

ST. PETERSBURG MUSICAL ARCHIVE

Northern Flowers



**Nikolai Yakovlevich
Myaskovsky
Complete String
Quartets Nos. 1-13**

**Taneyev
Quartet**

МУЗЫКАЛЬНЫЙ АРХИВ ПЕТЕРБУРГА

Nikolai Yakovlevich Myaskovsky (1881-1950)

Complete String Quartets

String Quartet No. 1 in a minor, Op. 33 No. 1 (1929-1930)

1	Poco rubato ma allegro ed agitato - Allegro non troppo	9:41
2	Allegro tenebroso	4:35
3	Andante sostenuto	9:02
4	Assai allegro quasi Presto - Prestissimo	5:39

String Quartet No. 2 in c minor, Op. 33 No. 2 (1930)

5	Allegro pesante	6:43
6	Andante	7:29
7	Vivace	5:09

String Quartet No. 3 in d minor, Op. 33 No. 3 (1911-1926)

8	Lento - Allegro non troppo malinconico	11:07
9	Teme e variazioni	15:23

String Quartet No. 4 in f minor, Op. 33 No. 4 (1909-1937)

10	Andante - Allegro - Andante ed appassionato	11:28
11	Allegro risoluto	4:57
12	Andante	7:46
13	Allegro molto - Molto vivo - Pesante - Vivacissimo	5:35

String Quartet No. 5 in e minor, Op. 47 (1938-1939)

14	Allegro tranquillo	7:44
15	Molto vivo, sussarando	3:51
16	Andantino semplice (quasi andante)	5:34
17	Allegro molto e con brio	7:56

String Quartet No. 6 in g minor, Op. 49 (1939-1940)

18	Moderato con anima	6:53
19	Allegro vivo giocoso (Burleska)	3:17
20	Andante lugubre (malinconico)	7:49
21	Allegro energico e con fuoco	4:41

String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, Op. 55 (1941)

22	Andantino	9:04
23	Vivace e fantastico	5:47
24	Andante con moto	7:37
25	Vivacissimo	6:50

String Quartet No. 8 in f-sharp minor, Op. 59 (1942)

26	Allegro moderato	7:40
27	Adagio	9:38
28	Allegro drammatico	7:21

String Quartet No. 9 in d minor, Op. 62 (1943)

29	Allegro inquieto	7:52
30	Andante appassionato - Allegro misterioso	11:25
31	Allegro con brio	7:04

String Quartet No. 10 in F Major, Op. 67 No. 1 (1907-1945)

32	Allegro non troppo	8:37
33	Vivo scherzando	3:25
34	Andante con moto lagrimabile	6:43
35	Allegro molto e con brio	4:42

String Quartet No. 11 in E-flat Major, Op. 33 No. 2 (1945)

36	Allegro tranquillo	7:19
37	Andante con moto	8:41
38	Allegretto pensieroso	5:09
39	Allegro non troppo, giocoso e festivo	4:56

String Quartet No. 12 in G Major, Op. 77 (1947)

40	Andante - Allegro moderato	10:01
41	Allegro fantastico	4:53
42	Andante con espressione	7:43
43	Allegro non troppo	8:05

String Quartet No. 13 in a minor, Op. 86 (1949)

44	Moderato	6:53
45	Presto fantastico	6:02
46	Andante con moto e molto cantabile	6:51
47	Molto vivo energico	4:30

The Taneyev Quartet

Vladimir Ovcharek & Grigory Lutzky, violins
Vissarion Solovyev, viola • Josef Levinzon, cello

There are composers whose impatient and resounding genius powerfully asserts itself from their very first steps, imperiously winning audiences and musicians. Their works shatter established traditions and tastes, and arouse storms of rapture and torrents of critical bile. Such is the daring pathfinder Sergey Sergeevich Prokofiev, "Chairman of Planet Earth for the section of music", using Mayakovski's figurative phrase. Such is Igor Fedorovich Stravinsky, a great master of the 20th century, a tireless seeker who, like the antique Proteus, changed his creative manner more than once in that century, each time disturbing the nerves of orthodox critics. Such is Dmitry Dmitrievich Shostakovich, the chronicler of the cruel century and supreme moral authority for several generations since his own time.

There are also composers whose creative powers developed unhurriedly, whose premieres did not stun the audience, and whose deep message and sincere expression of intimate thoughts did not immediately find the listeners' response – the author's style being so modest, and lack of pretension verging self-sacrifice indeed. Such is Nikolai Yakovlevich Miaskovsky, probably the most underrated of the last century's prominent Russian composers.

Having attended first piano lessons at home in his childhood, he followed the family tradition (his father was a military engineer, professor of the Military Engineering Academy in St. Petersburg) to go to a military school, and then to Petersburg's College of Military Engineers (1899-1902). In his school years, he sang in the military school choir, took piano and violin lessons, and played in an amateur orchestra. Upon graduation from the College, he served in a field engineer battalion in Moscow, studying harmony with R.M.Glière by recommendation of S.I.Taneyev. From the

autumn of 1903, after relocation to St. Petersburg for service, he studied counterpoint, musical forms, and orchestration with I.I. Krzyzanowski, pupil of N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov. In 1906 Myaskovsky entered Petersburg Conservatory where A.K. Lyadov, N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov, and Y.Vitol were his teachers. For his finals in 1911, Myaskovsky submitted two string quartets and a vocal suite titled "Madrigal" to words by K. Balmont. In 1908, he wrote his *First Symphony*, which determined his subsequent artistic career. Later, in his "Autobiographic Notes", the composer would say, "I felt that it was just the domain where I would be expressing myself most willingly." In the summer of 1911, Myaskovsky started his career as reviewer on the pages of *Muzyka*, a weekly published in Moscow, and very soon made his way into the top set of Russian musical writers.

