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NAXOS

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

Complete  
String Quartets

Quartetto Adorno

**Mario**  
**CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO**  
(1895–1968)

- String Quartet No. 1 in G major, Op. 58 (1929) \***
- 1** I. Arioso e sereno – Un poco meno mosso – Più mosso e agitato – Tempo I 10:04
- 2** II. ‘Strimpellata’: Mosso e spensierato – Dolce e arioso – Tempo I – Dolce e arioso – Più tranquillo – Tempo I – Calmo 5:28
- 3** III. Introduzione, Molto moderato – Più mosso – Moderato – Più mosso – Allegro rustico – Tranquillo – Più mosso – Deciso – Vivace e danzante – Tempo I – Più tranquillo – Vivace – Deciso 10:14
- String Quartet No. 2 in F minor, Op. 139 (1948) \***
- 4** I. Moderato (ma non troppo lento) – Vivo e appassionato – Un poco agitato – Più calmo – Un poco mosso – Un poco sostenuto (quasi recitativo) – Un poco agitato – Un poco meno – Più agitato 7:27
- 5** II. Andante mesto – Un poco più mosso (ma sempre calmo) – Un poco mosso – Mosso e deciso – Meno mosso, più calmo e dolce – Calmo – Molto calmo – Tempo I – Tranquillo e misterioso (ma con moto) – Molto calmo – Lento 8:44
- 6** III. Molto vivo e ben ritmato – Allegretto pomposo – Tempo I – Allegretto pomposo – Tempo I (vivo) – Allegretto – Tempo I (vivo) – Molto vivo – Meno mosso – Poco meno – Un poco più calmo – Allegretto pomposo – Più leggero e grazioso – Tempo I (vivo) – Allegretto – Tempo I (vivo) – Allegretto – Tempo I – Tempo I (molto vivo) – Molto sostenuto – Tempo I (molto vivo) – Molto sostenuto – Tempo I (molto vivo) – Furioso 4:36
- String Quartet No. 3 in F major ‘Casa al Dono’, Op. 203 (1964)**
- 7** I. Ritorno a Vallombrosa (‘Return to Vallombrosa’) 6:13  
Allegro moderato e deciso – Più dolce e tranquillo – Tempo I – (Un poco agitato) – Più dolce – Più calmo – (Un poco largamente) – (Molto calmo)
- 8** II. L’abbazia (‘The Abbey’) 7:29  
Andante tranquillo – Quiet and fluent (like a litany) – (Un poco sostenuto quasi Corale) – (Un poco sostenuto) – Tempo I – Più animato – (Agitato) – Tempo I – (Quiet)
- 9** III. Il trenino (‘The Little Train’) 3:18  
Allegro moderato (Introduction) – Scherzo (Allegretto mosso e deciso) – Meno mosso – Tempo dell’Introduzione (Allegretto Moderato)
- 10** IV. Discussione e tramonto (‘Discussion and Sunset’) 6:31  
Concitato (Mosso e deciso) Introduzione – Allegretto con spirito (Mosso e deciso) – (Un poco meno, Allegretto grazioso) – Tempo I – Molto Agitato – (Un poco meno, Allegretto giocoso) – Tempo I – Allegretto scherzando – (FUGATO) Allegro deciso e un poco pomposo – Un poco più largamente (molto marcati i due temi) – Più mosso (Furioso) – EPILOGO, Andante, fluido e tranquillo – Andante tranquillo – Lento

\* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

**Quartetto Adorno**

Edoardo Zosi, Violin I • Liù Pellicciari, Violin II  
Benedetta Bucci, Viola • Stefano Cerrato, Cello

## Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968) Complete String Quartets

### String Quartet No. 1 in G major, Op. 58 (1929)

In his autobiography (*Una vita di musica, Un libro di ricordi*), Italian-born composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco wrote, 'During the years from 1927 to 1932 I began to explore and cultivate chamber music, first in relatively free forms, and then gradually moving closer to traditional structures.' He started with a couple of works for cello and piano, a string trio, a piano sonata and a sonata for violin and piano. Next, in 1929, he composed the first of his three string quartets (*Quartetto in sol, Op. 58*), saying that he had to work up courage to begin the work because he regarded the string quartet as the most 'difficult' and 'perfect' form of chamber music. 'The work is simple and clear, inspired by the countryside, as would be the case later with my second string quartet.' (The same is also true of the third quartet, composed after *Una vita di musica* was completed.) He went on to describe it thus: 'The first movement opens with the sound of the viola beneath the swell of violins (giving the impression of rows of vineyards and olive trees). I would say that the viola is the predominant voice throughout the quartet (perhaps this is why [violinist William] Primrose liked it so much). The second movement is a *Strimpellata*, a kind of rustic serenade, and the final movement alternates a sombre, almost processional theme with lively, bouncy rhythms reminiscent of a village festival.'

