

Pennies from Heaven

Encores • Bis • Zugaben

audite

Mandelring Quartett



Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) / Erik Leidzen (Arr.)
Miniature Viennese March 3:07

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
I. Presto from: String Quartet No. 3 in G major, K. 156 3:01

Arthur Johnston (1898-1954) / Bill Thorp (Arr.)
Pennies from Heaven 4:02

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
Waltz in A major, Op. 54, No. 1 3:30

Mariano Mores (1918-2016) / Werner Thomas-Mifune (Arr.)
Cafetín de Buenos Aires 3:34

Félicien David (1810-1876)
III. Scherzo. Allegretto from: String Quartet in A major 3:18

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
I. Adagio from: String Quartet No. 1 in G major, K. 80 4:08

Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)
II. Scherzo. Allegro from: String Quartet No. 2 in D major 4:51

Enrique Francini (1916-1978) / Werner Thomas-Mifune (Arr.)
La vi llegar 3:11

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikowsky (1840-1893)
*II. Andante cantabile from:
String Quartet No. 1 in D major, Op. 11* 6:24

Leroy Anderson (1908-1975) / William Zinn (Arr.)
The Syncopated Clock 2:06

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Polka (Allegretto) from: The Golden Age, Op. 22 2:10

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
II. Lento from: String Quartet in F major, Op. 96 'American' 6:09

Stevie Wonder (*1950) / Jörg Widmoser (Arr.)
Sir Duke 2:55

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
*IV. Finale: Rondo. Presto from: String Quartet in C major, Op. 33
No. 3 'The Bird'* 2:58

Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga (1806-1826)
III. Menuetto from: String Quartet No. 1 in D minor 3:16

Héctor Varela (1914-1987) / Werner Thomas-Mifune (Arr.)
El 58 2:55

William C. Handy (1873-1958) / Matteo Giammario (Arr.)
St. Louis Blues 4:45

MANDELRING QUARTETT

Sebastian Schmidt & Nanette Schmidt, violin
Andreas Willwohl, viola • Bernhard Schmidt, cello

“Ev’ry time it rains, it rains pennies from heaven. [...] Be sure that your umbrella is upside down. Trade them for a package of sunshine and flowers...”. It is moments of happiness that the song *Pennies from Heaven* promises – unexpected little treasures. And exactly such treasures have been assembled for this album: encores, trouvailles and favourites from the Mandelring Quartett’s repertoire.

The collection opens with the **Miniature Viennese March**, written by the great violinist **Fritz Kreisler** in the 1920s for violin and piano. Kreisler made a name for himself as a composer with his meltingly sweet, elegant and sometimes satirical salon pieces in the Viennese style, although he foisted many of these works on more or less unknown colleagues of the pre-classical era. These delightful miniatures seem to mirror his amiable nature which manifested itself in selfless helpfulness and down-to-earth enthusiasm for dogs and motorsports, for good food and card games.

Kreisler shared this latter passion with **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** who is said to have mastered fourteen different card games. However, Mozart not only passed the time with card and other games, but sometimes also with composing: during his third tour of Italy in October 1772, Mozart’s father wrote to his wife that young Wolfgang had “just spent a long while writing a quatro”. The “quattros” written during this trip are now known as his “Milan” or “Italian” string quartets, and they include the **Quartet in G major, K. 156**, which opens with a divertimento-like presto in the *galant* style.

Mozart, perennially afflicted by debt, would surely have had no objections to receiving **Pennies from Heaven**. And the protagonists of the eponymous film of 1936 with Bing Crosby would also welcome a pecuniary blessing from on high before things take a turn for the better even without heavenly intervention. The title song of the film topped the US charts for ten weeks and received an Oscar nomination.

It was not pennies but marks, and in unforeseen quantities, that **Antonín Dvořák** earned once the Berlin publisher Simrock had published his *Slavonic Dances*. Overnight, the 37-year-old became an internationally renowned and well-paid composer. During this phase of his first major success in 1879, Dvořák produced his collection of eight piano waltzes, of which he also arranged two – including the **Waltz in A major, Op. 54 No. 1** – for strings.

