

CHANDOS

Górecki

**COMPLETE WORKS FOR
STRING QUARTET**

Silesian Quartet



Photograph by Malcolm Crowthers / ArenaPAL

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, at Siewierz Castle, near Częstochowa, on the route from Warsaw to Katowice, Poland, May 1991

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki (1933–2010)

COMPACT DISC ONE

1 **String Quartet No. 1, Op. 62 'Już się zmierzcha' (1988) 16:00**

(Already It Is Dusk)

'Music for String Quartet'

Viola part based on the *cantus firmus* of the song by
Wacław of Szamotuły (c. 1520–c. 1560)

Deciso. Marcatissimo – Molto lento. Tranquillo –

Deciso. Marcatissimo – Molto lento. Tranquillo –

Deciso. Marcatissimo – Molto lento. Tranquillo –

Deciso. Marcatissimo – Molto lento. Tranquillissimo –

Allegro – Deciso. Energico, molto espressivo e molto marcato

ma sempre ben tenuto – Feroce. Marcatissimo – Gridendo –

Molto espressivo... e molto acuto – Molto espressivo... e molto acuto –

Ferocissimo. Furioso. Marcatissimo –

Molto furioso. Marcatissimo ma anche molto deciso e molto espressivo –

Martellando. Tempestoso –

Con massima passione, con massima espressione –

Con massima passione, con massima espressione –

Molto furioso – Molto lento. Tranquillissimo –

Più lento – Ancora più lento. Largo

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 64 'Quasi una fantasia' (1991) 32:53

- 2 I Largo. Sostenuto. Mesto -
Tranquillo (quasi in Tempo I). Mesto. Semplice -
Largo. Sostenuto - Poco più largo -
Molto largo. Tranquillissimo, dolce, cantabile - 7:41
- 3 II Deciso. Energico. Marcatissimo sempre -
Con grande passione, con grande tensione -
Molto furioso - Adagio -
Molto energico. Furioso, marcatissimo sempre -
Molto furioso - Tranquillo. Mesto (quasi largo) -
Pochissimo più largo - Ancora più largo - 7:30
- 4 III Arioso. Adagio cantabile ma molto espressivo e molto appassionato -
Pochissimo più mosso (ma non troppo) -
Ancora pochissimo più mosso -
Ancora pochissimo più mosso. Furioso...
e Ancora pochissimo più mosso. Molto furioso -
Con massima passione - Poco meno mosso -
Tranquillo (quasi cadenza) - Pochissimo più lento -
Ancora pochissimo più lento - Lento (triste, lamentoso) - Più lento -
Largo - Dolcissimo. Morbido (cantabilissimo) -
Sostenuto, poco pesante - Largo -
Adagio cantabile. Dolce (pochissimo più lento che il Tempo I) -
Molto largo - 7:52

- 5 IV Allegro, sempre con grande passione e molto marcato –
 Con fuoco, molto espressivo – Impetuoso. Deciso, con bravura –
 Furioso. Marcatissimo – Impetuoso. Deciso, con bravura –
 Molto furioso. Ferocissimo – Agitato. Tumultuoso –
 Adagio – Allegro – Adagio – Allegro, sempre marcato (accentato) –
 (Lo stesso tempo) – Con bravura, con slancio, con massima passione –
 Lento. Tranquillissimo – Poco pesante, marcato – Largo –
 Pesante. Grave – Molto largo. Sostenuto 9:48
TT 49:01

COMPACT DISC TWO

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 67 '...songs are sung'

(1994 – 95) 52:56

To the Kronos Quartet, which for so many years has waited patiently
 for this quartet

- 1 I Adagio. Molto andante. Cantabile – Più mosso. Espressivo. Marcato –
 Più espressivo. Più marcato –
 Adagio. Molto andante. Cantabile – Più mosso. Espressivo. Marcato –
 Più espressivo. Più marcato – Molto espressivo. Molto marcato –
 Marcatissimo – Molto espressivo. Molto marcato – Marcatissimo –
 Marcatissimo – Adagio. Cantabile. Tranquillo –
 Tempo I – (Adagio. Molto andante. Cantabile) – Pochissimo più lento –
 Lento. Largo – Più lento. Più largo –
 Molto lento. Molto largo – 10:36