With the outbreak of the World War I, Myaskovsky as a reserve officer was immediately mobilized and sent to the Austrian theatre of war, where he served nearly all the time at the front line, until after shell-shock, in the last year, on the construction site of a sea fortress in Revel (Tallinn). After the October Revolution, the Soviet Command transferred him to the Navy General Staff in Petrograd, with which he moved to Moscow in 1918. The same year, the composer's father, Russian Army Engineer General Yakov Konstantinovich Myaskovsky, tragically died in the countryside, torn to pieces by a "revolutionary" mob. This dramatic collision describing the tragedy of Russian reality found its musical embodiment in Myaskovsky's *Sixth Symphony*, the finale of which is based on the contraposition of songs of the French Revolution (*Carmagnole* and *Ça ira*) and a Russian sacred verse under the title translated as "On the Parting of Soul and Body".

After the final demobilization in 1921, Myaskovsky was invited to Moscow Conservatory, where he stayed as Professor of Composition for thirty years, until his death. An outstanding teacher, and the man who took over the leadership of the Moscow composing school after Taneyev, he educated dozens of talented masters; among his students were

Vissarion Shebalin, Aram Khachaturian, Dmitri Kabalevsky, Boris Tchaikovsky... Myaskovsky was distinguished by his enormous erudition, highest professional and moral authority, and sincere interest in the creative activity of his colleagues and students. As S.I. Taneyev before him, he was rightly called "the musical conscience of Moscow". High titles and awards, such as Honored Worker of Arts of the RSFSR (1927), Doctor of Arts (1940), National Artist of the USSR (1946), and Stalin Prizes (1940-1950), created an illusion of easy, successful, and conformist existence. However, we should not attach excessive importance to the composer's declarations in the press, which were unavoidable in the Soviet time, or to a few compromises in his musical activity, which were a forced homage to the official establishment. If we avoid being misguided by these outward attributes of Myaskovsky's biography, his artistic character will look quite different. Like Boris Pasternak in literature, Myaskovsky in music is a phenomenon of "internal emigration", an example of spiritual opposition to the regime of total suppression. This confrontation never took the form of active dissidence; the inner flame that was burning inside the composer did not burst outside. Nevertheless, Party critics and official ideological authorities, when hearing Myaskovsky's compositions, were keen enough to recognize wrong-class "intelligentsia wavering", "abstract humanism" (!), "condensed and mournful

psychologism" (in the *Sixth Symphony*, dedicated, it should be reminded, to the memory of his murdered father!) Similar terms were used to criticize the *Seventh Symphony* (1922) for plunging into the "abyss of subjectivism", and the *Tenth Symphony* (1927), for "morbid expressionism" and "a concept of individualistic pessimism". "Dark, gloomy... and sometimes oppressed and dispirited" or "a

symphony of torments" were epithets applied to the *Thirteenth Symphony* (1933). The *Twenty-Sixth Symphony* (1948- 'on Ancient Russian themes' was also reproached for its gloom... The best but insufficiently "objective" symphonies of Myaskovsky, which were not in line with the only authorized genre of "optimistic tragedy", were ostracized and banned from concerts for many years. In 1948 Myaskovsky, along with Prokofiev and Shostakovich, was one of the main targets of the notorious Party resolution on "formalism" in music. However, it is hard to imagine art more remote from any formal schemes than the music of Myaskovsky, always alive and full of strained thought and sincere emotion.

In some of his symphonies (*Fifth, Eighth, Sixteenth, Twenty-Fifth*) Myaskovsky is the closest to the traditions of the lyrico-epical symphonism of the Russian Five creators – Borodin, Balakirev, and Rimsky-Korsakov. In other ones, reflecting the composer's inner self so complicated, and psychologically laden (*Third, Seventh, Tenth, or Thirteenth*), Myaskovsky is identifiable as a successor of the symphonism of the Romantics and Tchaikovsky. At the intersection of these two "parallel" lines, his greatest achievements sometimes came into being, such as the *Sixth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Seventh Symphony*, or the *Cello Concerto*... Doubtless, symphony is the central genre for Myaskovsky, the focus of his artistic intentions, his

"proving ground" for diverse research into the form, texture, and melodic language. The twenty-seven symphonies (a number unique since the days of Mozart and Haydn!) are indeed the book of life of N.Y. Myaskovsky. His creative heritage is impressive. Apart from the symphonies, it includes symphonic poems, overtures, instrumental concertos and sonatas, dozens of piano pieces, choruses, songs, vocal cycles, and was the most important instrumental genre for him, just as for the Viennese classics.

However, "together alongside the symphonies" would be more exact. For whether at the beginning of his composer's biography or in his years of maturity, Myaskovsky "expressed himself" almost as "willingly" in the quartets. He wrote his *First quartet in F major* (later reworked and published in 1945 as No.10, Op. 67) in the summer of 1907, just upon entering the Conservatory. Graduating from there in 1911, the composer submitted his two *string quartets in D minor* and *in F minor* to Lyadov for his rigorous and demanding verdict (in the Thirties, these degree works once slightly retouched became part of Op.33). Myaskovsky wrote the *Thirteenth Quartet*, which became one of the composer's topmost achievements along with the *Twenty-Seventh Symphony*. Listening carefully to Myaskovsky's quartets, one will easily find there a reflection of the same artistic ideals that were important for the author of the symphonies. The composer understood the peculiar genre of the quartet, and did not try to force any broad symphonic concept into it. On the contrary, the quartets contained an especially strong personal element, which Myaskovsky called "the ferment" of creativity. Advancing ahead of the symphonies or following them, the quartets show many common, and most representative, marks of the

evolution of the composer's style. The mutual "gravitation" of the symphonies and quartets in the last two decades of Myaskovsky's creative activity was especially fruitful.