As a son of an innkeeper, Dvořák would doubtless have been able to relate to the tenderness with which the great tango poet Enrique Santos Discépolo described the **Cafetín de Buenos Aires**, the little café which “like a school of life, gave me, a wide-eyed young man, the cigarette, the belief in my dreams and the hope for love”. This is the last published tango by Discépolo, who died in 1951. The composer **Mariano Mores**, on the other hand, born in 1918, would live until 2016: one century of lived tango history.

Tango originated in the run-down immigrant quarters of Buenos Aires and began conquering the world during the 1910s when it became an elegant, fashionable dance in Paris. The French capital was a musical metropolis, always receptive to new influences; a century previously, orientalism had been *à la mode*. One of the first French composers able to experience authentic oriental

music for themselves was **Félicien David**. In the 1830s he travelled to Egypt and subsequently processed the impressions he gained there – exotic smells, desert sand, camel trains – in a great number of works. However, hardly any oriental traces are to be found in his four string quartets, written in 1868/69, one of the few exceptions being the **Scherzo from Quartet No. 3 in A major** featuring distant echoes of the camel train from his most famous work, the symphonic ode *Le Désert*.

Did **Mozart** find his first trip to Italy as exotic as David had perceived his journey to the Middle East, just over half a century later? He was, after all, only fourteen years old when he visited Italy for the first time. He composed his first **String Quartet, K. 80**, in a tavern near Milan. It bears typically baroque hallmarks, especially in the slow opening movement, but also already reveals characteristically Mozartian melodies.

The exotic flavour in **Alexander Borodin's String Quartet No. 2 in D major** hails from the treasure trove of Russian music to which Borodin and his composer friends of "The Five" felt obliged. However, the second movement, the scherzo, features a waltz motif, exuding a Viennese flair. The immaculately crafted writing of the quartet gives no indication that Borodin's day job was not that of a composer: he was, in fact, a renowned chemistry professor.

Some are of the opinion that the Argentinian musician **Enrique Francini** was the best tango violinist of all time. Not only was he a member of Astor Piazzolla's legendary Octeto Buenos Aires, but from the late 1950s also of the then recently founded symphony orchestra of the Teatro Colón. In 1944 he wrote one of his most famous pieces: **La vi Ilegar**, a melancholy memory of a bygone love.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky was also afflicted by feelings of loneliness in Moscow, where he had been engaged as professor of music theory at the newly founded conservatoire: he was missing St Petersburg. In order to establish himself in Moscow, and to supplement his income, he gave a concert in March 1871 featuring his own compositions: songs, piano music and, as the main item, his first **String Quartet in D major, Op. 11**. From its premiere, the latter was a resounding success. "A nimble, even piquant composition", the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick would write later on, "which reveals its most radiant side in the andante, a serenade-like melody over a pizzicato bass."

A contrast to Tchaikovsky's melancholy mood is provided by **The Syncopated Clock** by the US-American composer **Leroy Anderson**, who made a name for himself with entertaining orchestral miniatures. When he wrote this piece towards the end of the Second World War, Anderson was director of the Scandinavian section of the military secret service – born to Swedish parents, he had studied not only music but also German and Scandinavian linguistics and spoke seven languages. Whilst still serving in the military, Anderson performed the work with the Boston Pops Orchestra. His clock, which is played by temple blocks in the original and by the viola in the arrangement, proved an instant hit.

No acclaim, at least not from the critics, was won by **Dmitri Shostakovich's** ballet *The Golden Age*. The reasons for this were of an ideological nature: the colourful score was accused of being "bourgeois". It tells the story of a Soviet football team

visiting an industrial exhibition in a “fascist” Western city, whilst grotesquely distorting both camps. The most popular number, a polka, was arranged as an **Allegretto** for string quartet by Shostakovich himself.

