


THE COMPLETE **RIAS** RECORDINGS

audite

# QUARTETTO ITALIANO



Berlin, 1951-1963

 Deutschlandfunk Kultur





**GAETANO DONIZETTI (1797-1848)****String Quartet No. 7 in F minor**

I. Agitatissimo	5:48
II. Adagio, ma non troppo	5:30
III. Presto	4:51
IV. Marcia lugubre	6:15

recording: October 18, 1959 • RIAS Funkhaus, Berlin – Studio 7

**LUIGI CHERUBINI****String Quartet No. 5 in F major**

I. Moderato assai – Allegro	7:55
II. Adagio	6:49
III. Scherzo. Allegro non troppo	5:38
IV. Finale. Allegro vivace	5:15

recording: October 13, 1958 • Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz

**GIAN FRANCESCO MALIPIERO****String Quartet No. 4**

Allegro	8:29
Allegro	6:42

recording: October 13, 1963 • Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz

**DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)****String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 108**

I. Allegretto	3:32
II. Lento	4:05
III. Allegro	5:37

recording: October 13, 1963 • Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz

**MAURICE RAVEL****String Quartet in F major**

I. Allegro moderato	8:44
II. Assez vif. Très rythmé	6:58
III. Très lent	9:05
IV. Vif et agité	5:57

recording: October 18, 1959 • RIAS Funkhaus, Berlin – Studio 7





## FRANZ SCHUBERT

### String Quartet No. 8 in B-flat major, Op. 168

I. Allegro ma non troppo	11:31
II. Andante sostenuto	10:13
III. Menuetto. Allegro	5:59
IV. Presto	4:51

recording: February 25, 1951 • Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz

## ROBERT SCHUMANN

### String Quartet No. 2 in F major, Op. 41/2

I. Allegro vivace	6:05
II. Andante, quasi Variazioni	8:13
III. Scherzo. Presto – Trio. L'istesso tempo – Coda	3:04
IV. Allegro molto vivace	4:10

recording: February 26, 1951 • Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz

## JOSEPH HAYDN

### String Quartet in G major, Op. 77/I (Hob. III: 81)

I. Allegro moderato	5:41
II. Adagio	7:53
III. Menuetto. Presto	4:47
IV. Finale. Presto	3:32

recording: February 26, 1951 • Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz

## ROBERT SCHUMANN

### String Quartet No. 3 in A major, Op. 41/3

I. Andante espressivo – Allegro molto moderato	5:54
II. Assai agitato	7:51
III. Adagio molto	8:17
IV. Finale. Allegro molto vivace	7:24

recording: October 13, 1958 • Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz

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## The Quartetto Italiano – Italy's contribution to the string quartet Olympus

### Italy, the land of opera?

Italy is considered the land of opera. At least at first glance, the “Melodramma” in Italy does not allow space for any other musical genre besides itself, whether it is chamber music, the symphony, the concerto, or the art song. Appearances can be deceiving, however: Without question, opera dominated Italy's musical life throughout the nineteenth century. But what is often forgotten is that at the beginning of the seventeenth century – in the early Baroque era – instrumental music for strings and string ensembles experienced an early heyday. Arcangelo Corelli was probably the first composer to succeed in achieving fame and glory with purely instrumental music (without leaving behind any operas or sacred music). His work – mainly trio sonatas, violin sonatas, and concerti grossi – was made possible not least by the spread of string instruments, starting around 1670, from the Cremona school of famous violin makers Antonio Stradivari and Guarneri del Gesù. Numerous composers were influenced by Corelli's achievements, culminating in the countless violin concertos and violin sonatas written by Antonio Vivaldi between 1710 and 1730. Around 1760 the violinist and composer Pietro Nardini founded a string quartet in Florence for the first time (with Filippo Manfredi, Giuseppe Cambini, and Luigi Boccherini), for which the four musicians composed their own works – at the same time that Joseph Haydn was writing his first string quartets. (Many of the early Italian quartets, however, still had very little in common with the structure and form of the “classical” string quartet as it was developed by Joseph Haydn during his middle creative period). Luigi Boccherini, who is considered the father of the Italian string quartet, composed his first quartet in 1761, which was to be followed by another ninety by the year 1804. He was surpassed in terms of productivity only by Giuseppe Cambini, an Italian-born composer active in Paris from the 1770s onward, who left behind at least 149 *Quatuors concertants*. Over the following thirty years up to around 1800, the writing of string quartets developed into an extremely popular fashion, enriching the musical life of Italy alone with around 550 works. Relatively few of these found their way northward across the Alps; the triumvirate of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven had this terrain firmly under control. But with the beginning of the nineteenth century, the opera crowded out instrumental music to the point of insignificance until around 1870, when in the wake of Wagnerian enthusiasm, a renewed interest in German culture was kindled in Italy – and at the same time Beethoven's string quartets began to receive an audience. The answer to these developments was Giuseppe Verdi's popular String Quartet in E minor, written in 1873.