Sympathizing with everything advanced in art, Myaskovsky, according to his own words, did not attach self-sufficient importance to any "last word in musical techniques or inventions". As an artist of quite different mentality, he followed the nature of his gift to search for, and carve the way "from the live past of Russian music, through its violently pulsating present, to foresights of the future" (B.Asafiev).

The "mute strings", the reserve, and severe restraint of utterance suggest responsive concentration and disposition towards a philosophic comprehension of life in the listener, and promise to Myaskovsky's music a kind of glory that is not loud but durable.

The cycle of quartets that Myaskovsky collected in *Op.33* evolved during the years 1930-37 in a quite peculiar way. Re-addressing the genre of the quartet after a nearly twenty-year intermission, Myaskovsky wrote his *Quartet in A minor* at the verge of 1929/1930, and named it his *First Quartet* (Op. 33 No. 1). Next, literally in one go, the *Second Quartet in C minor* (Op. 33, No. 2) was finished by the early March 1930. At that same time, Myaskovsky included one of his "Conservatory" quartets the one in D minor, in Opus 33 as No.3, naming it his *Third Quartet*. Several years after, the composer added another "graduation" work to Opus 33, his *Fourth Quartet in F minor*, (Op. 33, No. 4).

Quartet No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33 No. 1 (1929-30)

"I have written a very difficult string quartet (a-moll)..." noted Myaskovsky in his diary of January 31, 1930. In his letter to Sergey Prokofiev of May 16 of the same year, Myaskovski complained again that the quartet was "...very difficult, and will only sound (when and if, of course) after a drilling rehearsal..."

The "difficult" quartet turned out to have a really difficult fate. It was not before March 1934 that the Quartet of the Union of Soviet Composers performed the piece for the first time in public (it is worth mentioning that the attempts by the Stradivarius Quartet and the Komitas Quartet in 1930 and 1931 failed). In November 1934, the piece was played by the Beethoven Quartet, but since then, Myaskovsky's *First Quartet* has appeared on concert hall posters just a couple of times. This recording is intended to discover the music of this most fundamental work of the composer.

The *Quartet in A minor* may be called dialectic as with no other work of the composer in this genre. Everything in it is motion and impulse, and everything is development and change. The pitch is set by the introductory theme of the first movement (*Poco rubato ma allegro ed agitato*), which straightens like a coiled steel tape – and indeed, it is the spring of the action. The sonata-like *allegro's* themes are presented in continuous development and establishment. As a matter of fact, all the facets of the classical sonata format (exposition, development, and reprise) become the ground for an animated and sometimes turbulent dialog of the main part and side parts, which leads them to convergence. The dramatism of the impulsive, nervously excited main theme subsides, foretelling its gradual "turning lyrical" in the quartet's slow movement and finale. The melancholy side theme, somewhat restrained

at first, is blossoming, getting filled with a thrilled emotion. But still, the coda sounding mysteriously and illusively secures an atmosphere of volatility and suspense...

The scherzo (*Allegro tenebroso*) written in a complex three-part form introduces a contrast of images and genres. The archetypal origins of the thematism (dances, games, and tales) are evident. It seems quite logical that the scherzo is the only movement in the quartet that is not related to the cycle's other movements in any way.

The third movement (*Andante sostenuto*), also in a three-part form, impresses you with the severe and austere pathos of declamation. Its monologue theme, lasting endlessly and in continuous "creation", borders the middle part, which is dominated, apart from the new-material elegiac fragment, by a lyrically transformed main theme of the first movement (in one case, though, this theme is quoted nearly "verbatim", as a reminiscence of the cycle's prologue and as a harbinger of the finale). The tumultuous wave-like advance of the main part of the finale (*Assai allegro quasi presto*), in its passages swiftly rushing down, revive the dynamic action, which was pushed aside for a while by the genre scherzo and meditative *Andante*. The second theme of the rondo sonata, a dancing tune in its nature and "a slightly obscene one", as the author humorously qualified it in his letter to Prokofiev, suddenly switches the action to another facet, which is more worldly and universally human. The troubled "frozen" chords appearing in some episodes and followed by a lyrical version of the first movement's main theme reminds us again of the conflicts that remain unsettled. But the advance is already irreversibly approaching the compact and dynamic coda, a clear and resolute ending of the cycle.

Quartet No. 2 in C minor, Op. 33 No. 2 (1930)

Writing down in his diary the date of completion of "a very difficult a moll string quartet" (January 31, 1930), Myaskovsky added, "I've taken up a broad kind of music". A comment typical for him. Not always willing to reconcile or oppose "the subjective" and "the objective" within one large composition, Myaskovsky every now and then created contrast-laden cycles of several pieces.

Arguably it is only the introductory bars of the first movement of the *Second Quartet*, a kind of epigraph, that seem to have moved there from the disturbed, violent, and nervous music of the *First Quartet*. The development of the basic melodic images of the *Allegro*, i.e. its emotional main part, and its tender and melancholy side part, is invaded by thrilled scanned chords of the "epigraph", but they just remind of the storm that has died down. The music of the *Allegro* ends in waning, fading chords, colorfully "tinted" with flageolets.

The viola solo is a peculiar "opening intonation" of the *Andante*, which is generally rendered in narrative tones (such is in particular the nature of the first theme). The middle episode is somewhat more vivid and graceful, presents an agreeable contrast to the narrative sections before and after, and even, to a certain extent, substitutes for a scherzo that is missing in the cycle.

The finale (*Vivace*) is the most definite movement in terms of its genre. Both of its themes, the first one with its sweeping, "quadrille" attitude (a ready-witted definition by Sergey Prokofiev) and the second one, which is more effortless and "round-dance-like", determine from the outset of the movement a mood of joyful exultation, just briefly clouded with dramatic outbursts and the epigraph reappearing towards the end to be recited in a scanned manner.

