

 GOLDMARK String Quartet in B♭, op. 8. String Quintet in a, op. 91 • Haydn Qrt; 1Rudolf Leopold (vc) • GRAMOLA 99076 (69:06)



Carl Goldmark: String Quartet - String Quintet

It is tempting to say that Karl Goldmark took a steep nosedive into oblivion not long after his death in 1915; it's just that I'm not sure how well known his music was during his lifetime. An opera, *The Queen of Sheba*, enjoyed a respectable following for a while, as did a symphony nicknamed "Rustic Wedding." But the one work that has proved to have considerable staying power is Goldmark's Violin Concerto in A Minor. Once championed by Nathan Milstein, the concerto still tempts the occasional violinist to take it out for a spin, and it can still boast more recordings in the catalog than any other single Goldmark work.

Goldmark was a late bloomer. He was already 30 years of age in 1860 when he wrote his sole string quartet; he wrote his string quintet two years later, in 1862. Both works are among the composer's earliest published efforts; neither has received much attention on disc. In fact, until the arrival of this new version with the Haydn Quartet, there hasn't been a new recording of the quartet I'm aware of since the Rosamunde Quartet recorded it for Berlin Classics in 2005. Earlier versions, in reverse chronological order, still listed in print are those with the Klenke Quartet (Hänssler, 2002), Fourth Dimension (ASV, 2000), and the Lajtha Quartet (Hungaroton, 1994). Since all but the Klenke Quartet pair Goldmark's string quartet and string quintet together on the same disc, options for the quintet are the same minus one. The Klenke pairs Goldmark's quartet with Mendelssohn A-Minor Quartet, op. 13, so recordings of Goldmark's quintet are one fewer than those of his quartet.

I think I to have to part company with some of my former colleagues who reviewed the above-cited recordings. Frankly, the quartet just doesn't hold my interest, and that is not the fault of the performance

given it here by the Haydn Quartet. The music is amiable enough, ambling along in a late German Romantic style that shares a certain kinship with the F-Major Quartet of August Klughardt, composed in 1883, almost 50 years before Goldmark's quartet. I'm not sure the failure of the music to grab my attention is due to "the principal themes being quite short, so the listener might be confused as to what is theme and what is passagework," as Robert McColley observed in his 26:5 review of the Klenke Quartet's performance. An analysis I find more in sync with my own response was put forth by David Johnson in his 17:5 review of the Lajtha Quartet's performance, which is worth quoting in full:

"There are longueurs in both works [the quartet and the quintet], suggesting a composer who has not yet totally mastered his art. But one is impressed by Goldmark's independence from the obvious influences that captured most neophyte composers in the early 1860s. There is little of Schumann in these works and less of Mendelssohn. The sensibility is deeply Romantic but is a Romanticism built on foundations of its own making. Schubert comes closer to being a soul-mate than any of Goldmark's nearer contemporaries. Beethoven is a presence also, at times. Brahms and Dvořák are yet in the future. In both the quartet and the quintet the strongest movements are the openings ones and the slow movements. The scherzos (both unorthodox) tend to be less sure of themselves, and the finales are too diffuse and marred by academic and self-conscious exercises in counterpoint."

That pretty much sums it up for me as far as the music is concerned, and I'm one who loves chamber music above all else; yet the quartet strikes me as note-spinning without much point or purpose and largely devoid of anything that could be called melodically inspired or memorable. That is not, however, an indictment of these performances, unless one wishes to complain that the Haydn Quartet might have spent its time and talent more profitably on other endeavors.

I find only one entry in the Fanfare Archive under the name "Haydn Quartet," but it's for a listing of string quintets by Louis Spohr on Marco Polo that goes back to issue 19:2 (Nov/Dec 1995). Frankly, I don't know whether the Haydn Quartet on this new Gramola release is the same ensemble or not, though I'm guessing it probably is, in light of the fact that both David Johnson's 19:2 review and Gramola's enclosed booklet both name Budapest (specifically the Estherházy Palace in Eisenstadt) as the ensemble's venue of residence. The booklet also notes that the Quartet has been in business for over 20 years, which would extend back to the 1995 Spohr recording. However, the booklet note also makes mention of the ensemble's "many CDs"; yet on ArkivMusic I find only one other entry for the Haydn Quartet, a five-disc set titled *A.-e.-m. Grétry: Portrait Musical*, on the Musique en Wallonie label. The Quartet's official web site, haydnquartet.com, does list six CDs in addition to this new one, which I wouldn't refer to as "many," especially considering that the group has been playing together for over 20 years, nor does the web site list the Marco Polo Spohr disc Johnson reviewed.

Being the inveterate chamber music collector I am, I found both the Lajtha's Quartet's Hungaroton and the Klenke Quartet's Hänssler CDs on my shelf, though I can't recall listening to either of them in years. So this was my prod to do some comparative listening. At first glance, it appeared that the Klenke was considerably slower in the first movement of the quartet than either the Lajtha or this new one from the Haydn Quartet: 11:27 vs. 9:54 and 10:13, respectively. But in listening to all three, I found that the Klenke adopt a tempo for the *Allegro moderato* that's faster than either of the other two ensembles. The reason the Klenke takes longer is that the players observe the exposition repeat, which neither the Lajtha nor the Haydn does. In his review of the Klenke's performance in 26:5, Robert McColley mentions that the Fourth Dimension also observes the repeat. Perhaps, as McColley reasons, hearing the exposition repeat will be "a further aid to figuring out the form of the first movement." Perhaps he's right, but simple arithmetic tells me that zero times two is still zero.

