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PAUL WRANITZKY (1756–1808), ED. NANCY NOVEMBER  
*SIX SEXTETS FOR FLUTE, OBOE, VIOLIN, TWO VIOLAS, AND CELLO*  
Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era 87  
Middleton: A-R Editions, 2012  
pp. xi + 317, ISBN 978 0 89579 730 8

Most current studies and performances of late classical Viennese chamber music continue to be dominated by the usual names that remain (rightly) the stalwarts of the period: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert. The string quartet, too, has been consistently held up (probably correctly) as the paragon of chamber genres of the period, but this has sometimes been maintained at the expense of a larger body of music for mixed instruments. Within the A-R Editions series *Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era*, Nancy November has made a cleanly presented, useful and very welcome contribution that goes another step towards filling the gaps in the publication of Wranitzky's music and also deepens our understanding of the variety of chamber music composed for mixed ensembles in Vienna in the final years of the eighteenth century.

November's edition opens with a useful, though cursory, biography of the composer. The brevity may be due to editorial constraints, but with so few details of the composer's life available in English, this biography could have been rather more substantial. Wranitzky's life is typical of so many Bohemian and Moravian composers of the era who sought to make a career for themselves – a great many naturally gravitated to Vienna, the capital of the empire. Wranitzky has retained his small place in a few music histories for several reasons: first, for having been appointed by Beethoven to conduct the premiere of the latter's First Symphony; second, for his popular and successful singspiel *Oberon* (1789), which is occasionally revived today. He also acted as something of a musical diplomat on several occasions, playing vital mediating roles between Haydn and the *Tonkünstler-Societät*, as well as helping the widowed Constanze Mozart negotiate with the publisher André. Although generally held in high esteem in his lifetime, Wranitzky had essentially been forgotten by the Viennese public by the time of his death in 1808, as November rightly notes. The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* put matters rather bluntly in Wranitzky's obituary (9 November 1808, 92), claiming that he 'never achieved fame and never earned it'. In a contrasting tone to the latter bleak assessment, November offers a quotation from Fétis, who lamented in his *Biographie universelle* (Brussels, 1844) that Wranitzky's music 'was in fashion when it was new because of his natural melodies and brilliant style . . . I recall that, in my youth, his works held up very well in comparison with those of Haydn. Their premature abandonment today has been a source of astonishment for me.'

One might have hoped that comments like this from Fétis might have drawn some remarks from the editor about notions of 'naturalness' and changes in style at the time. November also might have offered a more vigorous challenge to some of the subsequent reception of Wranitzky: he was not merely a tuneful composer of the kind that was so typical of the Czech lands at the time, but often a pioneering and modern-leaning figure – particularly in his later symphonies. Not only did some of those works garner much-deserved musical attention, but some also raised eyebrows for political reasons, including his Symphony in C major (Op. 2, 1790) with the title *A Magyar Nemzet Öröme* (Joy of the Hungarian Nation) and his 1797 *Grande sinfonie caractéristique pour la paix avec la République française* (Op. 31), the premiere of which was forbidden by imperial decree because of the politically provocative subject matter. Wranitzky was a personal friend of Beethoven, and it is widely known that the slow movement of Op. 31 contains a funeral march subtitled 'The Fate and Death of Louis XVI' – an idea that surely captured Beethoven's imagination for his Symphony No. 3.



Wranitzky was a prolific composer of chamber music, his output in that area being dominated by around fifty-four string quartets, thirty string trios and twenty-five string quintets. Helping to explain the preponderance of the all-string chamber music genres, November quotes an 1810 panegyric to the string quartet (in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*) by Wilhelm Petiscus (1763–1825), who alleged that ‘a combination of wind instruments with string instruments never gives as beautiful and pure a result as four string instruments’ (16 May 1820, 520–521). Again, November is right to argue (viii) that Petiscus is addressing an idea of ‘true’ chamber music that would have been unknown to Wranitzky in the 1790s.

These six sextets were published in Vienna by Hoffmeister around 1795 and without opus number (they are not listed in Dlabac’s works list for Wranitzky (Gottfried Johann Dlabac, *Allgemeines historisches Künstler-Lexicon für Böhmen und zum Theil auch für Mähren und Schlesien* (Prague: G. Haase, 1815)). They represent the composer’s biggest chamber works (in terms of number of parts and length), and November posits the idea that they may be arrangements of lost symphonies (viii); a manuscript copy of the sextets in an unidentified hand in the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna even refers to them as ‘Sechs Sinfonien’. This is a reasonable suggestion, as Wranitzky made something of a habit of making chamber arrangements of his operas, symphonies and incidental music. November also brings clarity to a few areas relating to the sources of the sextets, such as correcting Milan Poštolka’s claim (‘Thematisches Verzeichnis der Sinfonien Pavel Vranický’s’, *Miscellanea musicologica* 20 (1967), 101–147) that the Musikfreunde copy is an autograph (the hand is yet to be identified). If the sextets are indeed arrangements of symphonies, they are likely to be from very early (now lost) works, as four of the six are in three movements (numbers 4 and 5 both have four movements), whereas Wranitzky’s surviving symphonies are in four movements.

