

Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920)
Sketch Based on Indian Themes
(Unpublished)

Trained originally as a pianist, the interests of this tragically short-lived American turned more and more to composition. This sensitive, modest, shy talent had been championed by his second piano teacher, Mary Selena Broughton, who influenced profoundly his personal and musical development. It was she who financed his piano studies at the Stern Conservatory in Berlin. Against her advice, Griffes left the conservatory and began working with Engelbert Humperdinck. His four years in Berlin were mostly spent composing, though he did occasionally appear as a piano soloist and accompanist.

Upon returning home, Griffes became director of music at the Hackley School for Boys in Tarrytown, New York. While the pay was not high, he got along well enough and was well-liked and respected by his fellow teachers and by his students. He spent his spare time composing. While in Europe he had been drawn to Impressionism, moving away from the German Romanticism he had been educated in. He experimented all through his life, trying to find a musical language of his own. What he accomplished, particularly in the last three years of his life (when the Two Sketches were written), was to usher in a more progressive era in American music, and he is this country's sole true impressionist composer. His life was cut short by pneumonia, his remarkable promise brutally curtailed by death.

When Griffes' Sketches were being prepared for publication (see below), this one was, for reasons difficult to guess, not included. It is a powerful, eloquent declaration and we are delighted to be able to bring it to you. The performance of this unpublished work is made possible through the kind permission of the copyright owner, Donna K. Anderson.

Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920)
Two Sketches Based on Indian Themes

The first of these two sketches is based on a Chippewa song of farewell, the setting poignantly nostalgic and imparting an eerily fantastic atmosphere. The second sketch is a vigorous, extroverted dance piece featuring the more conventional tom-tom rhythms. Its middle section, however, is lyrical and haunting. Griffes did not specify any sources for this movement.

The Two Sketches were premiered in 1918 by the Flonzaley Quartet, and Adolfo Betti (their first violinist) edited the music for publication by Schirmer.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)
String Quartet in E Minor

"Verdi's letters", observed Melvin Berger, "make clear that he was very well acquainted with the great quartet scores of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. In fact, he is said to have kept them always by his bedside and to have advised his students to use the Classical string quartets as models of clear and concise organization. Thus, when the circumstances were propitious, he was able to produce a string quartet of unquestioned authority and great appeal."

Verdi's only exclusively instrumental work is the result of a three-week break in rehearsals, under Verdi's supervision, for the Naples premiere of *Aida*. The break was occasioned by the leading soprano's illness.

The first performance of the quartet took place April 1, 1873, one day after the opening of *Aida*; the occasion was an informal concert by friends at Verdi's hotel.

The quartet opens in typically Verdian dramatic fashion. Sinister figures lurk in shadows, a feeling of foreboding pervades the music. Verdi was the master at creating little musical motifs which would suggest actions, and these creep furtively into the music early. The music quickly explodes into overt drama, the curtain is up and richly colored scenes flash by — now bravado, now intimate humor, now a snippet of a great aria, now an extremely solemn moment of sober reflection — all this gives us a wonderfully kaleidoscopic vision of Verdi's fertile imagination which made his operas so intriguing.

The slow movement is a cavatina, charmingly naïve and innocent. The occasional chortle betrays the innocence and gives us the idea that all is not serenity and peace in this music. And, sure enough, he gives us a nasty little spat brought on by the all-too-serious cello but eagerly joined in by the other instruments — but coming to naught as everyone steps back, takes a look at what is happening, and then as if nothing had ever gone amiss returns to the original cavatina. To be sure, there are still some rumblings but at the end some comforting figures make it all serene again.

Verdi the opera composer is ever present, particularly in the third movement, which Berger calls "unabashedly operatic. The first part," he continues, "brings to mind the sense of excitement as the opera house curtain rises and the stage slowly fills with singers who soon launch into the lusty opening chorus. The middle section features an exquisite tenor aria for cello, accompanied by the others playing pizzicato in imitation of a guitar. Verdi then repeats the opening section." Note for note, by the way!

The last movement is uncharacteristic of string quartet writing and certainly of operatic writing where a great denouement is expected. Here Verdi indulges in some fugal writing which suggests nothing more than plotting — hurried whispers, quickly hissed disagreements, and the occasional uproar as some underhanded idea is tossed around amongst conspirators. In this case, however, the plot turns out to be more along the lines of a practical joke than a more sinister undertaking, because it unravels far too easily and the four string-playing conspirators begin gently ridiculing the whole idea and the quartet ends with the music figuratively bounding off the stage in great good humor.

Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov (1865-1936)
Five Novelettes, Op. 15

An exceptional ear and musical memory marked young Alexander Konstantinovich for a career in music. When he was fourteen he met the famous St. Petersburg composer Balakirev, who recommended him to Rimsky-Korsakov.

Teaching him composition for less than two years, Rimsky-Korsakov observed that Glazunov progressed, "not from day to day but from hour to hour." Glazunov completed his First Symphony at age sixteen, and it was given a successful premiere under Balakirev's direction. Balakirev embraced Glazunov's promise and welcomed him into a circle of composers who, according to Rimsky-Korsakov, were known as musical revolutionaries and were called "The Five."

Glazunov caught the interest of a powerful man in St. Petersburg's cultural scene, Mitrofan Belyayev, who invited the young composer to break with Balakirev and join Belyayev's circle. Rimsky-Korsakov was now a member of the Belyayev Circle as well; he described it as "the peaceful progressives," advancing the ideas of Russian national music.

These Novelettes were written when Glazunov was only 21. Two years earlier Belyayev had taken Glazunov on a trip to western Europe, where he met Franz Liszt and where his First Symphony was performed. His first impressions of Europe led to these character pieces, in which he infused elements of what he had heard into his own distinctly Russian writing.

In "Alla Spagnuola" the Spanish elements are very mild and decidedly friendly, reflecting his delight in visiting Spain for the first time.

Next comes an exotic "Orientale." Where this music might have been inspired is unclear, and Glazunov doesn't enlighten us, but the piece is delightfully animated and gives us an intriguing glimpse of an older-style oriental musical style.

The ruins of ancient Rome are memorialized in his "Interludium in modo antico." Here the somber, measured tones pay solemn tribute to the relatively few remaining ruins visible in Rome.

A Viennese-style Valse follows. This waltz is great fun but, of course, not entirely Viennese.

The last movement, "All'Ungherese," is a muscular Hungarian romp, full of exuberant energy but mixed with contrasting pensive elements suggesting that Hungarians' lives under Austrian domination were not entirely their own.

Glazunov interweaves with the national characteristics of each piece his own distinctly Russian style. The result is colorful, wonderfully entertaining music.