

## Inspired by Song

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, R.: Piano Quintet / Quintet in D Major / 6 Studies in English Folksong / Romance for Viola and Piano (London Soloists Ensemble) 8.573191

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, R.: Piano Quintet in C Minor / SCHUBERT, F.: Piano Quintet, "Die Forelle" (The Trout) (Widenmeyer, Rilling, Munich Piano Trio) GEN14305

These two recordings both include the Vaughan Williams Piano Quintet (same instrumentation as the Schubert Trout). It is easy to characterize the two. The English are much more delicate and refined; the Germans are richer, stronger, faster, more emphatic. I prefer the Germans—but I usually do. It's not the faster tempos—that is not necessarily something I prefer (about a minute faster in each movement: 9 versus 10 minutes). It's more the sense that this is substantial music. It seems inspired by Brahms, and the Germans make it sound Brahmsian. The English never sound gutsy and strong and rich. I admire their subtlety, but I am not as moved by their interpretation. I have always thought that non-English musicians play Vaughan Williams better than English ones; if you generally disagree you may prefer the Naxos recording. But the Germans were recorded in concert and strike me as much more involved and moving.

The piano quintet is from 1903. No one knows when he wrote the Romance for viola and piano. It's only seven minutes, and it was first performed in 1962. (The composer died in 1958.)

The Quintet in D (1898) is not as attractive as the piano quintet, because it is less characterized, and because the clarinet and horn detract from the music. It seems less concentrated, harder to comprehend. I spent most of the time looking at a book about Van Gogh in Arles—having just returned from Arles. The music never distracted me. I think when music is really good I cannot read!

The English Folk Song studies are from 1926—quite a bit later—and are heard here in an arrangement for clarinet and piano. He wrote them for cello and piano but made arrangements for violin or viola as well as clarinet. Well, why not? One wants one's music to be performed. But I don't happen to like the clarinet arrangement. It's only nine minutes, so that may not keep you from this collection.

The Germans add the Schubert Trout to their Vaughan Williams—and why not? The only problem is that we all have lots of Trouts in our collections. This is a very good one, but we don't need it. It is good because, like the Vaughan Williams, it is gutsy and strong and rich. I think Schubert would be thrilled to hear it played so well and recorded so beautifully. There are lots of good recordings of the piece, but this must be among the best. © 2014 American Record Guide

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