

NAXOS

GINASTERA

String Quartets (Complete)

Ensō Quartet
Lucy Shelton, Soprano



Alberto Ginastera (1916–1983) String Quartets

Alberto Ginastera, the foremost Argentinian composer of his epoch, developed his art over the years into a profound synthesis of national and contemporary elements. His style evolved from the vividly nationalistic works of his early years into a musical language that was modernistic yet constantly evoked the roots of his cultural identity.

Born in Buenos Aires to parents of Catalan and Italian descent, Ginastera showed musical aptitude from an early age. In 1936 he entered the National Conservatory of Music, the orchestral suite from his ballet *Panambi*, being given its première at the Teatro Colón soon after. The composer was to accept a number of academic posts throughout his life but, as a well known civil libertarian, he came under frequent scrutiny from the Perón regime. As a result, he moved to the United States for a short period between 1945 and 1947, taking the opportunity to study with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood. In 1948 he became Director of the Conservatory of Music and Scenic Arts at the National University of La Plata. Three years later he made his first trip to Europe for a performance of his *String Quartet No. 1* in Frankfurt. In 1958 Ginastera was appointed professor at La Plata and Dean at the Catholic University of Argentina (1958-1963). In 1962 he took charge of the Latin American Centre for Advanced Musical Studies at the Instituto Torcuato di Tella (1963-71). His opera *Don Rodrigo* (1963-4), based on a twelve-tone series, had its première at the Lincoln Center, New York in 1966. Its success brought about a further commission from the Opera Society of Washington for *Bomarzo* (1966-7). In 1971, having separated from his first wife, he married the Argentine cellist, Aurora Nátola, and moved to Europe, settling in Geneva. His final decade produced many outstanding works, among them the *String Quartet No. 3*. Ginastera's prolific output comprised four operas, orchestral works, several concertos, choral and solo vocal pieces, a wide range of chamber and instrumental compositions, eleven film scores, and incidental music for half a dozen dramas.

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 20 (1948) was given its première by the Mozart Quartet in Buenos Aires on 24th October, 1949. The work is representative of his second phase of compositional style which Ginastera called *subjective nationalism* (1947-1957), commenting that 'it was time to drop ethnic realism in favour of the creation of an imagined folklore'. This contrasted with his former approach of *objective nationalism* (1934-1947), where works such as *Panambi, Op. 1* (1937), a ballet on a legend of the Guaraní Indians, *Danzas argentinas, Op. 2*, (1937) for pianoforte, and *Estancia, Op. 8*, (1941), a ballet of a day on a ranch with the *gauchos* at the centre of the action, were all profoundly influenced by traditional Argentinian elements.

In his first *String Quartet* Alberto Ginastera incorporates rhythmic and thematic aspects of his country's folk-music while advancing towards a rigorous, dissonant and varied vocabulary. Thus though the first movement, *Allegro violento ed agitato*, is propelled by rhythms which evoke images of *gauchos*, the cowboys of Argentina, the complexity of the textures is reminiscent of Bartók and Stravinsky. The fast second movement, a scherzo, may present distinct impressions of the pampas but the technically intricate string effects, accumulated trills, and interaction of parts, suggest wider horizons looking towards post-war Europe. The emotional centre of the quartet is the third movement, *Calmo e poetico*, where the first violin sings its melody before the lead is passed to the cello, an instrument for which Ginastera frequently composed. *Alleggeramente rustico*, a folk-inspired theme in the *criolla* tradition concludes the work, its rapidly changing time signatures expressing a fiery tension ultimately resolved within the triumphantly frenetic climax.

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 26, completed in 1958 and revised in 1968, was commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation and had its première with the Juilliard String Quartet at the first Inter-American

Music Festival in Washington D.C. on 19th April, 1958. Ginastera had progressed to his third phase, that of *neo-expressionism* (1958-1983), involving serial composition, microtones, indeterminacy, and polytonality. A further development is the quartet's five movement structure, a break from the traditional four movement classical quartet.