In the first movement, Castelnuovo-Tedesco develops three thematic ideas. The first of these is a long-lined melody introduced on viola against susurrating figures in first and second violins. Cello soon takes it up, with some imitative counterpoint from viola. It then moves to first violin (with second violin in counterpoint). A transitional passage leads to the second theme, introduced on second violin and featuring an emotive dropped seventh that gives it a particularly expressive flavour. The initial theme returns (again on viola against murmuring violins) to begin what seems like a development section, although Castelnuovo-Tedesco eventually introduces a third, *scherzando* theme – a two-bar rhythmic figure that ends with a pizzicato punctuation. He develops this extensively, leading to the recapitulation of the opening theme, again on viola (although anticipated by one bar in cello), with the third theme in counterpoint. The second theme returns for yet more development (including the first theme in counterpoint) and concludes the movement in viola, with a hint of the opening theme in first violin.

The title of the second movement, *Strimpellata* (Italian for 'strumming'), comes from the pizzicato accompaniment that accompanies the initial, playful melody in 6/8 time. It has an unsettled harmonic quality in part because the open fifths in the cello alternate in tritone intervals, as opposed to a fourth or fifth. Castelnuovo-Tedesco uses the three-note incipit of the theme (a rising, triadic figure) prominently throughout the development. Indeed, when the second theme arrives (with an abrupt change to 2/4 time), it too opens with a rising triad, and when yet a third, more lyrical theme appears it also features a rising triadic idea (extended to include a seventh). The opening theme returns for further development, as do the second and third, but it's to the first idea that the composer returns for the calming coda with its gentle, C major harmonics.

The concluding movement explores two ideas, both of which the composer introduces in the first few bars. Viola introduces the first, a questing melody characterised by double-dotted rhythms, while second violin presents the second, more a motif than a melody: a four-note figure ending in a dropping seventh that directly relates the material back to the second theme of the first movement. Rhythms become quite agitated as Castelnuovo-Tedesco works out his material with, again, much imitative counterpoint. This is offset by a more lyrical idea introduced on second violin and then first, but the turbulent rhythms carry the day all the way to the *Deciso*, G major coda. The villagers have enjoyed their festival but, at the end of the day, their energy is spent.

The work was commissioned by – and dedicated to – American benefactress Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. It premiered at the Berkshire Festival in 1930. The following year Coolidge included it on a series of chamber music concerts she sponsored in various Italian cities that also featured works she had commissioned from Castelnuovo-Tedesco's compatriots Respighi, Alfano, Malipiero, Casella, Pizzetti and Pilati.

### **String Quartet No. 2 in F minor, Op. 139 (1948)**

Although the first quartet was the only one Castelnuovo-Tedesco composed during his 'Italian period' (he emigrated to the United States in 1939) it was not the only one he actually *wrote* there. In 1948, Mario, his wife, Clara, and son Lorenzo, having taken American citizenship and settled in Los Angeles, set sail for the first trip to their homeland in nine years. In his autobiography, the composer details the mixed emotions he felt as he was enthusiastically greeted by friends and family, feted at concerts featuring his own works, and strongly encouraged by supporters to claim directorship of the Naples Conservatory. But the Italy he remembered had changed. While he considered Florence 'his' city, and experienced 'ecstasy' in rediscovering it, it was scarred by war and not the same. 'I could barely recognise the quiet streets of my Florence in the hustle and bustle of the unruly crowds, in that disorderly movement of vehicles of every type and every speed,' he wrote. 'I noticed the extent of the deterioration in my poor city,' and said if Hitler (who was once a housepainter) had survived the war he would have sentenced him 'to whitewash the walls of the buildings and villas of Florence!' He and his family finally escaped to the countryside – to the one home he still had in Italy, the villa of Usigliano, in Lari, near Pisa. 'I found Usigliano exactly as it had always been for me, "the most beautiful place in the world".' He put himself to work in his downstairs studio and there, over the course of a single week, he wrote his *Secondo Quartetto d'archi*, Op. 139. He says it was 'inspired by the countryside, as was my first quartet, but carrying the weight, I would say, of different feelings. I tried to condense the emotions of that period into the work, the emotions of our adventurous return to Italy (in fact, I did not have to try at all, it came to me quite instinctively, all in one go.)'

'In the first movement,' the composer wrote, 'after a contemplative introduction (*Moderato, ma non troppo lento*), the *tempo Vivo e appassionato* evokes the distressing conflicts that occurred when I resumed contact with my native land.' He lays out the principal theme – a rising and falling four-bar idea that restlessly wanders from the home key of F minor as soon as the second bar – during the introduction. He speeds it up when the *Vivo* begins, giving it to cello and first violin two octaves apart. A second idea (most easily recognisable from its three-note anacrusis) quickly follows, and the composer moves freely between them in a contrapuntal development in which they follow and overlap each other in quick succession.