Whatever their origins, Wranitzky makes the most of the instrumental colours and possibilities in these delightful works. The Sextet No. 1 (in B flat major) has a remarkable opening movement, both in terms of its length and its harmonic surprises. I was particularly struck by the *minore* in the middle of the concluding Rondo, where the lilting character is interrupted by fortissimo unisons and octaves – a rustic sonority bizarrely heard here amid chromatic imitation. Another attractive trait in the set is Wranitzky’s fondness for creating three pairs of instruments with call-and-response or imitative passages (this happens in several of the works, but in No. 2 in G in particular). Sextet No. 5 (in F major) has a horn topos running through it and an enjoyable theme and variations to conclude.

As we have come to expect from A-R Editions, the volume is neatly presented in a large format for ease of reading. As a score, the font size is rather large, but parts are apparently available from the publishers on request. The composer seems to have played close attention to articulation in these works, and that might have been explored in a little more detail. Serious questions should be asked of the decision to replace the original strokes in the Hoffmeister print with dots in the modern edition. Strokes and dots did not necessarily equate to the same articulation by the end of the eighteenth century. The subject is far too large to go into here, but the edition should have taken account of research such as that by Clive Brown in his detailed *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice 1750–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). As Brown observes (98–104), although there seems to have been no functioning difference between strokes and wedges, there surely were differences between the latter two on the one hand and dots on the other (though the performance implications of these differences remain subject to debate). Wranitzky used both strokes and dots in the original prints, but the modern performer will be unable to see how they were variously applied because in this edition they have all been rendered as dots.

The wider reception of Wranitzky’s music could have been explored in more detail too. To judge from the amount of his music listed in the inventories of Czech collections, his posthumous reputation fared better in Bohemia and (in particular) his native Moravia than it did in Vienna. The reasons for this may be many, but high on that list will be what the Viennese public heard as musical conservatism in works like these sextets – indicative of certain elements of style and genre that remained popular in the Czech lands long after they had been consigned to the archives in Vienna. Readers may be interested to note that these



sextets (though not this edition) have been recorded, and were released on the Supraphon label in 2004 (SU 3788–2 131).

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## RECORDINGS

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JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683–1764)

*CASTOR & POLLUX*

Jeffrey Thompson, Hadleigh Adams, Celeste Lazarenko, Margaret Plummer, Paul Goodwin–Groen, Anna Fraser, Pascal Herington, Mark Donnelly / Pinchgut Opera; Cantillation, Orchestra of the Antipodes / Antony Walker, Erin Helyard  
Pinchgut Live PG003, 2013; two discs, 139 minutes

Each December, as the rest of the world braces itself for the annual *Messiah* indulgence, Sydney audiences are treated to new, invigorating productions of rarely performed works by Pinchgut Opera. This small company – which plays on the one hand on the name of an island in the shadow of the Sydney Opera House where, in colonial times, miscreant convicts were chained Prometheus-like, and on the other on the gut-wrenching affect of early opera – was the brainchild of a team led by musical directors Antony Walker and Erin Helyard, and philanthropists Elizabeth and Ken Nielsen. Walker and Helyard share responsibilities: Helyard prepares the editions and assists in rehearsals, while Walker conducts. The gifted Walker draws on wide-ranging experience: in addition to his positions as Music Director of the Pittsburgh Opera and Washington Concert Opera, it is with Pinchgut that he has been able to indulge his passion for pre-romantic opera. Starting in 2002 with Handel's *Semele*, the company's offerings have ranged from Monteverdi to Mozart's *Idomeneo*, taking in numerous rarities such as Vivaldi's *Griselda*. Mounted in short runs of just four performances in Sydney's modest City Recital Hall, and adapted for minimalist staging, the company's work deserves to be better known, and is available to international audiences through live recordings. (Early releases were on the Australian Broadcasting Company's Classics label, and later on Pinchgut's own Pinchgut Live. Recordings of some productions are downloadable from iTunes, but so far *Castor* is only available in CD format.)

*Castor & Pollux*, Rameau's second *tragédie en musique*, takes as its theme the psychological tensions and love intrigues of the twin heroes Castor and Pollux of Greek legend. Despite conforming to the platitudes of myth-based opera, involving a pantheon of divinities and demi-gods, a *lieto fine* and a metamorphosis orchestrated by a *deus ex machina*, and concluding with a celestial ballet, *Castor* revitalized the *tragédie en musique*. It was also Rameau's greatest success, and exercised significant impact, with a long and distinguished performance history into the 1780s. *Castor* became the touchstone of French opera: it was decisive in the *querelle des bouffons* and was played at the inauguration of the Tuilleries theatre in 1764. Revivals across Europe attest to the breadth of its influence. After its 1737 creation, substantial reworking in 1754 resulted in a second version different enough to count as a distinct work. With Pierre-Joseph Bernard's revised text, Rameau provided a completely new first act and reorganized the material in the remaining portions. He did not fail to include the best of the larger pieces from the earlier version, but these were enhanced by a new dramatic organization and innovations such as the off-stage chorus and an entr'acte between the first two acts that, breaking with convention, sustain dramatic continuity in a manner that looks forward to *verismo* dramaturgy. It is often stated that the suppression of the Prologue, with its reference to the 1736 Peace of Vienna, was Rameau's personal decision, but in reality it resulted from