

Carpe Diem String Quartet

The Carpe Diem String Quartet, in residence at Ohio Wesleyan University, is one of the most versatile quartets of its generation and has earned critical acclaim with innovative programming, electrifying performances, and a passion for audience engagement. The group's musical vision has led them down the paths of gypsy, tango, folk, pop, rock, and jazz inspired music, but the quartet is equally at home with the traditional string quartet repertoire. Defying easy classification, the quartet continues to break boundaries and push the limits of the classical string quartet. Carpe Diem writes, arranges and performs music of all styles, and works with artists from many different genres. Their inventive school and outreach programmes even make use of video game songs and TV and movie theme music, such as *The Simpsons*. Carpe Diem champions the music of living composers, and has given premières and first Mid-West performances of works by Osvaldo Golijov, Gunther Schuller, Danny Elfman, Bruce Wolosoff, and Korine Fujiwara, among others. The quartet's latest CD was selected for the 2009 GRAMMY® Awards Entry List in no fewer than four categories: Best Classical Album, Best Chamber Music Performance, Best New Artist, and Best Engineered Album-Classical.

www.carpediemstringquartet.com



Our heartfelt thanks to Ed Adelson, Charles and Mary Babcock, John and Susan Beavers, Rhoma Berlin, Susan and Jim Berry, James and Ruth Decker, Ann Ekstrom, Randy Foster, Jack George, Donald and Marilyn Harris, Frank and Linda Kass, Anne Marie Lapidus, Lyman Leathers, LTC Lance Lisle, J.D., Joseph and Johanna Meara, Anne and Noel Melvin, Judith Pease, Ann and Ron Pizzuti, Andy and Sandy Ross, Daniel and Marina Ruiz, Markus and Lolo Schmidt, Caroline Sweney, Ray and Nancy Waggoner, William and Susan Walsh, Robert and Carole Wilhelm.

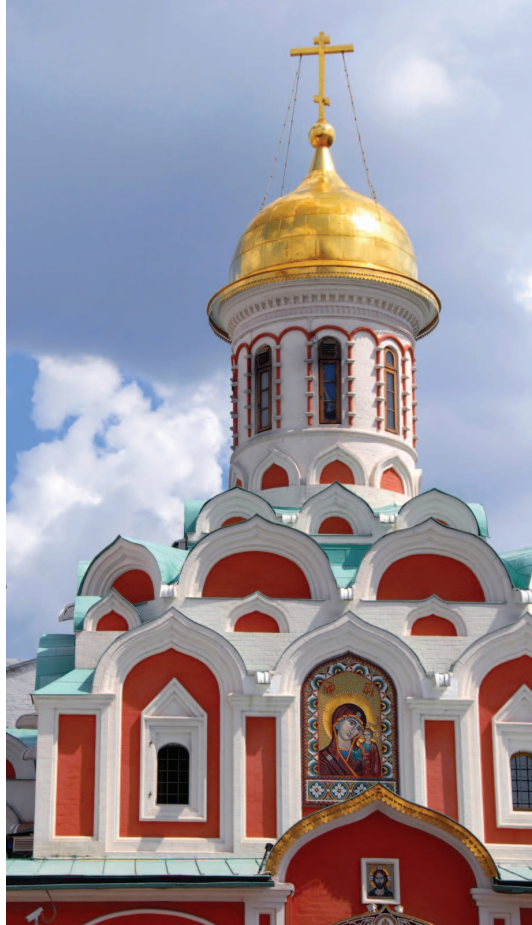
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TANEYEV

Complete String Quartets • 2

String Quartets Nos. 2 and 4

Carpe Diem String Quartet



Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev (1856–1915) String Quartets Nos. 2 and 4

The name of the Russian composer Sergey Taneyev steadily continues to emerge from relative obscurity in the West. A composer who is greatly admired and revered in his native Russia, he is remembered as a student and close friend of Tchaikovsky and teacher of Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Medtner. Taneyev was a devout scholar of counterpoint and early music, a passionate promoter of Esperanto in Russia, a scholar of ancient Greek history and literature, an owner of a brilliant mind always ready to fire a joke, a closet Wagnerian and an object of Sof'ya Tolstaya's unrequited love.

As a composer Sergey Taneyev was undisputable master of chamber music in Russia. His string quartets, trios, and piano quintet made an invaluable addition to the chamber music repertory in Russia. The Russian music critic Boris Asaf'yev wrote: 'With [the appearance of] Taneyev's works Russian chamber music finally left the phase of lonely, more or less successful compositions, as well as the phase of salon music-making, and entered the sphere of highest musical self-realisation.' A reviewer E. Gunst believed that 'It would be difficult, almost impossible, to find a composer of the post-classical period who has such a tremendous mastery of chamber ensemble style as Taneyev.'

Taneyev's compositions for chamber ensembles were a great gift to performers in search of new repertoire, such as the famous Czech Quartet, which championed his works, performing them to great acclaim. Taneyev himself frequently joined the Czech Quartet in performing the piano part in his compositions for chamber ensembles with piano. Throughout December 1908 Taneyev gave concerts in Berlin, Vienna and Prague. Prague concerts were particularly successful, earning him great popularity and bringing him close to many Czech musicians and performers.