Quartet No. 3 in D minor, Op. 33 No. 3 (1911-26)

The *Third Quartet in D minor* that had been waiting in the composer's portfolio since the days of his graduation from St. Petersburg Conservatory was first performed due to enthusiasm of the young musicians of the State Stradivarius Quartet in March 1926. Myaskovsky was at first reluctant to agree to its public performance, but was satisfied in the end, noting in his letter to Prokofiev that the quartet "sounded excellent". Probably it was the success of this quartet with the audience that predetermined the future role of the quartet genre in his music.

The form of the *Third Quartet* is unusual: the two movements of the composition in fact comprise all the components of a traditional four-movement cycle. A short slow "introduction" (*Lento*) opens the first movement, *allegro non troppo, malinconico*. The author's notation emphasizes a melancholy shade in the music, which can be heard in expressive melodic intonations of the core themes, and dominates in the continuous movement of unaffectedly flowing and whimsically intertwining instrumental voices. But this impetuous speech seems to be moderated by moments of "contemplation" and self-absorbed thought. Such are the slow introduction and conclusion that border the *Allegro*, and the developed *Lento* episode based on the introduction's material in the middle of the first movement before development. Curiously, the lovely waltz-like theme, a side part of the sonata-like *Allegro*, is nothing else but a witty sequence of notes: b – re – gis – la – do – fa (Beregis' Lyadova, i.e. "beware Lyadov"). In this joking manner, Myaskovsky expressed both his obeisance to the maitre and the trembling of yesterday's student before the strict and pedantic professor.

The second movement, or *Theme with Variations*, is one of the most remarkable models of Myaskovsky's variation style. The theme was borrowed from the piano *Lullaby* by Edvard Grieg, Op.66 No.7; the composer himself, in his diary entries and in his letters, called the quartet "*Griegian*". The adorable tune so attractive in its melodious simplicity and primeval essentiality, is undoubtedly of a folk origin (the original title of Grieg's Opus 66 is "*Nineteen Previously Unpublished Norwegian Folk Songs Arranged for Piano*"). Myaskovsky is profound and diversified in exposing this artless theme in his variations. The lyrical fragments are excellent. They appear as some "wandering" round the theme, timid and "bashful" in the beginning (first variation), and an inspired poem (fifth variation), and the seventh variation remarkable for its fairytale color. The scherzo-like episodes (the second, fourth, and sixth variations), however diverse they are, have much in common: a dotted rhythm, brisk and resolute intonations, and dynamic thrust. His favorite polyphonic forms are represented too, such as a brief three-voiced canon (third variation), and a traditional final fugue where the theme is transformed with extraordinary rhythmic mastery. After a general pause, the variations' theme sounds again, this time only to say 'goodbye'.

String Quartet No. 4 in f minor, Op. 33 No. 4

The Fourth Quartet owes its second birth to its performers' Initiative. In early September 1937 Myaskovsky wrote in his diary, "*The Beethovenians*" want to play the *F minor quartet (1909)* in this season, they say it sounds perfect." In November, after the first rehearsals, the satisfied author commented, "*really sounds not bad. I made slight corrections on the move.*" The premiere performed by the Beethoven

Quartet took place on November 18, 1937. Thus, the piece written as early as in school years, two years before graduation from the Conservatoire, became the harbinger of the composer's mature quartet style.

The first movement (Andante. Allegro) opens in a slow thoughtful introduction. The lively syncopated main theme with its typical passionate flights is set off by a quieter, measured advance of the side part. However the contrast, both at the first appearance of these melodic images and in the development apex, does not go beyond the predominating lyrical mood. The themes are just slightly dramatized in the reprise, which takes us back to the initial, gradually fading bars of the introduction.

The second movement, Allegro risoluto, is a scherzo, a sample of a strictly delineated three-section form: vigorous, rhythmically springy extreme sections enclose the flowing "round-dance" trio.

The third movement, Andante, is a sonata form rarely met in the cycle's slow movements, with laconic development and a mirror reprise. Its first theme is an extended tune, full of wide breath and "sculptured". The pattern of the second theme, clearly of a Russian folk style, is woven from whimsically alternating duple and triple rhythmical figures.

The finale, Allegro motto, is an energetic, dynamically inspired rondo sonata. The genuinely quartet, polyphonically enhanced texture is at the same time harmonically transparent, and the advance of parts changing each other and inter-twining is towards a decisive and brief coda.

String Quartet No. 5 in e minor, Op. 47
(1938-1939)

Quartet No.5, dedicated to V. Y. Shebalin was composed in the winter of 1938/9 and first performed by the Beethoven Quartet on November 28, 1939. This quartet, as if growing from the symphonies of the 2nd half of the 30's, also "outgrew" them, towering above both by its formal perfection and by moving, sincere lyrical utterances. The *Fifth Quartet* reached the fusion of the inner world and life's voices, of the personal and extra- personal; which predicted the *21st Symphony* which appeared one year later.

The profound kinship of the key thematic images of the first movement, Allegro tranquillo, be it the first theme with its characteristic drooping intonations, or the second one, with more defined melodies, and covering a wider sound range, or, finally, the link part heaving in waves, with its active pulse seeming to push the motion - predetermined the form (sonata without development, in fact a sonatina), on one hand, and the very nature of this excited lyrical poem, on the other hand.

The second movement, Molto vivo, sussarando, is a virtuoso scherzo flashing by in a whirl. This laconic rondo with two skillfully interwoven song episodes impresses with intricate finishing and remarkable new colours.

The third movement, Andantino semplice (quasi andante), is a quiet unhurried tale fascinating with its simplicity and artlessness, and genuine folk manner of its message. The measured narration is set off by abrupt, lyrically rich music of the middle section.