- 2 II Largo. Cantabile -
Pochissimo più lento e più largo ma cantabilissimo. Dolcissimo -
Più lento - Quasi Molto largo -
Molto lento e molto largo. Cantabilissimo -
Ancora più lento e più largo. Cantabilissimo -
Tempo I (Largo). Cantabile - Molto lento - Ancora più lento -
Molto molto lento 12:05
- 3 III Allegro. Sempre ben marcato -
Meno mosso. Molto espressivo e ben tenuto -
Tempo I (Allegro). Marcato - Lo stesso tempo ma poco dolce -
Ben marcato - Lo stesso tempo. Dolce 4:39
- 4 IV Deciso. Espressivo ma ben tenuto -
Quasi in lo stesso tempo ma tranquillo - Poco più lento -
Molto lento - Tranquillo. Dolce. Cantabile. Morbido -
Tranquillo. Cantabile. Ben tenuto - Espressivo -
Molto espressivo - Largo cantabile. Tranquillo -
Molto lento. Poco più come prima. Dolcissimo. Cantabilissimo.
Tranquillissimo -
Più lento - Lo stesso tempo come sopra. Tranquillo -
Molto largo (lo stesso tempo come sopra) -
Estremo lento. Estremo largo 12:06
- 5 V Largo. Tranquillo - Più largo. Più tranquillo -
Sempre lo stesso tempo 13:26

première recording in version for string quartet

Five Kurpian Songs, Op. 75 (1999) **22:34**

for Unaccompanied Mixed Choir

Performed by String Quartet

- | | | | |
|----------|-----|--|------|
| 6 | I | Hej, z góry, z góry! (Hey Down the Hill, Down the Hill!).
Largo. Dolce. Affettuoso – Dolcissimo – Più largo. Dolce –
Dolce. Affettuoso (Tempo I) – Molto largo. Dolcissimo –
Tempo I, espressivo – Più largo. Dolce – Molto largo –
Largo. Tranquillo | 4:16 |
| 7 | II | Ciamna nocka, ciamna (Dark is the Night, How Dark).
Largo. Espressivo – (Espressivo) –
Pochissimo più largo. Dolcissimo – Sostenuto | 3:12 |
| 8 | III | Wcoraj, dziwcyno, nie dzisiaj (Yesterday, My Dear, Not Today).
Largo. Dolce. Cantabile – Pochissimo più largo –
Tempo I. Poco espressivo, ma dolce, cantabile –
Pochissimo più largo –
Più largo (quasi molto). Dolcissimo. Cantabilissimo – Più lento –
Ancora più lento – Molto lento | 4:51 |

- 9 IV Z Torunia ja parobecek (I Am a Farm-Hand from Torun).
Lento moderato. Espressivo – Molto espressivo 2:11
- 10 V Wylsa burzycka, bandzie desc (The Storm Is Coming, It Will Rain).
Lento. Tranquillo – Molto lento – Tempo I –
Pochissimo con moto. Molto espressivo –
Lento. Tranquillo (Tempo I) – Molto lento –
Ancora più lento. Dolcissimo 8:01
- TT 75:34**

Silesian Quartet

Szymon Krzeszowiec violin
Arkadiusz Kubica violin
Łukasz Syrnicki viola
Piotr Janosik cello



Silesian Quartet

Górecki: Complete Works for String Quartet

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki (1933–2010) was one of the great figures of the so-called 'Polish School', a group of composers (Krzysztof Penderecki, Kazimierz Serocki, and Wojciech Kilar, among others) who made a breakthrough into the world of new music in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The arena for the performance of their music was the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music, first organised in 1956 on the wave of the post-Stalinist thaw which rekindled hopes for greater civil liberties.