### The Quartetto Italiano performs music of their fellow countrymen

When the Quartetto Italiano was founded in Reggio Emilia in 1945, the idea of honoring the ensemble's name was undoubtedly one of its principal aims. It was necessary at the time to establish, if not re-establish a tradition of Italian quartet culture; in those years, the young ensemble had almost no role models with a national or international presence. In addition, one of the four musicians' primary goals was to perform the music of their fellow countrymen and spread it internationally. The first works rehearsed by the young musicians included compositions and transcriptions for string quartet by Leonardo Vinci (1690–1730), Luigi Boccherini, and Arcangelo Corelli. And the few premieres they performed were almost exclusively dedicated to their Italian contemporaries, including the Second String Quartet of the Piedmontese composer Giorgio Ghedini (1892-1965) written in 1959, and *I semi di Gramsci* by the Florentine composer Sylvano Bussotti (born 1931) for string quartet and orchestra, premiered in 1972. The Fourth String Quartet (1934) by Gian Francesco Malipiero, heard on this recording, formed part of the Quartetto Italiano's repertoire for many years. Known for his great contributions to the revival of the music of Claudio Monteverdi and Antonio Vivaldi, Malipiero incorporated into his music the ideas that he encountered during his editing work (like his countryman Ottorino Respighi). In the wake of a return to the ideals of the eighteenth century, an entire generation of composers drew upon the forms and expressive means of Baroque music. This was apparent in the avoidance of dramatic conflict

and a frequent use of polyphonic compositional techniques, together with a lightness and dance-like quality in the rhythm. All this can also be found in Malipiero's Fourth String Quartet which presents, in concentrated form, movements of very different characters that return repeatedly in altered guise without ever compromising the unified tone of the work. In some passages, memories of Ravel's Quartet, one of Malipiero's early models, flash into our awareness.

Luigi Cherubini and Gaetano Donizetti have both gone down in the history of music as opera composers. Donizetti, who was born the same year as Franz Schubert in 1797, wrote his string quartets at the beginning of his career. The Seventh Quartet in F minor is an early work composed in 1819, several years before the composer's operas that are well-known today, but at about the same time as Schubert's great quartets. Though Donizetti did not have any knowledge of Schubert's music, it is closer, in its character and drawn-out melodies, to his music than to that of Beethoven, who composed his last quartets a few years later.

In contrast to Donizetti's quartets, Luigi Cherubini's string quartets are late works; the Fifth Quartet in F major is the work of a seventy-five-year-old composer who was no longer accepting opera commissions, instead composing string quartets for his own pleasure. Although the Fifth Quartet was written in 1835, seven years before Schumann's three quartets op. 41, it is stylistically closer to the latter stages of the Classical period than to Romanticism. More lyrical than dramatic, its tonal language resembles Donizetti's quartet in that it recalls Schubert in some passages, as in the second movement and the outer parts of the third, but the third movement trio evokes a veritable opera scene. When he heard one of Cherubini's quartets in 1838, Robert Schumann admitted to finding it unusual: "It is not our familiar native language in which we are addressed, but a noble foreigner who speaks to us: the more we learn to understand him, the more highly we will think of him."