Several factors contribute to the dark, nocturnal mood of the second movement, including the relatively high degree of dissonance, the whispering accompaniment figures and the fact that the instruments are muted throughout. Castelnuovo-Tedesco, who related the atmosphere of the movement to the region's beloved cypress trees, called it 'melancholic, detached and, I would say, resigned.' He presents the first theme immediately, with first and second violin tracing parallel open fifths (over an open fifth drone in cello) through a descending line that develops and evolves with a natural flow until it is interrupted by a more agitated idea, initially marked *fieramente* ('proudly') and characterised by dotted rhythms. The return of the first theme restores a sense of hushed lyricism, and the movement ends quietly with the same open fifths with which it began. The concluding movement strikes a more optimistic note, alternating a lively, rustic tarantella (treated fugally at one point) with a courtlier idea, intending to project 'the confidence, almost, that the life of the fields could restore Italy to prosperity and health.'

The American Art String Quartet premiered the work in Los Angeles on 18 September 1949; it was first published by Affiliated Musicians of Los Angeles in 1953. In his autobiography, the composer described it as 'more emotive and subjective and further from formal concerns [than others of his works] and, precisely for this reason, I consider it the best of my chamber works of recent years.'

### **String Quartet No. 3 in F major 'Casa al Dono', Op. 203 (1964)**

In his preface to the printed score of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Terzo Quartetto d'archi 'Casa al Dono', Op. 203*, editor Angelo Gilardino describes the work as one of the composer's most autobiographical pieces. Prior to coming to the United States, Castelnuovo-Tedesco would often visit eminent art historian Bernard Berenson at his residence in Vallombrosa, called *Casa al Dono*. The composer was in awe of his friend's knowledge, and 'the two would immerse themselves in long conversations about the art of the Renaissance, of which Berenson had an unrivalled knowledge.' It was during a visit with Berenson in the early 1950s that the composer ('now an American citizen but still Florentine in his soul') was

inspired to sketch the themes for a string quartet. Although the completed manuscript, written in Beverly Hills, is dated 17 September 1964, it includes a page of sketches, written on Berenson's stationery and dated 7 September 1952, that outline the quartet's principal themes. Thus, the work could be said to be inspired by the composer's memories of his homeland and the warm relationships he enjoyed there.

Each of the four movements has a title that suggests some sort of programme. The first, *Ritorno a Vallombrosa* ('Return to Vallombrosa') opens with a brief declamatory statement (in homophonic texture – a relative rarity in these works) that quickly gives way to the first theme (*grazioso e leggero*) in F major. This alternates with the opening idea until it is succeeded by the second theme (*Più dolce e tranquillo*) in C major (note how viola echoes first violin just two beats later). Castelnuovo-Tedesco works all three ideas into an effortless fantasia, sometimes combining and overlapping them, until the introductory statement ends the movement quietly with harmonics.

The second movement, titled *L'abbazia* ('The Abbey'), has a definite ecclesiastical bent. Viola introduces a prayerful motif that extends to a series of octave leaps resolving down to a seventh that almost becomes a motif in itself as Castelnuovo-Tedesco develops his material. The theme moves to first violin and then cello before the composer transitions to a new section that he marks 'Quiet and fluent (like a litany).' First cello, then viola and then the two violins in octaves intone the traditional *Dies irae* chant (of which the Latin text is written into the score underneath the notes). The first theme returns but *Dies irae* has the last word – on triple stops in the cello.

The quartet's *scherzo* (*Il trenino*, or 'The Little Train'), opens with a pizzicato ostinato in cello that supports the main theme (*Allegretto mosso e deciso*) until it takes over the theme (switching to *arco*) and the other instruments take up the pizzicato ostinato. The composer weaves both ideas throughout the movement, freely switching textures and voicings to keep the ear engaged. The title of the final movement, *Discussione e tramonto* ('Discussion and Sunset') clearly suggests Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Berenson walking through the grounds of *Casa al Dono*, engaged in what must have been a very animated conversation if the composer's busy textures and lively *Allegro con spirito* tempo are to be taken as any indication of the scene. There are two themes, the first introduced on first violin (over a pizzicato accompaniment) and characterised by a wide leap (usually spanning a twelfth) followed by a series of triplets. Viola announces the second, somewhat more circumspect, theme that Castelnuovo-Tedesco later develops in a formal, sombre *Fugato* (marked *un poco pomposo*). Sunset arrives in the form of an *Epilogo* (*Andante, fluido e tranquillo*), during which the two men return to the villa, now in complete accord no matter what the nature of their discussion might have been.