Taneyev began to compose string quartets while still a student at the Moscow Conservatory but left some of his early works unfinished. He composed only two move-

ments for his *First String Quartet* (1874-76) and, although he completed the next three quartets (between 1880 and 1890), he did not show them to anyone and did not give them opus numbers. Thus, his first numbered quartet is actually his fifth, and his last quartet is unnumbered and incomplete. Understandably, this has led to some confusion.

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 5, is the first quartet Taneyev composed after completing his musical trilogy *Orestea* (1894), finishing it during his stay with the Tolstoy family in Yasnaya Polyana. The next two decades saw the emergence of the rest of his quartets, *Piano Quintet, Op. 30*, two string quintets, piano and string trios, and a *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. During this time Taneyev produced only two large-scale works: *Symphony in C minor, Op. 12* (1898) and a monumental cantata *At the Reading of a Psalm* (1915).

The quartet was given its première in Moscow on 16th November 1895 by J. Hřimali, D. Krein, N. Sokolovsky and A. von Glen. Taneyev noted an unrefined, hastily put-together performance and lack of ensemble between the musicians, but the reviews were positive. A Moscow critic Nikolay Kashkin, a friend of both Tchaikovsky and Taneyev, wrote: 'Having heard this work, we can say that it must take a very high place in the new musical literature and surely it will attract attention of all quartet players. [...] For a long time we have not heard a quartet written so well and with such accomplished mastery.'

Two years after the première, on 11th October 1897, the work was performed brilliantly in Moscow by the members of the Czech Quartet, Hanuš Wihan, Karel Hoffmann, Josef Suk, and Oskar Nedbal. Taneyev thought that their playing was 'the height of perfection', and Sof'ya Tolstaya, who was present at the concert, wrote enthusiastically in her diary: 'the quartet was a true victory of music. What a charming work! It is the last word of new music; it is serious, complex, with unexpected harmonic combinations, a wealth of ideas and great mastery.'

In the same year the Czech Quartet performed the work

in Frankfurt, and the pianist Alexander Siloti wrote in a letter to the composer about its rapturous reception and enormous success.

The *Second Quartet* opens with a sombre and majestic theme, which develops throughout the first movement with a kind of Beethovenian inner energy. Beethoven's influences are clearly heard in an array of augmented intervals, octave leaps, daring harmonies, and spontaneous intonations. Taneyev built the main theme of the demonic, wild *Scherzo* on a motif close to the *Dies irae*, a later favourite of Rachmaninov. A lyrical and peaceful trio provides a huge contrast and emotional respite before the return of the tempestuous world of the *Scherzo*. The *Adagio* shows a broad range of intimate, sincere emotions, embodied within a kind of Wagnerian endless melody heard in the cello. The intense *Finale* abounds in a variety of inventive harmonic devices, contrapuntal techniques, enharmonic modulations, and chromaticisms. Taneyev is a virtuoso orchestrator – he assigns his melody to various instruments, masterfully charting its passage from one instrumental part to another.

The composition of the *String Quartet No. 4 in A minor, Op. 11*, did not always come easily to Taneyev, who even wrote a poem describing his exhaustion:

In the peace of a monastery, for over a week
I have lived here alone, writing my A minor quartet
For two violins, viola, and cello.
But I am tired, I have no more strength to write;
I shut my notebook, and my frivolous thought,
From the depths of fugues and contrapuntal debris,
Transports me to a chessboard.

Perhaps Taneyev was thinking back to his summer stay in Yasnaya Polyana during the composition of his *Second Quartet*, where he spent evenings playing chess with Leo

Tolstoy. If Tolstoy won, Taneyev would play for him a piano composition of the writer's choice (usually Chopin or Beethoven), and if Tolstoy lost, he would read to Taneyev a chapter or a passage of a work he was currently writing.

The quartet had its first performance on 27th December 1900 in St Petersburg with the Czech Quartet, to whom it was dedicated. The Moscow première on 7th February 1902 was given by the quartet of Count Meklenburg-Strelitsky.

The *Fourth Quartet* is the most dramatic of all quartets written by Taneyev, opening with dissonant chords and an intensely searching melody. A short opening theme unifies the quartet by re-appearing throughout the whole work and giving birth to other melodic material. Taneyev was a master of his beloved technique of monothematicism, which is present in many of his instrumental and symphonic works. The *Divertimento, Allegro vivace e scherzando*, is a lively, graceful movement, written in an unusual 6/16 metre, with striking changes of instrumental colours. Taneyev's *Adagios* are all marked with a kind of elevated, profound emotion that is completely free of any exaggerated, made-up expression. Deep, meditative states and a sense of observing rather than experiencing them are the hallmarks of the emotional worlds of Taneyev's slow movements. The *Adagio* of this quartet is a majestic, noble movement, conceived as one endless melody. The *Finale* begins with the return of the opening intonations of the quartet, followed by a graceful dance in A minor. Taneyev treats his ensemble like a small orchestra that has all the power to impress the listeners and leave them with a sense of witnessing something grandiose, profound, and yet deeply personal.

Anastasia Belina