If one were to look for a main feature distinguishing Western modernists from the Polish school, it would probably be the expressiveness of the latter, contrasted with the more intellectual and constructivist aesthetics of Western composers. From the very beginning, Górecki saturated his music with extreme contrasts of all musical parameters, as exemplified by his *Scontri* (Collisions, 1960) for orchestra. Already in the 1960s, however, a tendency towards simplification of means and extended use of repetition began to mark his music, as in *Refren* (Refrain, 1965), regarded as one of the peaks of his *œuvre*. The 1970s saw

the apogee of his monumental vocal-instrumental works: Symphony No. 2 *Copernicus* (1974), Symphony No. 3 *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* (1977), and the cantata *Beatus Vir* (1979), commissioned by Krakow's Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, and premièred during his first pilgrimage to Poland after his election as Pope, as which he took the name John Paul II.

In communist Poland, however, such a commitment meant inevitable conflict with the authorities. The area of this conflict was not only music itself, but also Górecki's activity in the institutional field – in 1975–79 Górecki was the rector of his alma mater, the State Higher School of Music, in Katowice, where he also taught composition. Tired of political pressure and wishing to protect his creative freedom, Górecki withdrew from public life in the 1980s. This decision, too, left its mark on his *œuvre*, which then took on a somewhat private character, Górecki placing a particular emphasis on chamber genres. It was then that he began to write string quartets, which belong among his greatest achievements. All three were commissioned by the Kronos Quartet.

String Quartet No. 1 'Already It Is Dusk'

String Quartet No. 1 *Already It Is Dusk* (1988) owes its title to a song by the Polish Renaissance composer Waclaw (Wenceslas) of Szamotuly, which Górecki had already used once before, in his *Muzyka staropolska* (Old Polish Music, 1969) for brass and strings. In the original version, the song is titled 'Prayer when children go to sleep': it is a request to God to protect man from the devils who, especially in the night, lurk for his soul. Waclaw's theme appears in the viola part, hidden within a dissonant four-part chorale. In his Quartet Górecki combined this religious dimension with a fascination with Podhale folklore, i.e. the music of the Tatra highlanders, which Karol Szymanowski had elevated to the status of the Polish equivalent of Dionysian ecstasy. And Górecki regarded Szymanowski's music with unconditional adoration. In *Already It Is Dusk*, two states of being collide: contemplation and impetuosity, calmness and movement (how far from, and yet how close to, the *Scontri* style!). The pivotal sound cell, recurring in this piece from beginning to end, is the fifth D – A.

This composition should also be viewed as an attempt to capture the spiritual essence of Podhale (where Górecki had settled in the 1980s): the sounds, smells, and colours of a highland village at dusk. As a motto, Górecki

included in the score a poem of his own authorship:

BEFORE DUSK

hens are cackling
geese are gaggling
dogs are barking

horses are neighing
pigs are squealing
sheep are bleating
cows are moing

Men are shouting
Women yelling
Children running about
Music is pounding
HUSTLE and BUSTLE

And this dies down slowly
goes quiet

Smoke from chimneys
Lights in the windows
Mist in the fields and meadows
Angelus from afar
C A L M and Stillness.¹

On the last page of the score (where
G flat major and D flat major chords alternate)

¹Translated by Boleslaw Taborski

Górecki noted: *pianissimo ma ben sonore* – *ARMONIA*.

String Quartet No. 2 'Quasi una fantasia'
String Quartet No. 2 *Quasi una fantasia* (1991) is twice as long as its predecessor. Whereas *Already It Is Dusk* was a one-movement work (with a division into contrasting internal sections), *Quasi una fantasia* is a *quasi* classical four-movement cycle. It opens with a lamenting *Largo*. In its final bars, Górecki introduces (what he himself referred to as) 'Beethovenian chords', and the allusion to Beethoven links this quartet to another chamber work of his – *Recitativa and ariosa 'Lerchenmusik'* for clarinet, cello, and piano (1984), in which Górecki gradually unveils a sometimes camouflaged quotation from Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4. The precise source of the 'Beethoven chords', however, has so far remained a mystery. It seems that the answer, contrary to appearances, should not be sought in the Piano Sonatas, Op. 27 (annotated *Quasi una fantasia*), but in the String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, more particularly in its central movement – which Beethoven described as the 'Holy Song of Thanksgiving of a Convalescent to the Deity'² – which takes

² Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit

the form of a set of double variations: the chorale-like first theme is a prayer, while the second, dance-like theme is an expression of the ecstatic joy of the man returned to health (Beethoven wrote 'Neue Kraft fühlend' [Feeling new strength] in the score at this point). Górecki's 'Beethoven chords' are an altered form of three chords that form a modulation leading from the prayer theme (in F Lydian mode) to the dance theme (in D major): in Beethoven's instance the chord progression is D minor – G major – A major, whereas in Górecki's it is B flat major – E flat major – A major.

Before the hope signalled by this allusion is fulfilled, in the final movement (i.e., in the appearance, at first triumphant but soon overshadowed, of D major, the key of the dance-like theme – and thus the key of 'new strength' – which at the end of the *Largo* is replaced by a mournful E flat minor), we have to pass through the struggles of the two middle movements, and in these adventures we will find ourselves accompanied by the 'Beethovenian chords' (although sometimes occurring in camouflaged or incomplete form).

The second movement – *Deciso. Energico* – is an example of Górecki's specific variety of the *barbaro* style. Although the contrast with the *Largo* could not be greater, the two

movements are linked by a single narrative thread: first by the cello's persistent repetition of the note E, and finally, after the momentum has waned, by the surprising return of the last segment of the *Largo*, but this time with a different ending – the cello stays on the note E until the very end (in the *Largo* it descended lower), so that in the last bar of the *Deciso*, instead of the darkness of E flat minor, there is the light of A major, the dominant of D major.

The third movement, *Arioso*, however, instead of delivering the expected resolution to D major, introduces as its main key the pastoral F major. The music achieves its greatest ambitus here, rocking phrases leading to the only lyrical outpouring in the piece, which is followed by a soothing *quasi* cadenza (played by two violins). Then comes the turning point: a sequence of 'Beethoven chords' in their original form (as at the end of the *Largo*), which launches a musical sequence that is, as it were, the spiritual centre of the whole Quartet: placed in a low register, it contains a (slightly altered) quotation from the chorale 'Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden', taken from Johann Sebastian Bach's St Matthew Passion, in which it appears immediately after the death of Jesus (a few bars further on, Górecki places the signature B-A-C-H motif in the middle

voices). And are we not also hearing echoes of the solo viola melody that opens Mahler's Symphony No. 10? All the indications are that Górecki viewed this passage as a meditation on death. Yet another quotation reverberates: the alternating succession of D flat major and G flat major, two chords that also appear on the last page of Quartet No. 1.

The finale, *Allegro*, pulses with vitalistic joy: its theme is based on a three-note cell derived from the melodic line traced by the 'Beethovenian chords'. As in Beethoven's Op. 132, the chorale has been transformed into a dance. In the syncopated middle episode, Górecki (by his own admission) alluded to *West Side Story* in order to pay homage to Leonard Bernstein, who died while the Polish composer was working on this Quartet. In the finale, the D major chord, which the music had been striving towards since the end of the *Largo*, is at last reached, and even three times. Each time, however, its brilliance is dulled in one way or another. The Quartet's conclusion, too, casts a shadow: the lullaby-carol *Silent Night* is followed by a series of reminiscences, among which the initial lament returns, although now as if seen from a different perspective – one of reconciliation with fate, or perhaps even of religious hope. The music stops, leaving the question unanswered: the rest in the last bar



Silesian Quartet

invites the listener to fill its silence with an imaginary chord – either D major or E flat minor.