### Early music – New music

Historically, the Quartetto Italiano tended to expand its repertoire in the direction of the past rather than its own present, performing transcriptions of several *Canzoni per sonar* from the pen of the Venetian composer Giovanni Gabrieli, which mark the transition from late Renaissance to early Baroque. In contrast, the British-based Amadeus Quartet broadened its repertoire toward the past to include Henry Purcell's *Fantasias* and *Chacony*, and at the same time toward the present day and their contemporaries Benjamin Britten and Mátyás Seiber [audite 21.429]. The Quartetto Italiano tended to avoid modern music by non-Italian composers, but they shunned music that had gone beyond the limits of tonality almost entirely. They initially performed Béla Bartók's Sixth Quartet, later only his First Quartet, and the entire, very limited quartet oeuvre by Igor Stravinsky. A striking exception was the work of Anton Webern, with the ensemble releasing a brilliant recording of his string quartets in 1970. Perhaps the intricate texture of Webern's miniatures suited the musicians' natural temperament, and they relished the challenge of illuminating the predominantly non-tonal and dodecaphonic pieces and making them accessible to the listener.

### Beginnings and future prospects

In the middle of the Second World War, it was the year 1940, three aspiring musicians met during a competition in La Spezia: violinist Paolo Borciani, violinist Elisa Pegreff, and cellist Franco Rossi, eighteen and twenty-one years old at the time. Two years later they met again, joining with violist Lionello Forzanti<sup>1</sup> to rehearse and perform Claude Debussy's String Quartet in G minor under the guidance of cellist Arturo Bonucci. Just two months after the end of the war, all four musicians came together once again to rehearse. During this time, specifically on August 20, 1945, they founded the "Nuovo Quartetto Italiano." (Using this name to set themselves apart from a then-active ensemble that continued performing until 1951). The founding came at a time when scarcely a living quartet culture remained in Europe – and even less so in Italy in the wake of the final days of fascism – as the major ensembles of the pre-war era had long since

<sup>1</sup> Piero Farulli followed Lionello Forzanti as violist in 1947



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disbanded or been forced to emigrate due to political circumstances. This tragic development proved to be an invaluable opportunity for the young generation. Within just three years, the ensembles that, in the 1960s and 1970s, were considered internationally to be the epitome of modern quartet playing appeared on the scene: the Quartetto Italiano in 1945, the Juilliard String Quartet and LaSalle Quartet in 1946, and the Janáček and Amadeus quartets in 1947. In Italy they were followed in the ensuing years only by the Carmirelli Quartet (with Arturo Bonucci as cellist), founded in 1954; it was not until after 1981 (the year of the final dissolution of the Quartetto Italiano) that a renaissance of quartet culture began in Italy. The number of new quartets increased rapidly up to the turn of the new millennium, and the Quartetto Italiano finally found a worthy successor in the Quartetto di Cremona, founded in 2000 (their CD recordings have been released by audite since 2012) – an ensemble that represents to a great extent the quartet culture of Italy today. The Quartetto di Cremona sees itself as part of the “grandchildren’s generation,” and through their teacher Piero Farulli, the musicians also belong to the same line of tradition as their predecessors.

## **The music of the Viennese Classicists**

From the beginning, the music of the Viennese Classicists Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven (and Schubert) played a central role in the Quartetto Italiano’s concerts and recordings. Their greatest achievement was probably the complete recording of Mozart’s string quartets, which they realized between 1966 and 1973 with their record label at the time. The music of Mozart seems to have been close to their sound ideal, their elegant playing style, and their vision of musical perfection, even more so than the music of Beethoven and much more so than that of Haydn. Their strongest competitor on the European continent, the Amadeus Quartet, prepared their Mozart cycle at around the same time and completed it only a few years later. But whereas the Quartetto Italiano focused purely on the string quartet repertoire, the Amadeus Quartet endeavored to record Mozart’s complete chamber music for strings. While the latter enjoyed collaborating with guest musicians, their Italian colleagues were purists: at the beginning of their career they joined with Antoine-Pierre de Bavier for Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet, and towards the end of it they performed Brahms’s F-minor Piano Quintet several times with Maurizio Pollini. They also played two works whose instrumental combination places them in the category of rare curiosities: Bohuslav Martinů’s Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra from 1931, and the previously-mentioned *I seme di Gramsci* by Sylvano Bussotti for the same setting. The second major complete recording undertaken by the Quartetto Italiano was devoted to Beethoven’s string quartets, but their Schubert project remained unfinished. One mystery remains, however, namely why they dedicated themselves only marginally to Haydn’s quartets in the later years of their career. They recorded just four of the very late quartets along with the very early quartet op. 3, no. 5, nicknamed “Serenade,” which was unmasked as a counterfeit a year before the recording – according to current findings, it was authored by Haydn’s contemporary Roman Hofstetter.