The opening establishes the twelve-tone row on which the movement is constructed but Ginastera allows himself sufficient freedom not to compose throughout in strict serialism. The *Allegro rustico* is divided between pulsating rhythms and quieter passages that are searching, intense, and reflective. The *Adagio angoscioso* (slow and anguished) movement expresses introspection rising to a dramatic climax. In ternary form the first part includes viola and cello solos. The middle section, freely atonal but not serial, progresses towards a finale heralded by a cello solo and the return of the first motif. The *Presto magico*, in rondo form, with two reprises of the main thematic material and two trio episodes, provides the hinge between the framing outer movements. This virtuosic scherzo exploits effects such as *glissandi* and *pizzicato*, with contrasting thematic fragments from the first violin. The fourth movement, *Libero e rapsodico*, begins with a violin cadenza stating the main theme, and moves to a cello cadenza, a solo by the second violin, and a final variation performed by the viola. *Furioso*, structured in the form of *Sonata-Rondo*, brings the quartet to an exciting conclusion with agitated rhythms, perpetual motion, syncopations and explosive energy.

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 40 (1973), had its première with the Juilliard String Quartet and the soprano Benita Valente in Dallas on 4th February, 1974, and was written shortly after Ginastera's move to Geneva and his marriage to Aurora Nátola. Following Schoenberg's precedent in his *String Quartet, Op. 10* (1908) of bringing a soprano voice into two movements, Ginastera goes further and sets four poems for voice, only the second movement being for instruments alone. An understanding of this work is therefore partially dependent on an awareness of the meaning of the songs.

The first movement, *Contemplativo*, a setting of Juan Ramón Jiménez's poem *La Música*, celebrating love and the music of love, opens with an introduction evoking night, after which the singer presents the poem in four distinct sections in a mixture of song and speech. The first episode brings in the beautiful image of stars like lilies in the endless firmament, the woman's passion giving meaning to the universe itself. The second part starts with the words *De pronto* (Suddenly), the 'impassioned outcry shattering the darkness'. The third unit arrives out of quietness, moving towards a vividly dissonant conjunction of voice and strings and ending on *amor* (love). The final two lines are sung 'normally', long lingering notes evoking *¡La música./mujer desnuda/ corriendo loca por la noche pura!* (Music, naked woman, running crazed through the pure night!). *Fantastico* allows the strings their nocturnal moment, with fragments of sound like voices in the night, first intermittent, later together, rising to a passionate chorus, and back into quiet poignancy, though the composer has the capacity to surprise at any time. The third movement, *Amoroso*, centres on *Canción de Belisa*, a song from Federico García Lorca's play *The Love of Don Perlimplín for Belisa in Their Garden*. Perlimplín, a shy old bachelor, decides to marry the beautiful Belisa, who is half his age. He hears her singing this song and finds her irresistible:

*Love, love.
Between my secret thighs,
The sun swims like a fish.
Cold water through the rushes,
Love.
Cock crow and the night is fleeing!
Do not let it go, Oh no!*

As Perlimplín is unable to consummate the marriage, Belisa betrays him with a procession of other suitors while he lies asleep. In the morning he wakes with a pair of gilt horns on his head but in a strangely happy mood. Disguising himself as a young lover in a red cape Perlimplín manages to seduce Belisa, then goes off-stage

and returns bleeding from a self-inflicted knife wound. Belisa removes his cape and finds that it is indeed Perlimplín though she does not as yet grasp the full truth of what has happened. He dies in her arms. In time Belisa will realise that she has killed her true love. Appropriately marked *Drammatico*, the fourth movement which features Rafael Alberti's *Morir al sol* (Death in the Sun) contains the most tragic of the four songs. In a dramatic opening, where the soprano enters almost immediately, we hear that '*The soldier has fallen, the woods weep each morning for him*'. The mood intensifies in the central section where the singer is almost shouting with grief. Finally the singer re-creates the howling of a dog in lamentation for the dead

soldier. For the last movement, *Di nuovo contemplativo*, Ginastera chose *Ocaso* (Twilight, sunset), another poem by Jiménez. The movement starts with plaintive strings celebrating the duality of music and silence, '*the sound of gold*' which '*goes to eternity*', and evoking the sadness of listening to that '*gold that goes to eternity and the silence that remains*'. The soprano's demanding rôle is characterized by a sustained high note on '*eternidad*' (eternity), and a further extraordinarily prolonged note at the end of the exquisitely poignant finale.