String Quartet No. 3 '...songs are sung'

String Quartet No. 3 *...songs are sung* in its turn is twice as long as its predecessor (and therefore four times as long as Quartet No. 1). The work was written in 1994–95, but was not premiered until 2005. The dedication in the score reads as follows: 'To the Kronos Quartet, which for so many years has waited patiently for this quartet'. The genesis suggested by these words says much about the situation which Górecki faced in the last two decades of his life. After a burst of early fame, when, as a young composer, he was able to compete with the leaders of the world *avant-garde*, the further development of his aesthetics – towards simplicity, tradition, folklore, sacred music – met with less and less sympathetic interest in new music circles. However, Górecki used to say, perversely, that the most *avant-garde* of his works was the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*. And it was a recording of this work (a dozen years after its première, which passed unremarked in the world at large) – made by Dawn Upshaw and the London Sinfonietta conducted by David Zinman – that in 1992 topped the charts. Then came the unexpected fame. – And with it a certain amount of bitterness: that

it happened so late, perhaps too late... The question arose in the mind of this self-critical composer whether his newer music would live up to the expectations of listeners who had come to his work through the Third Symphony. He wrote very little at the time.

The Third Quartet, however, dispels all doubts. As in the works of the 1960s, when Górecki's music was constantly changing, from piece to piece, in *...songs are sung* Górecki has once again surpassed his earlier achievements. The title of this composition was taken from a poem by the Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922). One stanza is printed in the score:

When horses die, they breathe,

When grasses die, they wither,

When suns die, they go out,

When people die, they sing songs.

Górecki, however, protested against the search for direct references to this poem in his Quartet. What nevertheless remains is the important general suggestion that the music is linked to themes of lament, mourning, remembrance, consolation. It is no coincidence that four of the Quartet's five movements proceed at a slow tempo, only the middle movement offering a brief smile.

The first movement, *Adagio. Molto andante. Cantabile*, is based on an insistent rhythm in the viola and cello recalling a funeral procession (on the notes E flat and G flat, connoting E flat minor, the key of death), against which the violins play motifs of lament. Changes in rhythm and harmony are gradually introduced, steering the music towards a climax, after which the initial idea returns, leading finally to a 'rasping' and non-conclusive cadence.

The second movement, *Largo. Cantabile*, follows immediately (*attacca*). As in the first movement the overall plan is ABA' (this time with an introduction and a coda). However, the form is easier for the listener to grasp, as the delicate and bright central section (consistently in D major) contrasts sharply with the darker outer sections which are based on dominant-type chords, so that the music breathes greater hope, even though it is kept in a low register (the cello oscillates mainly between a low C and D, and the highest note in this whole movement is c2). The coda ends on an E flat major chord, a brightening of the 'sombre' E flat minor of the first movement.

In the accompanimental part of the third movement, *Allegro. Sempre ben marcato*, the semitone lament is transformed (and inverted) into a joyful and graceful

harmonic delay. Against this backdrop, the violin introduces an unusual melody that in its successive phases changes like a chameleon: from a melismatic phase through a quasi-Mozartian one to the sharp-edged motifs of Podhale music (reminiscent of the *Deciso. Energico* from Quartet No. 2). In the middle of this scherzo, there is a surprise: a pathetic, solemn bar acts as an 'overture' to an 'ecstatic' quotation from the first movement of Karol Szymanowski's String Quartet No. 2.

It is with this gesture (the 'overture' and the quotation) that the fourth movement begins. It signals that the narrative of the Quartet is entering its late phase – it will henceforth be conducted as if in two dimensions of time: new musical thoughts will urge it towards the future, while reminiscences will reflect thoughts on the past. Immediately after the Szymanowski quotation, another reminiscence appears – a slightly modified version of the main idea of the second movement. It is not until bar 29 that the proper theme of the fourth movement (derived, incidentally, from the music preceding it) sounds: against a marching background, two violins introduce (in a diaphony of thirds) a sorrowful melody reminiscent of an unsophisticated drinking song. Here, as in the *Arioso* from String Quartet No. 2, Górecki

finally allows the music to 'cry out': in a long *crescendo* the lyrical intensity reaches its ultimate expression. In the final phase, references to earlier movements reappear: first to the second (but this time recalled in literal form) and then to the first (the motif of lament). The plagal cadence ends this movement in a manner reminiscent of that of the first movement: on a drone (the fifth F – C), but this time without the 'grating' dissonance.