## **European chamber music in different regions**

A third focus of the Quartetto Italiano’s repertoire was the diverse regional variants of European chamber music, mostly from the early twentieth century: with the pair of quartets by Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, French music provided two of the genre’s *pièces de résistance*, to which Darius Milhaud’s Twelfth Quartet was added. Hungary contributed Béla Bartók’s first and sixth quartets, the Czech Republic Antonín Dvořák’s *American Quartet*, and Russia individual works by Alexander Borodin, Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, and Igor Stravinsky. The string quartets by Robert Schumann heard on this recording, which the Quartetto Italiano performed frequently and with enthusiasm, may also be counted among these – as a regional side path on the one hand, but also as an outlying region within Robert Schumann’s oeuvre as a whole. The listening expectations of the audience with which the musicians were confronted in those days, and the skepticism with which Schumann’s (at the time) less well-known works were heard and received fifty years ago, are attested



to by contemporary concert reviews, often in drastic fashion. Difficult to surpass in this regard is the review from January 15, 1969 in Berlin's *Tagesspiegel*, which reads as follows: "...with virtuoso elegance or bel canto-like sweetness [...] they performed Schumann's at times limp and contourless, at times rhythmically monotonous A-minor Quartet opus 41, no. 1 to greater effect than its value would merit."

### **The Quartetto Italiano visits Berlin at the RIAS**

A notable aspect of the repertoire that the Quartetto Italiano recorded from 1951 to 1963 at Berlin's RIAS Studios (where the programs of Deutschlandfunk Kultur are produced today) is that besides the two quartets of Haydn and Ravel, it consists of works that had not yet entered the standard repertoire at the time (and some of which have yet to enter it today). In contrast to the Amadeus Quartet, whose chief focus was always on the core repertoire, the classics, the Quartetto Italiano was eager to surprise their audience in their concerts (and initially with their recordings as well). Another surprising facet is their interpretive approach, which can be heard most clearly in the present recording of Maurice Ravel's Quartet: to an even greater extent than in the later LP recording, the work is liberated from impressionistic al fresco playing. The form is built up from the smallest units, which are meticulously worked through and at the same time joined together under a sweeping arc. The dominance of the upper voice – a central feature of classical string quartet writing is the homogeneity and equality of all four voices – is broken in favor of the middle voices, which never serve an incidental role or merely as filling. Those who miss the Parisian *fin-de-siècle* flair, perhaps finding a certain soberness in its place, are compensated by a very clear and meticulous presentation of the score – here the music shines in the bright southern midday sun. That this is not to be confused with soberness is also attested to by the fact that the Quartetto Italiano approached other "temptations" in the very same way, as with the previously-mentioned *Serenade* by Hofstetter, an innocuous yet pretty Rococo piece that practically invites a saccharine interpretation. One of the principles of the Quartetto Italiano seems to have been to push the limits of the possible to the extreme through intensive rehearsing, but without ever exceeding these limits – this could already be heard in their early recordings, as well as in these radio productions. In the review of the concert on September 23, 1977 published in the *Berliner Morgenpost*, we can read the following somewhat humorous characterization of the quartet: "Paolo Borciani is first and foremost an aesthete who sees to it that he does not attract too much attention. His temperament is restrained, not exactly sleepy, but not necessarily of the leading dominance one expects from a first violinist. His antipode is the second violinist, Elisa Pegreffi, undoubtedly the most interesting and distinctive personality in the ensemble. Bursting with energy and nervously excitable, she loses no opportunity in drawing from her part the utmost in characterization. Piero Farulli, the violist, loves a big, full sound. Sometimes he seems to suffer from the fact that a string quartet cannot be turned into a viola concerto. And so his powerful musicality is usually overshadowed by a touch of melancholy. I cannot think of anything special to say about Franco Rossi. He simply plays the cello competently." (In the interest of fairness: regarding the judgement of the cellist, it should be mentioned that this review was written only three years before the dissolution of the ensemble, when certain signs of fatigue had already become apparent).

