

NAXOS

Franz
SCHMIDT

Symphony No. 4
Variations on a Hussar's Song

Malmö Symphony Orchestra
Vassily Sinaisky



Franz Schmidt (1874–1939)

Symphony No. 4 in C major • Variations on a Hussar's Song

The Austrian composer Franz Schmidt has been strangely neglected abroad, in part through his own conservatism and in part through the vagaries of history and of progressive musical taste. He was born in 1874 in Pressburg, the modern Slovak capital Bratislava and one time, as Pozsony, capital of Hungary. It was here that Liszt had made his debut as a child and that Dohnányi and Bartók had their early schooling. Schmidt, whose family had Hungarian connections on his mother's side, had his first piano lessons with her. At school he was taught the organ and theory by the Franciscan Father Felizian Moczik and had encouragement from Archduchess Isabella, who had him perform as an infant prodigy pianist at the Grassalkovich Palace. In 1888 his father, a forwarding agent, was involved in a case of fraud, and the family moved to Vienna. There Schmidt had some rather unsatisfactory lessons with the great Leschetizky, through the insistence of a patron, and earned his keep as a tutor in a well-to-do family from Perchtoldsdorf to help his parents. He was able to enter the then Philharmonic Society Conservatory, where he studied the cello with Ferdinand Hellmesberger, member of a remarkable Vienna dynasty of string-players, and composition with Robert Fuchs, the teacher of Mahler, Sibelius, Wolf, Schreker, Zemlinsky and a whole generation of Austrian composers. He was also able to attend lectures by Bruckner, then near retirement. Schmidt completed his studies in 1896 and competed for and won a place as a cellist in the orchestra of the Court Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic. The Court Opera Orchestra was conducted from 1897 by Gustav Mahler, who at first favoured Schmidt over the existing front-desk players. According to Schmidt Mahler soon dismissed two thirds of the players and the two principal cellists would never play when Mahler conducted, leaving the front desk to Schmidt and a colleague, an arrangement that Mahler accepted. The intervention of Arnold Rosé, the concert-master and Mahler's brother-in-law, who moved him without warning

from the front desk, caused difficulties, particularly when Schmidt later refused Mahler's order to resume, unpaid, the position of principal cellist, risking threatened dismissal. Schmidt continued in the Court Opera until 1913-14 and in the Philharmonic until 1911 as a rank-and-file player, eventually resigning in order to carry out continuing duties he had assumed at the Conservatory, where he taught the cello, piano, counterpoint and composition. He was to serve as director of the then Vienna Music Academy from 1925 to 1927 and thereafter as director of the new Vienna Musikhochschule, a position he relinquished in 1931.

Something of the enmity that arose between Schmidt and Mahler was attributed by the former to the attention critics gave the first of the former's four symphonies, awarded the Beethoven Prize in 1900 and first played in Vienna two years later, to the expressed approval of the redoubtable Hanslick, former champion of Brahms against the Wagnerians. Schmidt played his opera *Notre Dame* through to Mahler, who found it deficient in melodic invention, although he listened to the work to the end. The work, completed in 1904, was a considerable success when it was eventually performed at the Court Opera in 1914. As a composer Schmidt won a significant contemporary reputation not only with his symphonies and his other orchestral and chamber music, including works written for his friends Paul Wittgenstein, the pianist who had lost his right arm in the war, and the organist Franz Schütz, but also with his apocalyptic oratorio *Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln* (The Book with Seven Seals), first heard in Vienna in 1938.

Schmidt suffered various vicissitudes in his personal life. In 1899 he had married a childhood friend, whose mental instability necessitated her admission to an asylum in 1919. She was finally put to death in 1942, following the euthanasia policy initiated by the National Socialist government. In 1923 Schmidt married one of his piano pupils, but in 1932 his daughter Emma, born in 1902, was

to die giving birth to her first child, a loss marked by Schmidt's *Fourth Symphony*, conceived as a Requiem for her. The event severely affected his health and he suffered a complete breakdown. His health, often precarious, deteriorated markedly during his final years, but shortly before his death he received yet one more of many honours, the Beethoven Prize of the Prussian Academy. He died in February 1939.