The unique design of the quartet consists in moving the dramatic centre of gravity to the cycle's finale, Allegro motto e con brio. It is written in a developed Sonate form, its thematic material is markedly contrasting, the

development is full of springy rhythmical energy, and is abundant in bright polyphonic episodes. Your ear easily perceives the intonational relationship with the quartet movements already heard, while the quietly lucid coda is organic in completing this deeply poetical piece of music.

String Quartet No. 6 in g minor, Op. 49 (1939-1940)

The Sixth Quartet, Op.49, along with the *Fifth Quartet, Op.47* (written the year before), chronologically adjoins such a zenith of composition as his *21st Symphony, Op.51*. This triad of remarkable opuses crowned the persistent search for a new style characteristic of Myaskovsky's music of the 1930's. Clarity, expression, and plasticity of musical speech, and rare, really Pushkinian harmony of thought and feeling, bring together these compositions, otherwise each having an individual colour. Excited and frank lyrical outpouring, which added poetic features to the *Fifth Quartet*, give way to a more restrained and strict tone in the *Sixth*. Here, the form is carefully and rationally designed, and the movements' proportions are in classical harmony.

The first movement, Moderato con anima, written as a sonata, does not contain, however, any typical contrasts to make the action more dynamic in the thematism itself. Both side and link themes seem to grow from the main theme as its "sproutings". In this natural ramification of underlying melodic lines, deeply Russian both in structure and in the accents of the sub-part polyphony, we see the singularity of the lyrically radiant elegy opening the cycle. The second movement, Allegro vivo giocoso (the author's subtitle is *Burleska*, i.e. Joke), is a miniature, for scherzo. The puppet

march whimsically embroidered with scherzo-like figurations is in contrast to the middle section - a broadly sung trio. From here, threads lead to the lyrical meditation of the first movement, and the mournful melancholy of the third one, and to the vigorous finale.

The cycle's dramatic culmination comes in the third movement, *Andante lugubre* (the author's subtitle is *Malinconia*, i.e. melancholy), which is a lullaby (Myaskovsky's favourite genre), elevated and inspired with a deep emotion. It is marked with stern and steadfast color, and full of reserved but emotionally rich expression. The rondo finale, *Allegro energico e con fuoco*, marks a decisive breakthrough from the murky *Andante* into a domain of dear images that are rhythmically and intonationally active. Extremely attractive in the song-like episodes is a smooth combination of triple and duple times, typical for Russian folk melos and emphasizing the energetic advance of the main theme.

The *Sixth Quartet*, first performed on November 23, 1940, was dedicated to the Beethoven Quartet (D. Tsyganov, V. Shirinsky, V. Borisovsky, and S. Shirinsky). "*The Beethovenians*" (also favoured by Shostakovich) were the first performers of Myaskovsky's ten string quartets (starting with the *Fourth* in 1937).

In the autumn of 1941, Myaskovsky, among a large group of Moscow musicians, was evacuated to Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria. Their hospitable hosts were eager to interest the Muscovites in their ethnic folklore. Caucasian folk tunes served as thematic material for many compositions, the most noticeable of these written by Prokofiev, Alexandrov, and Myaskovsky.

String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, Op. 55 (1941)

Myaskovsky composed the *Seventh Quartet* in September 1941 in parallel with the *23rd Symphony*. But, unlike the somewhat mosaic pattern of the suite-symphony completely built on North Caucasian tunes, the *Seventh Quartet* is a more mediated creative interpretation of new musical images discovered by the composer, of his bright impressions from the magnificent nature of the Caucasus. From the very first pages of the opus, the utterance is set as quiet, unhurried, and mostly lyrical and epic. Both themes of the first movement, *Andantino* (sonata forms without development), seem to have been grown from one "root". Their ramifying "sproutings" of polyphonic variations intertwine building the *Andantino's* musical texture, laden with Russian song-tones.

The second movement, *Vivace e fantastico*, continues the line of "*fantastic*" scherzos so loved by Myaskovsky. It is a rondo by its structure; the rapidly spinning, twirling passages of the refrain are contrasted by diverse lyrical episodes. The musical traditions of the "Russian Orient", always free of self-sufficient exotics, show up primarily in the organic manner, in which he incorporated the only Caucasian folk tune quoted by him in the "Russian-speaking" quartet.

Nanook, a Balkar lyrical love song, is arranged in the middle of the Quartet's slow third movement, *Andante con moto*. The enclosing sections are kept in a slow triple-time motion. By its intonation, this simple waltz-like theme has its rather close prototype in the first, song-like episode of the scherzo that has just ended.

Another episode of that scherzo, a chromatically strained melodic line insistently traced by different voices, becomes one of the key musical images in the finale, *Vivacissimo*, written in the rondo-sonata form. This episode serves as a link between the decisive main

theme and the lively side theme. But not only that; the "through" thematism adds a peculiar summarizing feature to the finale, and, together with the intonational unity of the Quartet's different movements, cements the form of the whole cycle. The *Seventh Quartet* was first performed by the Beethoven Quartet in Moscow on July 12, 1942.

String Quartet No. 8 in f-sharp minor, Op. 59
(1942)

Myaskovsky wrote the *Eighth Quartet* in Tbilisi in the spring of 1942. It was first performed by the Beethoven Quartet in Moscow on March 21, 1943. It is a sad elegy dedicated to the memory of the composer's friend (Z. P. Feldman). The elegiac attitude is especially noticeable in the images of the first movement, *Allegro moderato*, where hidden pain and sincere sorrowful emotion can be heard. But the taciturn restraint of utterance and screened emotions prevail, to create together a rare clarity and transparency of the chamber style. Wise meditation, and lucid lyrical tones in the *Adagio* are represented above all in the beautiful melodious main theme (by the way, its melodic pattern reminds us of the first theme of the *Adagio* in the *Twentieth Symphony*). Appearing first in a brimming sonorous chorus of the strings, it extends in several parts, is surrounded with subparts, varies, gives way to small contrasting episode, and finally comes back. The finale, *Allegro drammatico*, ties up the dramatic knot of the entire cycle. Both themes of the finale, the steadfast and dynamic main theme and a broad and song-like side theme, are united with the first movement's main theme in spirited

development. It is recalled once again in the soulful

melancholic coda crowning the Quartet.

