



Frank
BRIDGE

Cyril
SCOTT

Piano Quintets

Raphael Terroni, Piano • Bingham String Quartet

Frank Bridge (1879-1941): Piano Quintet in D minor

Cyril Scott (1879-1970): Piano Quintet No. 1

Compared to the piano quartet, product of an older and different tradition, the quintet of piano, two violins, viola, and cello is a fledgling, and was invented, not evolved, almost by chance. Robert Schumann had a habit, or compulsion, of concentrating on one creative medium at a time; in 1842 it was chamber music, beginning with three string quartets. But as well as being a great composer and thinker, he (unlike Brahms, who most enjoyed playing the horn) was a pianist never really happy away from the keyboard, at a time when its technical advances were suddenly making all sorts of new things possible. He was alive to them all and in retrospect it seems inevitable he would invent something to exploit his new quartet fluency and also give a starring rôle to himself or his beloved Clara with the instrument's full panoply of capabilities, and set about it with no daunting masterpieces from the past looking over his shoulder. It is no extension of a piano quartet but a completely new medium of extended symphonic scale and intent, retaining chamber intimacy but where one could deploy the most important thoughts with almost all the force of an orchestra while avoiding their expense and logistical problems. In so doing he set the standard, one that subsequent composers found – find – extremely challenging, but always attempt nonetheless. Bridge and Scott certainly did.

In 1904, when the original versions of both these works (allegedly) first saw the light of day, the world was not exactly awash with piano quintets. When Bridge and Scott were born, the miraculous year 1879 that also gave us John Ireland, Thomas Beecham and Hamilton Harty, there were, apart from Schumann's pioneering masterpiece, only two of consequence, by Brahms (1864) and Franck (1878), both vast, passionate and causing their composers enormous problems of one sort or another; then Stanford in 1886 and Dvořák in 1887. 1904 was a landmark for the genre; on the continent Fauré – whom Bridge met and knew – coming to the end of an eighteen year struggle with his *First Quintet* and Bartók completing his massive score. What motivated Bridge and

Scott though was very likely Josef Holbrooke, only a year their senior but a prodigy; rebel, pioneer, standard-bearer and rallying point for new British composers, whose own quintet had made a powerful impression at that time. Tantalisingly, when Raphael and I first discussed repertoire for this recording, Holbrooke's was the intended coupling for the Scott. He always wanted to record it and now alas never will.

Today Bridge is a more familiar name than Scott (and certainly Holbrooke). History has been kinder to him, reassessment earlier, but it needs remembering that the startling trajectory of stylistic development we now appreciate, which led to isolation in the years before his death and scandalous neglect following, began when in the decade before the Great War he was seen as one of the most gifted figures in British musical life. His talents were many: fine violinist, able cellist, useful pianist and in constant demand as an insightful conductor with a genius for getting inside complex new scores at short notice. More notable was his rôle as solo and especially ensemble violist – appearances with the Joachim and, more permanently, English String Quartet, of which he was a founder member, but equalled by his standing as a composer. An award-winning pupil (1899-1903) of Stanford at the RCM, he possessed a personal brand of melody, wistful but fresh, of harmonies that can go straight to the heart, and a use of tonality that produces pleasing, often unexpected results. With great fluency and an increasingly individual voice he produced not just high-class chamber music, miniatures, songs, solo pieces and unpatronising works within the grasp of decent amateurs that kept his name (just) alive in the dark days of his reputation's nadir, but orchestral scores and three extended ensemble pieces; the withdrawn *String Quintet* of 1901, a 35 minute C minor *Piano Quartet* of 1902 now resurrected and, in 1904, the still surviving four-movement first version of his D minor *Piano Quintet*.