Schmidt's *Fourth Symphony* was written in 1933 and dedicated to the conductor Oswald Kabasta, who gave the first performance with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. It is scored for pairs of flutes, the second doubling piccolo, oboes, a cor anglais, an E flat clarinet, pairs of B flat clarinets and bassoons, a double bassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, a bass tuba, two harps, a percussion section including four timpani, cymbals, side-drum, bass drum and tamtam, and a large string section. The first movement starts with a solo trumpet theme of initially ambiguous tonality, the source of much that is to follow. While the trumpet finds the tonality of C, it is D flat that forms the basis of the following harmonization, the note then serving, as C sharp, as the dominant of F sharp minor before the dynamic climax of an emphatic C major. Shifts of key lead to the second subject group, marked *Passionato*. The exposition ends with a short *Più tranquillo* passage, leading to a development of intricate complexity, starting with a version of the opening theme from the cor anglais. A solo cello leads into the *Adagio*, with its tonality of B flat major, and at its heart a passage marked *Più lento*, accompanied by the elegiac throb of funeral drums, their rhythm joined by other instruments. The solo cello leads back into the original *Adagio* tempo, and it is the cello that brings the elegiac movement to an end, followed by the echo of the muffled drums. The *Scherzo*, in B flat minor, seems to propose a fugue, with the viola subject answered by the second violins, before other ideas intervene, the seminal opening theme making

its appearance once more. The theme makes its due return with the first horn over an accompanying drum roll, continuing in a passage for the four horns. This, marked *Tempo primo un poco sostenuto*, forms the recapitulation, which moves forward to the *Passionato* second subject group and the eventual return of the opening trumpet melody, now underpinned by the sustained C and G of the cellos and the pizzicato Cs of the double basses, ending a work of remarkable unity and varied fascination.

Schmidt's *Variations on a Hussar's Song* was written in 1930 and first performed in Vienna the following year with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra under Clemens Kraus, to whom it is dedicated. It is scored for a similar orchestra, without a double bassoon. The work starts with a slow introduction, marked *Adagio* [5]. This is followed by a statement of the theme, with its characteristic rhythm, *Vivace alla marcia*. The succeeding five variations [6] keep the theme in something approaching its original form and it is with the sixth variation, marked *Lento* [7], that the possibilities of the theme are more fully explored, here in a *fugato*. The seventh version of the material, marked *Andante tranquillo*, offers a gently descending 6/8 figuration, with an eighth, *Allegretto molto moderato*, started by the woodwind, accompanied by the plucked notes of the lower strings. The next variation, *Più tranquillo* and in 9/8, is entrusted largely to the same instruments. The tenth variation, *Allegro* [8] and in 3/4, has the feeling of a scherzo, to be followed by a variation introduced by the first horn in a *Presto*, answered, *Poco meno mosso*, by the strings. This is followed directly by the twelfth variation, marked *Lento* [9]. The succeeding passage is less of a variation than a reminiscence of part of the slow introduction to the work, leading to a more or less straightforward statement of the theme, *Vivace* [10]. The variations culminate in an impressive finale [11].