The Quartetto Italiano appeared a total of ten times in Berlin concert halls between 1951 and 1979. During the first four times, a production in the RIAS Studios was on the agenda a day before or after the concert. The fact that they were already invited to the RIAS on the occasion of their first Berlin concert on February 26, 1952 at the Haus am Waldsee, which was virtually ignored by the critics, is a testament to the farsightedness and unerring instinct of the studio's legendary music division director of the time, Elsa Schiller. With this release, the string quartets of Luigi Cherubini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Dmitri Shostakovich can be heard performed by the Quartetto Italiano for the first time ever on CD.





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recording producer: Salomon (1951), Reuschel (1958 + 1963), Destinn (1959)  
recording engineer: Heinz Opitz (1951, 1958 + 1959), Kiehn (1963)

Deutschlandfunk Kultur

Eine Aufnahme von RIAS Berlin  
(lizenziert durch Deutschlandradio)

recording: © 1951-1963 Deutschlandradio  
research: Rüdiger Albrecht  
remastering: Ludger Böckenhoff, 2019

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photos: Courtesy of Associazione Amici del Quartetto "Guido A. Borciani" (Reggio Emilia, Italy), Società del Quartetto di Milano (Milan, Italy). Piero Farulli (viola) followed Lionello Forzanti in 1947

art direction and design: AB-Design

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Veranstaltende Abteilung Musik/Rittel	<b>Schallaufnahme</b>	Datum 23.2.51	Auftrag Nr. 47 46 - 992
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Titel: Archiv - Aufnahme und sendefertig machen Schumann: Streichquartett op.41,2 Quartetto italiano	Vermerke    
Mikro-Ort: Lankwitz	Dauer der Aufnahme 30, Minu.

## Aufnahme

	Datum	Zeit	in Schallaufnahme	auf Band bzw. Platte	Ton. Ing. Name
Probe o. T.					
Probe m. T.					
Aufnahme	25.2.51	14.30 - 17.00	Lankwitz	Band	} opitz
Aufnahme	26.2.51	16.00 - 15.00	Lankwitz	Band	
Mitschnitt					



Aufnahme	<del>25.2.51</del>	<del>14.30 - 17.00</del>	<del>Lankwitz</del>	<del>Band</del>	} <b>audite</b>
Aufnahme	26.2.51	10.00 - 15.00	Lankwitz	Band	
Mitschnitt					

### Wiedergabe

Datum:	Zeit	in Schall- aufnahme	Zweck	von Band bzw. Platte Nr.	Erledigt Technik Name

Nicht sendefertig

Ton. Techn.:

Lankwitz

Datum:

26. II. 51

Bandzahl:

2

Sendefertig

Ton. Techn.:

Orbert

Datum:

28. II. 57

Aufnahmeleiter:

Lankwitz

Bandzahl:

1

Dauer der fertigen Sendung

21 Min. 06 Sek.



Lfd. Nr.	Inhaltsangabe	Dauer	Aufgen. bei Hz. Masch. l. r.
I	STREICHQUARTET F-DUR OP 41/2 VON ROBERT SCHUMANN		57
	1) ALLEGRO VIVACE	57	
	2) ANDANTE, QUASI VARIATIONEN	8'09	
	3) SCHERZO - PRESTO	3'05	
	4) ALLEGRO MOLTO VIVACE	4'01	
50	PAOLO BORCIANI - VIOLINE ELISA DEGREFFI - "	<del>9'06</del>	



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