It is a work of personal significance, prompted by the absence – temporary it turned out – of his beloved (later

wife) fellow RCM student Ethel Sinclair, back home in Australia after graduating. Like other pieces written for personal reasons – think of the Bliss *Clarinet Quintet* – it was first performed privately, with Harold Samuel at the piano, in 1905. Only two years later was it heard in public (with Thomas Dunhill and the Erinson Quartet) when strictures of writing phantasy pieces for the Cobbett competition had increased his appreciation of structure as a means to musical impact; he withdrew what he now saw as a rather sprawling, self-indulgent piece for revision, though it wasn't till 1912 that he had both the time and detachment needed for the job. Changes in this, the final version, are extensive, specifically rewriting the development sections of the outer movements and bringing his phantasy experience to bear on the middle two, now a single arch form with the *Scherzo* material becoming the middle section of the original *Adagio*. Generally it is tauter and leaner, but only in comparison. As befits its origins, it's a poetic-narrative work following an agenda where expression dominates form; passionate, lyrical or florid, forceful by dint of intent rather than structural mastery or prioritising form. Perhaps for the same reason it calls for a sort of dream virtuoso pianist in its often Rachmaninov-like technical demands and stylistic figurations. If Scott, Schumann, Brahms, possibly Franck and Fauré and certainly Holbrooke – superb pianists all in their field – wrote a part they could consider playing themselves, Bridge didn't: not the keyboard part, anyway.

Maybe it's fanciful to see the piano representing Ethel and the strings Bridge himself, but the work's form, and sometimes lack of it, the ardent piano writing and its interplay with the ensemble do support such a script. The brief opening string *Adagio*, sombre rather than anguished, precedes the main *Allegro moderato*, restlessly dramatic with romantic gestures from the piano, then a lyrically poignant second subject. Before the recapitulation we find a curious passage of Fauré-like stasis, a gentle dreaming interplay of piano and strings going apparently nowhere, as the relationship must at first have seemed. The second movement begins *Adagio ma non troppo* in the unlikely key of B major, then a

declamatory *Allegro con brio* middle section leading to a memory of the opening material, introduced now not, as you might expect, by viola, but cello, in a mood of mocking serenity eventually achieving a beautifully placed, seraphic climax overlaid by the piano's (Ethel's?) passionate first movement subject. The finale, *Allegro energico*, is genuinely concerned with thematic integration, reconciliation and resolution, juxtaposing and developing themes from both the preceding movements with material of its own, and combining the first movement's lyrical second subject with its own in the recapitulation in a virtuoso display of musical, spiritual and romantic rapprochement.

Writing on Holbrooke in *The Musical Times* (August 1958) Scott asserts that no truly great artist progresses with the times, implying that only minor writers reflect trends; great ones create them. They either progress and develop logically within the sphere of their vision, as Bridge did, or remain faithful to them, as did Brahms and Holbrooke or, he might have added, himself. Scott was born in Oxtou, a suburb of Birkenhead, like Bridge to a comfortably-off cultivated family, and seven months his junior. Interestingly, both Scott and Bridge, while taking on their influences intellectually, shrugged them off stylistically very early. Neither fitted an existing British school – church music, the folk revival or extreme academicism – nor was touched by rampant nationalism sweeping Europe, but found an individual attitude and expressive voice quickly.

Like Bridge a hugely talented performer, Scott's piano style mirrored his flamboyant public persona while maintaining a genuine poetic search for the beautiful and sympathetic, no matter how unlikely the work. He had his own sound in mind when composing, even away from the piano, an idealised view that beauty defines rather than reflects truth, and not everyone's truth is the same. His interests extended far; a published poet from his teens and translator of Baudelaire and Stefan George, he wrote plays, two brilliant if unreliable volumes of autobiography, wrote on theosophy, mysticism, yoga, transcendental philosophy, higher occultism, biochemistry, homeopathy, diet and health as well as musical, para-musical and other

matters, making contributions to countless periodicals on all manner of subjects.

While Bridge met European culture through playing, the British première of Debussy's *String Quartet* for instance, and did not travel overseas till the 1920s on a conducting tour of the USA, Scott met it head-on in boyhood. At 12 he was shipped off to Frankfurt Conservatory and 18 months study, composition with Humperdinck – so a direct line with Wagner, and piano with Uzielli – so a direct line with Clara Schumann; not a bad pedigree. At 17, armed with a portfolio of original works, he was back there studying piano with James Kwast and composition with Iwan Knorr, he and fellow students Percy Grainger, Norman O'Neill (the other significant composer to die in 1934), Balfour Gardner and Roger Quilter becoming known as 'The Frankfurt Group', a circle also including Aubrey Beardsley. It was from Germany that a reputation at the forefront of avant-garde musicians established through high-profile performances of major early scores found its way across Europe to the UK, and by 1914 his standing seemed secure. Then came war, after which, like Bridge, he found himself increasingly isolated in an alien musical landscape, remembered principally through songs, piano or instrumental miniatures and salon pieces.

