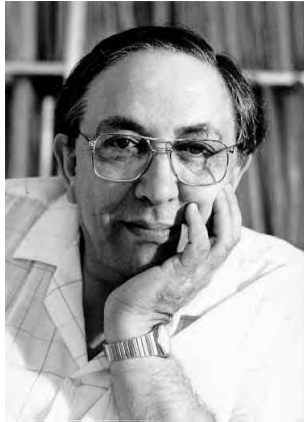


A Quintet for Clarinet and Strings by Wilfred Josephs

From Reynaldo Hahn: A Piano Quintet and Two String Quartets



Wilfred Josephs (1927-97) was born in Newcastle in the north of England. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music in London and later with Max Deutsch in Paris. Josephs has written in virtually every genre winning awards and acclaim for his highly original and appealing music. Besides his formal compositions, he has also composed for television and film. His **Clarinet Quintet** featured on **Metier CD 92058** dates from 1985. It is for the

clarinet in A. Josephs has written that he preferred the clarinet in A to that in B flat not only for the extra C sharp at the lower end of its range—something of which he wished to take advantage—but also because he felt it had a warmer if less brilliant sound than the clarinet in B flat. This is a big work, about a half hour in length. Although Josephs was thoroughly trained in the compositional style of the 2nd Viennese School, this is neither an atonal nor a serial composition. In tonality and mood, the Quintet reminds me of Max Reger's clarinet quintet but this is not to say it sounds like Reger, it doesn't. Perhaps this work's most unusual feature is that it has two first movements which Josephs numbered 1a and 1b. 1a is an *Andante*. Its opening is characterized by a legato melody, in the clarinet against interruptions by the strings. Besides Reger there are touches of Paul Dukas to be heard. 1b is a *Moderato* and follows 1a without interruption. Its gentle mood is not very different from 1a but the upper strings play a more prominent role in singing. At one point we hear a 4 measure quote from a late Beethoven quartet. Cello pizzicato is especially important in both parts. Josephs comments that in no way should the *Andante* be considered an introduction and that it is of equal importance to the following *Moderato*. Together, both are entitled *Partitura*. The second movement, *Scherzo, vivo*, is livelier, and has a urban neo-classical feel to it. The third movement, *Notturmo, adagio*, is the longest and despite its delicate nature, the center of gravity of this work. Here the clarinet presents a soft lovely melody in its high register while the strings, for the most part, play a soft and mysterious accompaniment. This is very languid music which almost creates a sense of suspended animation. The finale, *Dispartitura, moderato*, (Josephs tells us in his notes that it means a departure), begins calmly but in a pleasant mode. Then there is bustling, a preparation to leave perhaps, in any event the music becomes energetic for a while. The ending is peaceful and quiet. This is an unqualified masterpiece—a must hear, must play work that needs to enter the repertoire. Also on this highly recommended CD are Josephs 2 clarinet sonatas.

I have come across the name of **Reynaldo Hahn** (1875-1947) but only in connection with his operetta *Ciboulette*, (reputedly a masterpiece) but I had never heard any chamber music by him although *Cobbett's Cyclopedia* does mention his **Piano Quintet in f# minor** which dates from 1921 and is one of two works presented on **Naïve Auvidis CD 8787**. Born in Venezuela, Hahn's family moved to Paris when he was three. He studied at the Con-

servatory under Massenet who considered him a genius. Handsome and worldly (see photo), Hahn drew his friends from a much wider circle than other musicians (e.g.: Marcel Proust and Sarah Bernhardt) and was greatly interested in the literary scene as well as the theater. Having a gifted voice and being an excellent pianist, Hahn needed no assistant for vocal concert evening. He was also a deft conductor who eventually directed the Paris Opera. The big and highly dramatic opening movement of the three movement Quintet, *Molto agitato e con fuoco* is, in a word, brilliant. How could music this attractive and exciting land in oblivion? In the moody, pensive and beautiful *Andante non troppo lento*. The merest whiff of Faure can occasionally be heard. Toward the end, a lovely vocal melody, briefly, like the sun pushing through heavy clouds, lightens the mood. The thematic material of finale, *Allegretto grazioso* is elegant and genteel and has an almost neo-rococo feel to it but cannot match the excitement of the opening movement. The middle has a slightly more buoyant rondo and the coda slow builds momentum to a very satisfying conclusion. This is a superb work which must be revived.

Reading what Hahn had to say about the string quartet—"Chamber music in the form of a simple string quartet is fundamentally incomplete, such a combination makes versatility out of the question; each part is a layer. Supposing that one of those parts briefly takes the lead, the result will never be any more than an accompanied solo; if two parts break free, it will be an accompanied duo, if three do so, there will not be enough basses, and if all four move at once, you end up with instability."—you would not think he would choose to write one, but in the Autumn of 1939, he took up the challenge and wrote two. **String Quartet No.1 in g minor** is the only one published and represents a modest tonal advance over his quintet but is firmly rooted in traditional tonality. The *Andante molto moderato* is by turns pensive, lively and charming. The two parts of the *Récit et chanson de Provence*—*lent* which follows are starkly contrasting—an ascetic recitativo followed by a lovely setting of a folk tune from Provence. An *Andantino* which comes next is bluesy, melancholy music with the lightest touch of French impressionism. The neo-classical last movement, *Allegro assai*, is light in mood and full of energy. **String Quartet No.2 in F Major** written immediately after does not sound very different. *Animé* is stylish and light and also neo-classical in mood, much in the way of Saint Saen's 2nd Quartet. The excellent second movement, *Trés mouvementé* is a lively scherzo featuring wonderful use chromaticism. The work's center of gravity, *Posément, très modéré* is played muted. Though mostly quiet there is at times a sense of urgent yearning. The nervous finale, *Trés vite á un temps*, shows some tonal harshness juxtaposed with extremely beautiful melodies. Hahn loved Mozart and these quartets seem an attempt to write as a 20th century French Mozart might have done. Highly recommended.