String Quartet No. 9 in d minor, Op. 62 (1943)

The composer attached a dedication to the Ninth Quartet, "*For the twentieth anniversary of The Beethoven Quartet; to D. Tsyganov, V. Shirinsky, V. Borisovsky, and S. Shirinsky.*" The quartet was first played by that renowned ensemble in Moscow on October 30, 1943. The very concept of the *Ninth Quartet* sets it somewhat apart from Myaskovsky's other quartets. Conceiving a powerful solemn finale as a glorification, in accordance with his dedication, the composer had to care about the dynamic equilibrium of the cycle's movements. This is why the quartet's sound texture is on the whole more solid and harmonically filled, although well-developed in terms of polyphony as always with Myaskovsky. This is the reason for its 'orchestral' nature, the predominance of quartet tutti's, and the impressive scales of tempo and dynamic contrasts. All three movements are written in a sonata form, and this form is interpreted by the composer differently for each.

The first movement, *Allegro inquieto*, is designed with an unquiet, and somewhat nervous motion, which is kept throughout the movement. Both themes, the excited main theme and a slower, smoother one, are akin in intonation, being of a similar lyrico-epic folk nature. Incessant, and eagerly directed, active advance of melodic parts in the development lead to an ample sonorous reprise and a fading coda, which is built on the side theme.

The intensity of the melodic current is also felt in the second movement titled *Andante appassionato*. *Allegro misterioso*, which combines the functions of a quartet

cycle's slow middle and a scherzo. The passionate main theme permeates the music of the whole movement, initially appearing in the violin solo monologue. Together with the lyrical side theme presented in different parts against the background of slowly and rhythmically swaying accompaniment, they make the exposition, and afterwards the rondo-sonata reprise, i.e. the domain of the Andante as such. As for the central episode, Allegro misterioso, it is a brilliant example of a virtuoso soaring 'magical' scherzo, which can so often be heard in Myaskovsky's music.

The finale, Allegro con brio, is full of magnificence and inspiration. The bright main theme opening the finale reminds us of a traditional Russian chant of glorification. Materially changing the rhythmical pattern of the old chant 'Many Years', Myaskovsky added velocity and dynamic thrust. Beautiful is the lyrical landscape of the side theme rendered in by two voices throughout (based on a Russian soldiers' marching song, which the composer noted down in the War 1914-18). And once again, as in the preceding movements (to which the finale is connected with intonational responses), the intensity of the genuinely symphonic development is impressive. The celebratory and solemn attitude of the finale is emphasized by full-blooded quartet sonority.

String Quartet No. 10 in F Major, Op. 67 No. 1 (1907-1945)

At the end of 1943, already a recognized master of the quartet genre, Myaskovsky focused on one of his earliest compositions. In November, he wrote in his diary, "*Been cleaning up my school-boy (1907) quartet.*" Preoccupied with a lot of other work (typically,

one of these occupations was editing and finishing of Mikhail Glinka's junior-age quartet), the composer could not complete his work on the quartet earlier than the end of 1944. After he heard it performed by the "*Beethovenians*" in his home, he made some corrections in the score, and noted in his diary of January 5, 1945, "*I've completed re-making and re-writing the quartet. It will be No.10.*" The composer's manuscript features a subtitle "*After old sketches*", which was edited out on publication in 1946. The premiere performed by the Beethoven Quartet took place in Moscow on May 20, 1945. The *Tenth Quartet* is Myaskovsky's only 'student' Quartet that was subjected, in his own words, to a radical re-make. The outcome was a composition, in which you can tell the hand of a mature master by many details of texture and theme development, and by the balance and harmony of the forms. But Myaskovsky as editor was also experienced enough to carefully retain in his restoration the spirit of youthful fervour and frankness of utterance. This was even more valuable because the clear unshadowed vitality and bright colours set this *F major quartet* apart from other early works where the spirit of rebellious tragic struggle predominates, and motifs of gloomy and hopeless despair are heard.

The sonata-like allegro of the first movement, Allegro non troppo, is based on a main part and side parts that are contrasting in their pattern, but similar in their mood. Their features are an active attitude and clear and definite melodic outlines. The binding elements are involved equally in the exposition and in the laconic development, and in the extended reprise ending in a quiet coda typical for Myaskovsky.

The second movement is a merry and witty scherzo marked Vivo scherzando, with whimsical rhythms and

an expressive cantilena middle, followed by a slow and lyrically concentrated third movement named Andante con moto, lagrimabile. Both are written in a developed three-part form. It is most notable that as early as in his first ("schoolboy") quartet, he shows so clearly most typical features of his wilting manner, i.e. his care for intonational affinity easily perceived by ear, for unity of thematic material in all of the movements, and polyphonically rich, full quartet sonority. The finale, a dashing rondo titled Allegro motto e con brio, attracts with its bright resolute vigour and strong, sometimes orchestral texture. The development is oriented at the final fugue and at the final broad reappearance of the rondo's refrain.

