

YSL 747 T GUARNERI QUARTET Vol. 3

RUDOLF SERKIN AND DVOŘÁK

At last, after many years, I have heard Rudolf Serkin play the Dvořák Piano Quintet (No. 2, if you insist). It's a long story which begins back in 1910, when Adolf Busch was substituting as violist in the Gürzenich Quartet and took part in his first performance of the Op. 81 Quintet with Therese Pott as pianist. Later that year he played it again in Holland with Percy Grainger. Meanwhile in the summer of 1910 Fritz Busch was Kapellmeister at the spa Bad Pyrmont and brother Adolf was his concertmaster. Fritz reorganised the musical programmes but both brothers hated having to play music by the operetta composer Paul Lincke. Hans Simrock was taking the waters that summer and arranged for them to have scores of parts of all Dvořák's available works. They began announcing pieces by Lincke and actually playing Dvořák, a cunning wheeze which was torpedoed when Lincke himself confronted Fritz and complained. Anyway, the episode made both brothers lifelong lovers of Dvořák and in fact Adolf, who already knew the Violin Concerto, began his first full season as a soloist with that work in October 1910. The Piano Quintet remained part of his repertoire when he found his own quartet in 1912, but the first performance I know of with Serkin was in May 1930, in Munich. The work became a key part of the Serkin-Busch repertoire and Fred Gaisberg wanted them to record it, but other projects intervened and HMV gave the Quintet to Schnabel and the Quatuor Pro Arte, who played it like inferior Brahms. In due course Adolf Busch played most of the mature chamber works by Dvořák (a number of them with Serkin) and recorded several, including the E flat Quartet, Op. 51 – a wonderfully idiomatic performance – but not the Quintet.

Thanks to Yves St Laurent of St Laurent Studios (whom you can find online at <http://78experience.com/>) I now have the performance of Op. 81 which Serkin gave with the Guarneri Quartet at Carnegie Hall on 20 February 1973. The sound quality is quite resonant and there is a fair amount of audience noise, but the interpretation bears hallmarks of what I suspect Busch and Serkin worked out, all those years before. Fast passages are quite exhilarating and slow passages are given full value. The pianist's own contribution is lovely, with note values crisply observed. Serkin and his circle admired the Guarneri Quartet and so do I, up to a point, although there is not enough space in a Facebook post to outline all the reasons why I admire the individual members more than the group. I remember trying to explain my reservations to Serkin's sister Maltzchi and

saying that I could not accept a quartet with such a massive sound profile, led so blatantly from the cello. Anyway, there is a lot to enjoy here and I shall be interested to hear Bartók's Sixth Quartet from the same concert. I fancy it may be more amenable than certain other things to the Guarneri style. Funnily enough, I greatly enjoy the Brahms Quintet that the Guarneris recorded with Peter Serkin...

Tully Potter

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Carnegie Hall - February 20, 1973