Antonín Dvořák took less than two weeks to compose his **String Quartet in F major**, the “American”, in the summer of 1893. One year previously he had accepted the post of artistic director of the National Conservatory in New York. In works such as the F major quartet Dvořák captured the spirit of an imaginary traditional American music. In the slow movement, on the other hand, his yearning for his Bohemian home left clear musical traces.

Whether the quartet was in fact American, or Czech, or perhaps simply “Dvořákian”, has been the object of many discussions. No matter, **Stevie Wonder** would probably say, since “Music is a world within itself / With a language we all understand”. These are the opening lines of his 1977 hit song, **Sir Duke**, a tribute to his great role model Duke Ellington, who had recently died, as well as other jazz greats.

Joseph Haydn took a similar stance when he said: “My language can be understood in the entire world!” With his Op. 33 set of six, Haydn created the prototype for the string quartet. His **Op. 33 No. 3, “The Bird”**, became especially popular: the last movement, “Finale: Rondo. Presto”, combines twittering appoggiaturas with a Hungarian influenced melody.

Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga, the “Spanish Mozart”, was only sixteen years old when he wrote his three string quartets. They are astonishingly mature works, clearly following the example of Haydn. The rustic **Minuet of the Quartet No. 1 in D minor** exudes Spanish flair, especially in the accompaniments with guitar-like pizzicatos. It would be wonderful to listen to later quartets by Arriaga as well – sadly, these were not to materialise as the composer died at the age of nineteen, probably of tuberculosis.

The bandoneon player **Héctor Varela** was not primarily concerned with innovation, but rather with the dancers in tango salons. Compositions from his pen such as **El 58** were therefore criticised by some as being backward, and loved by others for being down-to-earth music that lent itself well to being danced to – which earned him great commercial success.

Elements of tango – and ragtime – also found their way into a song which is probably one of the most famous and successful of all time: the **St. Louis Blues**, written in 1912 by the “Father of the blues”, **William C. Handy**. Until the 1950s, it was the most recorded song. During the Abyssinian War, the Ethiopian army made it their anthem, the German Federal President Horst Köhler asked for this piece to be played at the Great Tattoo at his official farewell ceremony and an ice hockey team from St Louis in Missouri is named after it – an honour which probably has never been accorded to any other piece in music history.



MANDELRING QUARTETT

The Mandelring Quartett's trademark is its expressivity and phenomenal homogeneity. At the same time, their approach to music is always both emotional and personal. Founded in 1983, the ensemble is winner of major competitions, among them the ARD International Music Competition and the Premio Paolo Borciani. Today their performing commitments take the quartet to international musical centres such as Vienna, Paris, London, Madrid and New York. In addition, their concert diary includes regular tours to the European neighbouring countries, the U.S., South America and Asia. They are also warmly welcomed as guest performers at leading festivals such as the Schwarzenberg and Hohenems Schubertiade, Niederrhein Musikfestival, Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele, Kuhmo Chamber Music and Montpellier Festival.

The HAMBACHERMusikFEST was initiated by the Mandelring Quartett in their home city Neustadt an der Weinstraße in 1997 and has developed into a meeting point for lovers of chamber music from all over the globe. Since 2010 the ensemble has had a concert series of its own in the Berliner Philharmonie. The Mandelring Quartett celebrated its 30th birthday in the Berlin Radialsystem V with a project called "3 from amongst 30", five concerts at each of which the audience was invited to select a programme of three works from a list of thirty immediately before the start.

Numerous prize-winning CD recordings (Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik, International Classical Music Awards nominations a.o.) testify to the quartet's exceptional quality and wide-ranging repertoire. The productions with works by Schubert and Schumann, but especially the complete recordings of the string quartets by Shostakovich and Mendelssohn were acknowledged as new reference recordings. The recordings of Leoš Janáček's String Quartets and of Brahms' String Quintets and Sextets have also received numerous recognitions.

audite

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