Keith Anderson



Vassily Sinaisky

Vassily Sinaisky's international career was launched in 1973 when he won the Gold Medal at the prestigious Karajan Competition in Berlin. His early work as Assistant to the legendary Kondrashin at the Moscow Philharmonic, and his study with Ilya Musin at the Leningrad Conservatory provided him with an incomparable grounding. He has been professor in conducting at the Music Conservatory in St Petersburg for the past thirty years. Sinaisky was Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic from 1991 to 1996. He has also held the posts of Chief Conductor of the Latvian Symphony and Principal Guest Conductor of the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra. He was appointed Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Russian State Orchestra (formerly Svetlanov's USSR State Symphony Orchestra), a position which he held until 2002. He is Chief Guest Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic and is a regular and popular visitor to the BBC Proms each summer. In January 2007 Sinaisky took over as Principal Conductor of

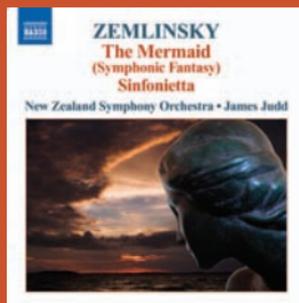
the Malmö Symphony Orchestra in Sweden. His appointment forms part of an ambitious new development plan for the orchestra which has already resulted in hugely successful projects both in Sweden and further afield. In September 2009 he was appointed a 'permanent conductor' at the Bolshoi in Moscow (a position shared with four other conductors).

Malmö Symphony Orchestra

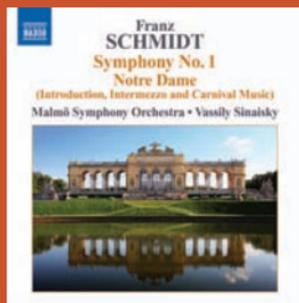
The Malmö Symphony Orchestra (MSO) consists of a hundred highly talented musicians who demonstrate their skills in a wide range of concerts. In the summer of 2008 the MSO founded a youth orchestra the MSO Ung (MSO Young) with talented young string musicians, entrusted in the 2009/2010 season with the chamber music series with MSO musicians as soloists. The record labels Naxos and BIS have brought the orchestra to a worldwide audience and several of its recordings have gained international awards, with first prizes in such competitions as the Cannes Classical Award and Diapason d'Or. The MSO's recording of Berwald's *Symphonies*, under the direction of Sixten Ehrling has been nominated for one of the world's most prestigious prizes, the Gramophone Award. One of the latest releases of music by the American composer Charles Ives (Naxos) has won great acclaim and was given as Editor's Choice/Recording of the month in October 2008 by the British classical music magazine *Gramophone*, which has also praised the orchestra's Naxos recordings of Franz Schmidt's *Symphonies*. Vassily Sinaisky was appointed principal conductor in 2007. For more information, please visit www.mso.se



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NAXOS

SCHMIDT: Symphony No. 4

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Naxos's critically acclaimed series of Franz Schmidt's lush late Romantic symphonies culminates with this new recording of his heartbreaking *Symphony No. 4*, conceived as a requiem for his daughter Emma. The *Variations on a Hussar's Song*, while recalling similar works by Brahms and Reger nonetheless showcases Schmidt's sensitive handling of large orchestral forces. *Symphonies No. 1* (8.570828), *No. 2* (8.570589) and *No. 3* (8.572119) are also available in what *BBC Music* magazine has praised as a 'consistently impressive cycle of Schmidt symphonies'.

Franz
SCHMIDT
(1874–1939)

**Symphony No. 4
in C major**

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1 Allegro molto moderato –
Passionato – | 46:22 |
| 2 Adagio – Più lento –
Adagio – | 14:28 |
| 3 Molto vivace – | 7:40 |
| 4 Tempo primo un poco sostenuto
– Passionato – Tempo primo:
Allegro molto moderato | 10:50 |

**Variations on a
Hussar's Song**

- | | | |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| 5 Adagio | 28:28 | 5:30 |
| 6 Vivace alla marcia | 3:55 | |
| 7 Lento – Andante tranquillo –
Allegretto molto moderato –
Più tranquillo | 4:57 | |
| 8 Allegro – Presto – | 4:10 | |
| 9 Lento – Adagio | 4:11 | |
| 10 Vivace | 3:56 | |
| 11 A tempo | 1:50 | |



Malmö Symphony Orchestra
Vassily Sinaisky

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