***String Quartet No. 11 in E-flat Major, Op. 33 No. 2* (1945)**

The *Eleventh Quartet*, subtitled "Reminiscences" and dedicated to A. Ikkonikov, make a kind of diptych with the preceding *Tenth Quartet* (similar macro-cycles are not infrequent with him, be it symphonies or chamber ensembles). Both quartets are retrospective. The *Tenth*, as mentioned before, is a radical remake of his "schoolboy", ie student, quartet of 1907, the composer's first attempt in the quartet genre. As to *the Eleventh*, it refers us to the early piano miniatures and to the lyrical vocal works of the 1930's. This is why the quartet's subtitle, "Reminiscences" is quite meaningful. The piano pieces of the years 1906-1907 were written as exercises for the class of A. K. Lyadov. Generally, Myaskovsky was rather thrifty and careful about managing his archive: he used melodic discoveries of his 'school-day' works later in his symphonies, chamber ensembles, and orchestral and piano cycles. In the *Eleventh Quartet*, the genre-origins show

themselves even more distinctly than in the *Tenth*. Without burdening the cycle with any psychological concept, the composer seems to be relaxing, recalling memories dear to his heart.

The unhurried narrative outset of the first movement, Allegro tranquillo, sets the pace for the whole cycle. The main part and the side part, in a sonata form, are strongly bed together with bonding "cement". Their polyphonic development is distinguished by special elegance and ease, a light quartet style, and a transparent, highlighted instrumental texture.

The second movement, Andante con moto, is the quartet's only 'vocal' reminiscence among the piano pieces from old notebooks appearing in their new guise. The author addressed a romantic song from his *Lermontov cycle* (1936), which had been left out of the printed edition. The resulting instrumental ballad, while retaining its vocal, "singing" nature, gained subparts twining round the romance theme. The steadily developing ballad is set off by an unexpected emotional outburst in the middle section of the Andante.

The third movement, Allegretto pensieroso, is a slow, at-home cozy waltz. The smooth spinning of the repeated waltz figure, every time gaining new detailing variations, makes a combination of a laconic rondo and a variational form. The finale, Allegro non troppo, giocoso e festivo, is a lively dance. The main part, being a refrain of the compacted rondo sonata, is a sprightly Russian jumping dance, rushing in from the very first bars, against the background of humming 'bagpipe' basses. The side part advancing in a more moderate tempo is of a round-dance nature, which is emphasized by the 'richer' sound of the quartet tutti. The motion is alternated with contrasting episodes, one featuring characteristic accents and broken rhythms, the other being the gentlest, 'heavenly'

intermezzo. In the coda, the 'jumping dance' main theme is definitely established.

***String Quartet No. 12 in G Major, Op. 77* (1947)**

The *Twelfth Quartet* (dedicated to D. Kabalevsky) was composed in the summer and autumn of 1947, to be first performed by the Beethoven Quartet on November 30 of the same year. In fact it is Myaskovsky's first fundamental addressing of the quartet genre in the post-war years. Indeed, the *Tenth Quartet* whose premiere took place in May 1945 had grown entirely from the early Conservatory experience of 1907. As with the *Eleventh Quartet* and played by the "Beethovenians" in December 1945, it is also inspired by previously written pieces (from which the author borrowed a few themes), and has a meaningful subtitle of "Memories". The *Twelfth Quartet* is one of Myaskovsky's most harmonious compositions. Chronologically, it adjoins the *Twenty-fifth Symphony* (also the first post-war one). A. Ikonnikov reasonably called it 'a peaceful symphony.' Its music is overflowing with the boundless innate air of Russian unrestricted expanses, it breathes peace and quiet and happiness. The *Twelfth Quartet* is close to the *Twenty-fifth Symphony* not only regarding the dates of its writing. The whole opus bears an impression of luminosity and conciliation, a reflection of pale sunbeams. The general attitude of unhurried (with moderate tempos prevailing even in the fast movements) and soft utterance is maintained throughout the cycle. Understandably, all of its movements, including the pungently rhythmized scherzo, are ended in a pianissimo: the music fades away as if going out... The Quartet's cheerful and flexible melodism, and the natural flow and variational development of musical ideas or themes are attractive

in both their serious and genuinely excited attitudes.

The slow introduction to the first movement (Andante. Allegro moderato) written in a sonata form will re-emerge as the theme of the opening four-voice fugato in the third movement (Andante con espressione). The music here is marked with a specific archaic colour; Russian folk epics or slow, measured narrations are its distant prototypes. The perfect quartet sonority is full of charm; the fantastic scherzo (Allegro fantastico) is instrumented in a fresh inventive way - be it the fast framing sections or the contrasting melodious centre. The key melodic images in the sonata allegro of the first movement and the final rondo sonata (Allegro non troppo) are affiliated in their intonations.

The finale strikingly displays folklore round-dance features, with the dancing refrain emphasized by song-like episodes, sometimes of a severe nature. The abundant thematic bridges render integrity to the Quartet; its musical texture is permeated with polyphony - 'threaded with subvoices' as Russians might say. The music, loyal to tradition, retained also the author's characteristic touch.

***String Quartet No. 13 in a minor, Op. 86* (1949)**

In the summer of 1949, Myaskovsky worked on drafts of his *Twenty-seventh Symphony*, looking through the sketches from two years earlier. The composer used one such sketch in the scherzo of a new *Thirteenth Quartet* which he was composing at the same time. The master's last quartet proved to be not only a satellite, but also an equal in age with his last symphony. They were performed nearly on the same day, too, but alas, after the composer's death: a severe illness took him in August 1950. In his diary, Myaskovsky noted that on

November 16, 1949 he played the symphony on the piano four hands with Alexander Gauk who was visiting him. Gauk was dying to conduct its performance in concert soonest. According to the conductor, Myaskovsky replied to this, "You will play it.. later?" The premiere of the *Twenty-seventh Symphony* was presented under the baton of Alexander Gauk in the Column Hall of the House of Unions on December 9, 1950. The day before, on December 8, "the *Beethovenians*" performed his *Thirteenth Quartet* for the second time; Myaskovsky dedicated the opus to them, the ensemble that gave life to most of the his quartets (the Quartet's premiere was on October 21, 1950, in the Minor Hall of Moscow Conservatory.) The Quartet's world of images, wide and diversified as it is, may be defined as lyrico-epical, a combination very much typical for Russian folk music. It is amazing how the quartet texture could absorb or take in the lyric element of an ancient drawling song, or stern paladin epics, and lullabies, and the scherzo tricks of Old Russia's vagrant musicians.