The final *Largo. Tranquillo* begins with a cello recitative, after which the distant (yet clear) echo of the first movement returns. Now, however, the music does not perpetuate the pain, but instead finds cadential formulas that bring release of tension, and relief. But it is only the E flat major chord (derived from the second movement) that brings real calm, a chord reached but abandoned several times before finally bringing the whole of this composition to a close.

Five Kurpian Songs

In the 1980s and 1990s, Górecki composed several collections of choral songs – to religious and folk texts. *Five Kurpian Songs* hold a special place, as the composer drew on the ethnomusicological collection *Puszcza Kurpiowska w pieśni* (Kurpian Forest in Song) (1928 – 34) of Father Władysław Skierkowski – the same one that had inspired

Karol Szymanowski, author of *Six Kurpian Songs* (1928 – 29) for choir a *cappella* and *Twelve Kurpian Songs* (1930 – 33) for voice and piano (containing two melodies chosen also by Górecki, as songs nos 2 and 5). Kurpie is a region situated to the north-east of Warsaw. Its musical folklore is characterised by archaic and fanciful ornamentation and melismas. Górecki brought out all its rawness and simplicity. His arrangement of the songs, full of repetitions and pedal points (especially in the middle voices), bear the indelible stamp of his individuality. It was the composer himself who suggested the possibility of performing these songs also in a version for string quartet.

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One of the leading chamber music ensembles in Poland, the **Silesian Quartet** has performed in such venues as the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall, London, Wiener Konzerthaus, deSingel, Antwerp, Berliner Schauspielhaus, Tivoli, Copenhagen, Salle Pleyel, Paris, Carnegie Hall, New York, Jordan Hall, Boston, Hoam Art Hall, Seoul, and Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, and in 2019 made its début appearance at the BBC Proms, London. From 1993 to 2017, the Quartet organised the annual International

Chamber Music Festival, the twenty-five editions of which brought together dozens of outstanding Polish and foreign artists. Since 2014, it has given regular performances as one of the resident ensembles of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra. During the concert season 2023/2024 the Quartet appeared at Wigmore Hall, performing masterpieces of Polish chamber music. Its extensive discography includes recordings of music from many different periods, manifesting a particular emphasis

on Polish music of the last several decades. It has released more than fifty CDs, on Chandos Records and many other labels, and has won the Fryderyk Award of the Polish Phonographic Academy ten times. In 2017, its recording of the complete string quartets by Grażyna Bacewicz, for Chandos, earned the Quartet the prestigious *Gramophone* Award for Best Chamber Music Album of the Year. In 2023 the Silesian Quartet released its recording of the complete string quartets (seventeen in all) of Mieczysław Weinberg.

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HENRYK MIKOŁAJ GÓRECKI (1933–2010)

COMPACT DISC ONE

- 1 **String Quartet No. 1, Op. 62 'Już się zmierzcha'** (1988) 16:00
(Already It Is Dusk)
'Music for String Quartet'
Viola part based on the *cantus firmus* of the song by
Wacław of Szamotuły (c. 1520 – c. 1560)

- 2-5 **String Quartet No. 2, Op. 64 'Quasi una fantasia'** (1991) 32:53
TT 49:01

COMPACT DISC TWO

- 1-5 **String Quartet No. 3, Op. 67 '...songs are sung'** (1994–95) 52:56

première recording in version for string quartet

- 6-10 **Five Kurpian Songs, Op. 75** (1999) 22:34
for Unaccompanied Mixed Choir
Performed by String Quartet

TT 75:34

SILESIA QUARTET

Szymon Krzeszowiec violin
Arkadiusz Kubica violin
Łukasz Syrnicki viola
Piotr Janosik cello

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GÓRECKI: COMPLETE WORKS FOR STRING QUARTET – Silesian Quartet

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