Graham Wade

Lucy Shelton

Internationally acclaimed American soprano Lucy Shelton is the only artist ever to have won two Walter W. Naumburg Awards. She has worked closely with some of the most important composers of our time, including Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, György Kurtág, Kaija Saariaho and Oliver Knussen, many of whom have written expressly for her. She has given premières of more than a hundred works and her discography includes over fifty recordings. Though contemporary music is her speciality, Shelton is a distinguished performer of music spanning four centuries. A quintessential collaborative artist, she has appeared with nearly all of the major orchestras in the United States and Europe and is a frequent guest with her vast repertoire of vocal chamber music at festivals such as Tanglewood, Ojai, Santa Fe, Aspen, Salzburg, Kuhmo, Aldeburgh and the BBC Proms. Lucy Shelton's primary mentor was the legendary American mezzo-soprano Jan de Gaetani.

Photo: Beth Kelly



Ensō Quartet

Since its inception in 1999 the United States based Ensō String Quartet has been acclaimed for their vibrant and passionate performances in major concert halls throughout North America as well as in Europe, Central America, Australia and New Zealand. In addition to audience appreciation and critical acclaim, the quartet has earned its place in the chamber music world with top prizes in the Banff International String Quartet and Concert Artists Guild International competitions. The members of the Ensō String Quartet are sought after as teachers and chamber music coaches. The quartet has served as faculty for the Boston University Tanglewood Institute and as Lecturers in Music at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. The instruments used in this recording are a matched set made in 2006 by London-based luthier Nigel Harris, generously on loan to the quartet by Christopher Marshall. This is the Ensō String Quartet's second recording for Naxos following the release of the string quartets of Ignaz Pleyel (8.557496 & 8.557497). www.ensoqueartet.com



Photo: Richie Hawley

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 40

Vocal Texts

10 *Movement I*

La Música

En la noche tranquila,
eres el agua, melodía pura,
que tienes frescas – como nardos
en un vaso insondable—las estrellas.

De pronto, surtidor
de un pecho que se parte,
el chorro apasionado rompe
la sombra – como una mujer
que abriera los balcones sollorizando,
desnuda, a las estrellas, con afán
de un morirse sin causa,
que fuera loca vida inmensa.

¡El pecho de la música!
¡Cómo vence la sombra monstruosa!

¡El pecho de la música!
¡Redoma de pureza mágica; sonora, grata
lágrima; bella luna negra –
todo, como agua eternal entre la sombra humana;
luz secreta por márgenes de luto – ;
con un misterio
que nos parece ¡ay! de amor!

¡La música; –
mujer desnuda,
corriendo loca por la noche pura! –

– *Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881–1958)*

In the tranquil night,
You are the rain, pure melody,
keeping the stars alive –
Like lilies in a fathomless vase.

Suddenly, like the flowing
from a heart that breaks,
the passionate outburst
shatters the darkness –
like a woman who might sobbingly
open the balcony wide to the stars
in her nakedness, with eagerness to
die without a reason,
which might be but a mad abundant life.

The strength of music!
How it vanquishes the monstrous darkness!

The strength of music!
Vial of magic purity; sonorous, grateful
weeping; lovely black moon –
all, like rain eternal within human darkness;
secret light along margins of mourning – ;
with mystery
which seems, Oh, to be love!

Music;
– woman unclad,
crazily running through the spotless night!

12 *Movement III*

Canción de Belisa

Amor, amor.
Entre mis muslos cerrados,
nada como un pez el sol.
Agua tibia entre los juncos,
Amor.
¡Gallo que se va la noche!
¡Que no se vaya, no!

– *Federico García Lorca (1898–1936)*

Love, love.
Between my secret thighs,
the sun swims like a fish.
Calid water through the rushes,
Love.
Cock crow and the night is fleeing!
Do not let it go, Oh no!

13 *Movement IV*

Morir al sol

Yace el soldado. El bosque
baja a llorar por él cada mañana.

Yace el soldado. Vino
a preguntar por él un arroyuelo.

Morir al sol, morir,
viéndolo arriba,
cortado el resplandor
en los cristales rotos
de una ventana sola,
temeroso su marco
de encuadrar una frente
abatida, unos ojos
espantados, un grito ...

Morir, morir, morir,
bello morir cayendo
el cuerpo en tierra, como
un durazno ya dulce,
maduro, necesario ...

Yace el soldado. Un perro
solo ladra por él furiosamente.

– *Rafael Alberti (1902–1999)*

The soldier lies supine. The woods
Come down to weep for him each morning's dawn.