The main theme of the first movement (Moderato) appears first in a deep cello register, and then gains brighter colors to "soar up" to the first violin. As always with Myaskovsky, the main part of the sonata allegro is widely developed and includes bonding melodic material leading to a side part (lively instrumental folk-tune, becoming even the theme of a small "toy-like" fugue, and finally getting the wings of a broad chant-like melody. The laconic development does not so much oppose, but rather just compares themes close in their nature: in the culmination, they merge to open way to a reprise and to a luminous coda.

The dashing scherzo (Presto fantastico) is much wider than its genre definition. Running in a hurricane like a

fantastic galloping horseman, the first theme gives way to another one - passionate, full of ardent impulse and dramatic tension. The scherzo's slow middle combines deep meditation and live human emotion with some mysterious magical images in the style of Russian folklore or fable-painting. The scherzo is framed with the first two fast and passionate themes returning in the inverse order. Andante con moto e motto cantabile is distinguished by its bright major-key colour. The chorus of strings sings a broad song-like theme fascinating in its warmth and cordiality.

The middle section is darkened with mournful intonations; its minor-key nature is enhanced as it develops: the very timbre of muted strings renders exciting stress to the sound. The recurrent chorus, ample and sonorous, gains a special scale and luminosity, moderating and pacifying sorrowful repercussions of the minor-key middle. The final rondo-sonata (molto vivo energico) rushes in with the first sounds of the steadfast and vivid theme, which is rash and resilient. Its resolute and impulsive rhythm is emphasized by a tremulous lyrical outpouring; expanding, It develops into a new melody returning us to the song images of the previous movements, both elegiac and bright.

The finale is centered about a powerful and stern image of tremendous might expressed in column-like chords. Its exposition in variations brings us to a reprise and a manly coda crowning the Quartet in the vigorous first theme. Romain Rolland understood a string quartet as "an instrument for recognition of thoughts and for their analysis - the most flexible, most precise, and most nervous of all can ever be found in the entire arsenal of music... In a quartet's sounding image, no tricks can help if the line is poor." As if echoing the remarkable

musical writer, Myaskovsky confessed to Prokofiev as early as 1924, "...It may seem strange now, but sonority as such does not appeal to me seriously - that is how obsessed I am with expressing the idea." These words of Nikolai Yakovlevich Myaskovsky are the credo of the author of thirteen string quartets in making a kind of encyclopedia of quartet writing. Behind these words we see the image of his modest and profound muse appealing to us with its "uncommon aspect."

Notes by Iosif Raiskin, translated by Sergey Suslov

The **Taneyev Quartet** has rightly earned the reputation as one of the finest Russian string quartets from the latter half of the 20th century. In the many decades of its existence, the Quartet has performed over 6,000 concerts in dozens of cities of the USSR, and in many European countries, the United States, and in Japan. Among the soloist-partners of the legendary ensemble were D. Oistrakh, S. Richter, M. Rostropovich, B. Davidovich, N. Petrov, M. Pletnev, E. Virsaladze, and other famous musicians.

This talented ensemble has made the Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Taneyev, Myaskovsky and Shostakovich quartets its specialties, though its repertory has been extensive, taking in modern works by Salamanov (see NFPMA 99102, 99109 Complete Quartets), Basner, Chernov, and Yevlakhov (NFPMA 99129 'Leningrad String Quartets') and Yuri Falik (99124), as well as other Russian mainstream fare by Glinka, Borodin, and, of course, a number of composers outside the Russian sphere. The Taneyev Quartet has made numerous recordings, mostly for the old Soviet- era Melodiya company. Many of these have been reissued exclusively

by Northern Flowers and some by other labels.

The Quartet was formed in 1946 by four second-year music students at the Leningrad Conservatory who all shared the birth year of 1927. The four players were Vladimir Ovcharek (first violin), Grigory Lutsky (second violin), Vissarion Soloviov (viola), and Beynus Morozov (cello). The original name of the ensemble was the Leningrad Quartet. After graduation (1950-1951) the four players became members of the Yevgeny Mravinsky-led Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, but it also managed to maintain a considerable schedule of quartet concerts. In 1963 the ensemble adopted the name Leningrad Taneyev Quartet, but it would later become known simply as the Taneyev Quartet. S.I. Taneyev was one of its favourite composers: it had celebrated the centenary of his birth in 1956 by performing all his quartets in a highly acclaimed series of Leningrad concerts (and much later recorded them, NFPMA 9933-37). In the 1960s the ensemble developed a close relationship with Shostakovich, and in 1974 performed the premiere of his *Fifteenth Quartet*.

By this time, the personnel had changed: Josif Levinzon replaced cellist Morozov in 1967. Two further changes took place in 1984 after these recordings: Alexander Stang replaced Lutsky and Vladimir Stopichev replaced Soloviov. Restrictions on the quartet's travel were lifted around this time, and the Taneyev players were allowed to concertize in Western Europe and the United States. Its first U.S. tour took place in 1989 and was a resounding success. It quickly developed an international reputation, not just from concert appearances but from numerous records that are now in the golden treasury of the world recording, such as the complete sets of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, Myaskovsky and Taneyev Quartets.

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