

"One Russian is an anarchist. Two Russians are a chess game. Three Russians are a revolution. Four Russians are the Budapest String Quartet." Or so went the witticism attributed to Jascha Heifetz. But this was not always the case. In 1917, when four players from the Budapest Opera Orchestra formed the quartet, it consisted of three Hungarians (Emil Hauser, Alfred Indig and Istvan Ipolyi, all Hubay pupils) and a Dutchman (Harry Son, who had studied with Popper). When Indig left in 1920, he was replaced by another Hungarian, Imre Pogany. It was this configuration which produced the ensemble's first issued recordings, dating from a series of sessions held early in 1926 (all of which were featured in our first volume, Pristine PACM 098).

The present collection, which completes the reissue of the Budapest's earliest recordings, picks up with Pogany's final sessions with the ensemble, playing the original version of Beethoven's Op. 130 quartet. They began at HMV's Hayes studio on February 14th, 1927, when Side 1, the first half of the first movement, and Sides 7 and 8, the complete *Cavatina*, were taken down. The four sides of the *Grosse Fuge* (a world première recording in its own right) followed a week later. There matters stood for nearly a year, as two more sessions in February and March devoted to the rest of the work failed to produce acceptable takes.

Before the end of the year, Pogany left and was replaced by Odessa-born Joseph Roisman, the first "Russian incursion" into the group. Roisman had studied in both his native city and Berlin, and brought a different approach that from early on challenged the Hungarians' status quo (including their playing of weak staccatos using the tip of the bow, rather than its middle). The remaining sides of Op. 130 were completed in January of 1928, now using HMV's studios in London's Small Queen's Hall, followed immediately by the Smetana, Tchaikovsky and Schubert movements presented here. The First Rasumovsky and Dittersdorf Menuet were inscribed thirteen months later, while the Beethoven Op. 18 movement was the only recording the group made in 1930.

The next two years would see the departures of both Hauser and Son, with Roisman moving up to first violin and the Vilnius-born Schneider brothers, Alexander and Mischa, brought in as second violin and cello, respectively. Ipolyi remained as the last founding member of the quartet until 1936, when he was replaced with Roisman's childhood friend from Odessa, Boris Kroyt. By then, the "Russian takeover" (as the members born in Ukraine and Lithuania when they were part of the Russian Empire considered themselves Russian) was complete.

The recordings presented here find the quartet in a period of transition, with Roisman beginning to nudge the group away from its Old World performance practices, evident to some degree in the 1928 sides of Op. 130, but even more so in the following year's First Rasumovsky. The Dittersdorf movement was one of two "filler" sides by the composer which the quartet made during their early sessions, and the last of his works the group would set down.

The Beethoven and Smetana single discs are surprisingly rare. Beethoven's Op. 18, No. 5 was the only one of his quartets that the group never recorded complete during the 78 rpm era; and despite its popularity, no studio version of the Smetana was ever released (although an unissued recording from 1964 exists in Sony's vaults).

The Schubert and Tchaikovsky movements were re-recorded by the Roisman-led group six years later (Pristine PACM 113). In the Schubert, the difference is stark: the earlier version presented here lacks the urgency of the later reading, which is fast enough to accommodate a complete *da capo* repeat on the first side.

Mark Obert-Thorn



budapest quartet

early recordings, volume 2



PACM 123

disc one (49:47)

1. DITTERSDORF Menuet

from Quartet No. 6 in A major (4:38)

Recorded 11 February 1929 · Matrix no. Cc 15876-2A (HMV D 1659)

2. BEETHOVEN Andante cantabile

from Quartet No. 5 in A major, Op. 18, No. 5 (7:36)

Recorded 7 March 1930 · Matrix nos. Cc 18923-3 & 18924-3 (Electrola EJ 559)

BEETHOVEN Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59, No. 1, "Rasumovsky"

3. 1st mvt. - Allegro (9:39)

4. 2nd mvt. - Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (9:35)

5. 3rd mvt. - Adagio molto e mesta - *attaca* (12:24)

6. 4th mvt. - Thème russe. Allegro (5:54)

Recorded 11 and 22 February 1929

Matrix nos. Cc 15870-3, 15871-2, 15872-2, 15873-3, 15874-3A, 15875-2, 15930-2A & 15931-3A (HMV D 1660/3)

THE BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET

Emil Hauser (Violin I)

Imre Pogany (1927 recordings) or Joseph Roisman (Violin II)

Istvan Ipolyi (Viola)

Harry Son (Cello)

Recorded in Studio B, Hayes (1927 recordings) and Studio C, Small Queen's Hall, London

disc two (62:38)

BEETHOVEN Quartet No. 13 in B-flat major, Op. 130

(Original version)

1. 1st mvt - Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro (9:14)

2. 2nd mvt - Presto (2:06)

3. 3rd mvt - Andante con moto, ma non troppo (5:50)

4. 4th mvt - Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai (3:29)

5. 5th mvt - Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo (5:52)

6. 6th mvt - Große Fuge: Overtura - Fuga (Op. 133) (16:07)

Recorded 14 and 21 February 1927 and 24 January 1928

Matrix nos. Cc 10169-2, 12468-2, 12469-1, 12470-1, 12471-1, 12472-2A, 10170-1, 10171-2, 10195-2, 10196-2, 10197-1 & 10198-1 (HMV DB 1547/50 & DB 1559/60)

7. SCHUBERT Quartet No. 12 in C minor, D.703,

'Quartettsatz' (7:29)

Recorded 25 January 1928 · Matrix nos. Cc 12477-1 & 12478-2 (HMV D 1421)

8. SMETANA Allegretto alla polka

from Quartet No. 1 in E minor, 'From My Life' (5:31)

Recorded 24 January 1928 · Matrix nos. Bb 12473-1A & 12474-2A (Electrola EW 42)

9. TCHAIKOVSKY Andante cantabile

from Quartet No. 1 in D major, Op. 11 (6:59)

Recorded 25 January 1928 · Matrix nos. Cc 12475-1 & 12476-2 (HMV D 1634)

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover image (L-R): Emil Hauser, Imre Pogany, Istvan Ipolyi, Harry Son

Total Duration: 1hr 52:25

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