The soldier lies supine. A little brook
Came down to ask for him.

To die under the sun, to die
Seeing it above,
Its splendour broken
Through the shattered panes
Of a single window
Whose sill is fearful
Of framing a sorrow-stricken
Brow, eyes full of
Dread, a cry ...

To die, to die, to die,
Beautiful dying, the body
Falling to earth, like
A fully ripe peach,
Sweet, needed ...

The soldier lies supine. Only a dog
Barks furiously for him.

14 *Movement V*

Ocaso

¡Oh, qué sonido de oro que se va,
de oro que ya se va a la eternidad;
qué triste nuestro oído, de escuchar
ese oro que se va a la eternidad,
este silencio que se va a quedar
sin su oro que se va a la eternidad!

– *Juan Ramón Jiménez*

Oh what a sound of gold will now remain,
Of gold that's going to eternity;
How sad is our listening as we strain
To hear the gold that goes to eternity
This silence that is going to remain
Without its gold that goes to eternity!

Translations by Eloise Roach

Texts:

La Música and *Ocaso* by Juan Ramón Jiménez, used by permission.

Canción de Belisa

from AMOR DE DON PERLIMPLÍN CON BELISA EN SU JARDÍN
(THE LOVE OF DON PERLIMPLIN AND BELISA IN THE GARDEN)
by Federico García Lorca.

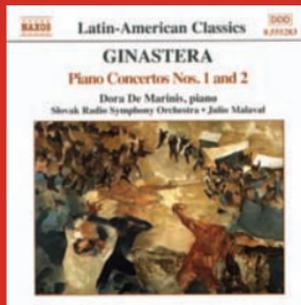
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Morir al sol by Rafael Alberti, used by permission.

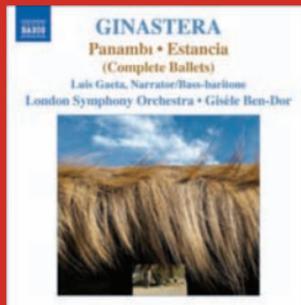
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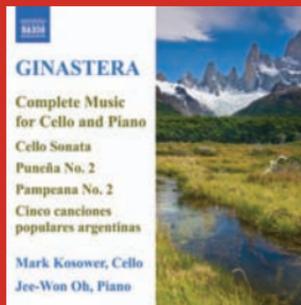
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Naxos's recording of Ginastera's Complete Music for Cello and Piano (8.570569) was hailed for 'the music's percussive rhythms as well as its reflective and mysterious melodic invention' by *The Strad*. Similarly, each of his highly individual and engaging string quartets abound in kinetic energy, glowingly evocative writing and the ever-present rhythms and sounds of his native Argentinean music. In his expressive *Third String Quartet* a solo soprano, fully integrated into the quartet texture, sings texts by Alberti, Jiménez and Lorca to create an intensely coloured spectrum of words and music.

Alberto
GINASTERA
(1916–1983)

**String Quartet No. 1,
Op. 20**

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------|
| 1 | Allegro violento ed agitato | 4:32 |
| 2 | Vivacissimo | 3:44 |
| 3 | Calmo e poetico | 8:06 |
| 4 | Allegramente rustico | 3:54 |

**String Quartet No. 2,
Op. 26**

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 5 | Allegro rustico | 6:11 |
| 6 | Adagio angoscioso | 5:58 |
| 7 | Presto magico | 3:59 |
| 8 | Libero e rapsodico | 5:56 |
| 9 | Furioso | 4:19 |



Ensō Quartet
*** Lucy Shelton, Soprano**

**String Quartet No. 3,
Op. 40 ***

- | | | |
|--|------------------------|------|
| 10 | Contemplativo | 7:51 |
| Text: <i>La Música</i> (Juan Ramón Jiménez) | | |
| 11 | Fantastico | 4:45 |
| 12 | Amoroso | 6:29 |
| Text: <i>Canción de Belisa</i> , from <i>El amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín</i> (Federico García Lorca) | | |
| 13 | Drammatico | 2:31 |
| Text: <i>Morir a sol</i> (Rafael Alberti) | | |
| 14 | Di nuovo contemplativo | 4:26 |
| Text: <i>Ocaso</i> (Juan Ramón Jiménez) | | |



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Playing Time
73:31



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