As for the playing, I can report that the Klenke Quartet sounds more alive, with a lift and thrust lacking in the Haydn Quartet's performance. The Klenke's Hänssler recording is also brighter, more forward, and better balanced, giving equal presence to each instrument. Gramola's recording for the Haydn Quartet is somewhat recessed and congealed sounding, tending to blend the instruments together in a way that makes it more difficult to pick out individual voices. But of the three, I think I like the Lajtha Quartet the best, even though theirs is the oldest recording. The players seem to have genuine affection for the score, bringing a degree of Romantic warmth and feeling to it that almost succeeds in rescuing it from the doldrums.

When it comes to the string quintet, the Klenke falls out of this three-way comparison because its discmate is a string quartet by Mendelssohn. In this instance, the Haydn Quartet does take the substantial first-movement exposition repeat, while the Lajtha Quartet does not, accounting for a big timing difference of 16:01 vs. 12:50.

The first theme of the movement isn't much more interesting than its correspondent in the earlier string quartet, but after some 124 bars of a good deal of chromatic meandering and the same phrase repeated ad infinitum, something extraordinary finally happens. Goldmark finds it within him to write an actual tune; and over a measured tremolo-like accompaniment in the second violin and viola, à la Brahms, the first violin soars upwards with a beautiful melody. Actually, I think with a few more hearings, I could actually learn to like this quintet quite a lot; it seems to have more going for it than does its stultifying older sibling, Goldmark's string quartet.

If, perchance, you already have the Lajtha Quartet's recording of the quartet and quintet, I find no compelling reason to advise replacing it with this new one by the Haydn Quartet. If, on the other hand, you don't have either of these works in your collection and feel your life is incomplete without them, I'd probably recommend this new one over the Lajtha, not because it's any better played—it isn't—but because the older Hungaroton recording may be harder to come by. I can't speak to the Fourth Dimension or Rosamunde Quartet versions because I haven't heard them. Jerry Dubins

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REVIEW

Karl GOLDMARK (1830-1915)

String Quartet, Op. 8 (1860) [31.02]

String Quintet, Op. 9 (1862) [37.59]

Haydn Quartett

Rudolf Leopold (cello)

rec. 2007, Evangelische Kirche, Neunkirchen,
Austria

GRAMOLA 99076 [69.06]

The year 2015 sees the centenary of Karl Goldmark's death. This seems to be passing with a mere whimper compared with the attention enjoyed by other luminaries in the classical music world who also celebrate anniversaries such as Sibelius, Nielsen, Pärt and Boulez. Hungarian by birth Goldmark adopted the city of Vienna as his home. When he died in 1915 he was a leading figure in the city's music establishment but his star quickly dimmed. Admired in his day by supporters of both the Wagner and Brahms camps it is the reputation of the *Rustic Wedding Symphony*, the opera *The Queen of Sheba* and *Violin Concerto No. 1 in A minor* that secures Goldmark a toehold on the repertoire. The present release is the only Goldmark anniversary recording I have come across up to now.

To my ears Goldmark's chamber writing was influenced by the works of Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann. Although attractive and worthwhile hearing these Goldmark



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works don't have anything like the same level of inspiration. Incidentally his friend Brahms had yet to write his string quartets and string quintets.

Written in 1860 in Vienna the *String Quartet*, Op. 8 was Goldmark's first taste of success. Joseph Hellmesberger Sr. founder of the Hellmesberger Quartet originally turned the work down but Goldmark engaged the quartet privately to give the première which led to a favourable outcome. Scored for two violins, viola and two cellos it seems the Hellmesberger Quartet introduced the *String Quintet*, Op. 9 in 1862 also in Vienna.

The Haydn Quartett augmented by cellist Rudolf Leopold play the Quintet with vivacity, alertness and taste. One senses considerable preparation and faith in the works together with generally excellent intonation and unity. This is laudable but cannot conceal a deficit of memorable ideas.

Well recorded for Gramola these accounts were first issued by the Haydn Quartet as a private pressing before this international release to mark the Goldmark centenary.

Michael Cookson

AllMusic Review by Blair Sanderson

The music of **Karl Goldmark** is infrequently performed and seldom recorded, except for his major works, the Violin Concerto in A minor and the Rustic Wedding Symphony, which are still occasionally programmed. Yet this 2015 CD of the String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 8, and the String Quintet in A minor, Op. 9, performed by the **Haydn Quartet** and guest cellist **Rudolf Leopold**, is a hopeful sign for **Goldmark**'s admirers. These are the only pieces of their respective genres in **Goldmark**'s catalog, and because of their obscurity, no claim of special significance or influence on other composers can be made for them. But they are charming works of a warm Romantic character that may appeal precisely because they aren't touted as masterpieces of deep profundity or originality. When heard in their proper context, as unassuming parlor music in the style of **Schumann** and **Mendelssohn**, they can be appreciated for their ardent

melodies and quiet, intimate moods, which the musicians deliver with apparent sensitivity and sympathy. Gramola's recording gives them a fairly close presence and vibrant sound without much grittiness, so the playing is quite smooth and pleasant, despite the rather airless quality of the acoustics.