manner, through five-part writing in which the two cellos each have a well-defined role independent from one another, allowing the composer to explore extremely varied combinations of sonorities. At the same time, Schubert’s own distinctive compositional personality emerges: the expression of a nostalgic and melancholy interiority described with great intimacy; on a harmonic level, the constant exploration of reflections in colour and timbre, variable almost to the point of exasperation; on a rhythmic level, it evokes an urgent impetuosity, driving breathlessly ahead only to stop suddenly as if balancing on the very edge of a cliff. All of this takes place within a compositional structure in which musical time is so dilated that it seems to almost stop, making the *Quintet* a work of symphonic scope and considerable length.

The complexity of the work already emerges in the initial *Allegro ma non troppo* which, through the fluid development of three clearly distinct but naturally connected motivic ideas, makes up nearly a third of the total duration of the quintet. The second movement is rightly considered one of the all-time high points in the history of musical composition. In the *Adagio*, it seems as though Schubert is giving voice to the double nature of his soul through a musical

battle between noble simplicity (the contrapuntal dialogue between the theme in the first violin and the pizzicato in the second cello, supported by an elegiac polyphony played pianissimo by the other instruments) and wrenching inner torment (the central section's whirlwind of dramatic rhythmic and melodic dynamism). The third movement is also in tripartite form, although the inverse of the previous movement: after an exuberant and vital *Scherzo* of an almost symphonic sonority, a more meditative *Trio* follows, characterized by the burnished timbral *mélange* of the viola and second cello. Then, similarly to the first movement, the *Allegretto* finale presents three principal themes (dance-like, tranquil, and lyrically evocative) which are developed and intertwined until an exhilarating closing *Più presto*. Before the definitive ending, Schubert allows himself one last little *coup de theatre*: a dissonant appoggiatura in the last chord creates a feeling of surprise and anticipation in the atmosphere of general liveliness that concludes the work.

The golden period of Italian violin making on a double CD

The Quartetto di Cremona new discographic release dedicated to Schubert offers also the extraordinary chance to listen simultaneously to five instruments that symbolize the golden period of the Cremonese violin-making tradition, included on UNESCO's list of "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" since 2012. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the great luthiers born in Cremona built instruments that are still considered absolute masterpieces today, benchmarks of quality and points of reference that can never be overlooked. Among them, the 1595 Amati cello played by Eckart Runge and the Stradivari "Paganini Quartet" played by the Quartetto di Cremona. At the same time, the union of these five instruments is the manifestation of an important form of artistic patronage: the loan, thanks to international foundations, of particularly fine and beautiful instruments to musicians of the highest level. Eckart Runge plays one of the rare cellos made by the brothers Hieronymus and Antonio Amati (forefathers of the Cremonese violin-making tradition) thanks to the generosity of the Merito String Instruments Trust Vienna, while the Quartetto di Cremona plays the Stradivarius "Paganini Quartet" on generous loan from the Nippon Music Foundation. Stradivari completed only six quartet "sets" of instruments in his life: while the two violins define the arc of his career, from his early work as a *protégé* of Nicolò Amati (son of Hieronymus) to his years of maturity, the viola is one of the few that has survived into our era and the cello is Stradivari's last – the label inside bears the note *92 years old* after the master's name. The set is known as the "Paganini Quartet" because it was once owned by the legendary violinist Niccolò Paganini and, incidentally, its loan to the Quartetto di Cremona contains a number of intriguing coincidences. Not only the ensemble bears the name of the city where Antonio Stradivari lived and worked, but its members have been also granted honorary citizenship of Cremona. Finally, Paganini was born and raised in Genoa, like the members of the Quartet.

Original Italian text by *Vittoria Fontana*

English translation by *Mara Gerety*

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“We would like to express our sincere thanks to Francesca Moncada di Paternò for supporting this project”. *Quartetto di Cremona*



The Quartetto di Cremona is proudly supporting the international project “Le Dimore del Quartetto”.
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instruments:

In September 2017, the Nippon Music Foundation loaned the “Paganini Quartet” by Antonio Stradivari to the ensemble. The set which was once owned by Paganini includes the following instruments:

Cristiano Gualco – Violin Stradivarius “Paganini”, 1727
Paolo Andreoli – Violin Stradivarius “Paganini”, 1680
Simone Gramaglia – Viola Stradivarius “Paganini”, 1731
Giovanni Scaglione – Cello Stradivarius “Paganini”, 1736

Eckart Runge – cello Hieronymus and Antonio Amati, Cremona ca. 1595 (generous loan of ‘Merito String Instruments Trust Vienna’)

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