The quartet was premiered at Villa i Tatti in Florence on 16 May 1966 by the Società Cameristica Italiana. The work remained unpublished until 2018, when it was published by Curci as part of *The Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Collection*, the first-ever published series entirely dedicated to the man once called 'the maestro's maestro.' The other two quartets have also been published by Curci after having been long unavailable, in critical editions also prepared by Angelo Gilardino.

**Frank K. DeWald**

(The writer wishes to acknowledge the help of the composer's granddaughter, Diana Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and James Westby in providing the relevant chapters from their work in progress: an English translation of *Una Vita di Musica*.)



## Quartetto Adorno

Founded in 2015, Quartetto Adorno won three prizes at the 2017 International String Quartet Competition 'XI Premio Paolo Borciani', the first Italian quartet to do so in the 30-year history of the competition. In 2018 it won the X International Competition 'V. E. Rimbotti', and also became an associate artist in residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel. The quartet has been supported by CIDIM since 2019. Quartetto Adorno has performed at prestigious series, venues and festivals such as the London Chamber Music Society Series at Kings Place; Wigmore Hall; Musikerlebnis, Munich; Flagey, Brussels; La Società dei Concerti, Milan; Fondazione I Teatri, Reggio Emilia; MITO Festival, Unione Musicale, Torino; Fazioli Concert Hall, Sacile; Podium für junge Solisten, Tegernsee; Amici della Musica, Perugia; Musica Insieme, Bologna; Amici della Musica, Firenze; Amici della Musica, Padova; and Micat in Vertice, Siena. Important collaborations include artists such as Simonide Braconi, Enrico Bronzi, Bruno Canino, Alessandro Carbonare, Miguel da Silva, Francesco Di Rosa, Louis Lortie, Paul Meyer, Andrea Oliva and Giovanni Sollima. The quartet released its debut album in 2019 alongside clarinettist Alessandro Carbonare, featuring Zemlinsky's *String Quartet No. 3* and Brahms' *Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115* (Decca Italia). This was followed by the guitar quintets of Castelnuovo-Tedesco with Giampaolo Bandini in 2021 on the same label. In 2022 the quartet recorded Franck's *String Quartet* and Enescu's *Octet for strings in C major, Op. 7* for Fuga Libera.

[www.quartettoadorno.com](http://www.quartettoadorno.com)

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Edoardo Zosi plays an Ansaldo Poggi violin (1929).

Liù Pelliciarì plays a Stefano Scarpampella violin (1917)  
that previously belonged to the American violinist Sergiu Luca.

Benedetta Bucci plays an Igino Sderci viola (1939) that belonged to and was played by Piero Farulli during his 40-year recording career with Quartetto Italiano, with thanks to Antonello Farulli.

Stefano Cerrato plays an anonymous 1920s cello.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco began to focus on chamber music composition during the late 1920s. From this period comes the *String Quartet No. 1 in G major*, which offers a countryside panorama with rustic serenades and processional themes reminiscent of a village festival. Returning to a much-changed Italy after the Second World War inevitably generated mixed feelings in the composer – the *String Quartet No. 2 in F minor* reflects these through dissonance and restlessness, though dancing rhythms sound notes of optimism. His final quartet, *No. 3 in F major ‘Casa al Dono’*, is an effortless fantasia, animated and in part ecclesiastical, which was inspired by memories of his homeland and the friendships he had enjoyed.

**Mario**  
**CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO**  
(1895–1968)

	<b>String Quartet No. 1 in G major, Op. 58 (1929) *</b>	<b>25:46</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>I. Arioso e sereno</b>	<b>10:04</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>II. ‘Strimpellata’</b>	<b>5:28</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>III. Introduzione, Molto moderato</b>	<b>10:14</b>
	<b>String Quartet No. 2 in F minor, Op. 139 (1948) *</b>	<b>20:46</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>I. Moderato (ma non troppo lento)</b>	<b>7:27</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>II. Andante mesto</b>	<b>8:44</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>III. Molto vivo e ben ritmato</b>	<b>4:36</b>
	<b>String Quartet No. 3 in F major ‘Casa al Dono’, Op. 203 (1964)</b>	<b>23:31</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>I. Ritorno a Vallombrosa</b>	<b>6:13</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>II. L’abbazia</b>	<b>7:29</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>III. Il trenino</b>	<b>3:18</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>IV. Discussione e tramonto</b>	<b>6:31</b>

\* **WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

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Edoardo Zosi, Violin I • Liù Pellicciari, Violin II  
Benedetta Bucci, Viola • Stefano Cerrato, Cello



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