The gestation of Scott's *Piano Quintet No. 1* is more complex than the Bridge because Scott always destroyed originals after revising or withdrawing a piece. It needs probing. Received wisdom is far from consistent. Most – though not all – agree that the piece from which it eventually evolved was a sextet written in 1904-05. Whether string or piano sextet depends on whom you believe. David Wordsworth says string sextet; Lewis Foreman says 'sextet (or quintet)'. Scott's friend Eaglefield Hull's biography (1921) which describes with music examples what is clearly the piece recorded here, says piano sextet, that it was hugely recast as a quintet in 1911 (as was Bridge's), significantly the year Scott became a vedantist. Ian Parrott who also knew Scott (and who sadly died, at 94, a month after Raphael Terroni) implies that 1904-05 was a revision of a piano quintet as he told me in 1992. Scott's autobiography *Bone of Contention* describes 'the work's first performance', like Bridge's a private one,

'at the salon of Miss Evelyn Suart' [the public première we think was at Aeolian Hall, London, on 12th June 1920, though Hull mentions it being played by Scott at 'one of his own concerts at Bechstein (now Wigmore) Hall' but supplies no date]. However, it describes the reaction at the salon as being divided between praise and 'denouncing this 25 year old debaser of musical morals with his extravagant and discordant effusions'. 25 year old? Back to Hull who tells us Scott wrote a piano quintet when he was 21 and withdrew it shortly after. If Parrott is right, he withdrew it to reuse the material as a sextet in 1904 and again to return it to its original forces in 1911. Possible, and also possible that Scott regarded its composition date as that of conception rather than completion. Just why an eminently playable and fine piece by a fashionable composer on the crest of popularity could remain unperformed in public for nine years and unpublished for a further six, and then not by any of his normal publishers, poses questions which nobody has tackled. Parrott dates the work described in Hull's 1921 book as 1925. A gaffe because 1925 is the copyright date on the published edition? Unlikely: Parrott was an experienced composer who knew that composition and publication dates were often wildly different. One explanation would cover the conflict of information. The Carnegie UK Publishing Trust report found it 'strong, vigorous, rugged, written with obvious mastery of its resources and its medium... It is uncompromisingly modern in style but there is nothing tentative in its method: it advances with a firm step, confident of carrying its audience with it.' When they offered publication Scott was delighted, but as it had elements of experiment and was possibly the first piece to reflect his vedanta principles it must be his best work; maybe improvements could yet be made so he simply held it back, adding refinements up to the last minute. Also the Carnegie agreement allowed Scott to retain his copyright, making further revision or even withdrawal possible. This would matter to Scott whose attempt to withdraw his *Piano Quartet* was only thwarted by its publisher.

Scott's harmonic language of quasi modal chords of three and four equidistantly placed pitches transposed unchanged ('sliding about') was fine for short pieces but

lack of recognisable tonal centres deprived him of musical landmarks: modulation and resolution, key signposts to traditional developmental progress but it did win praise from one high source: When Bernard Shaw complimented Elgar that 'for an Englishman' his harmonies sounded remarkably modern, the great man replied 'you mustn't forget that it was Cyril Scott who started all that.'

Still, he did need ways to sustain interest over serious time-spans in a non-solo context. One was organisation of timbre and interplay of colour by his ensemble, another originated in discussions with Percy Grainger at Frankfurt as early as 1900: constantly changing metres. Grainger's fascination with the rhythmic patterns of a local train clattering over points, crossings, intersections or rough track developed into what he called prose music 'just as there is free verse'. Grainger found echoes in the rhythmic eccentricities of folk singers and used it in short bursts for brief scores (e.g. *Train Music* of 1901). To Scott it was liberation, a way to renew thematic material in continuous lyrical, hypnotic narrative. The limitation that it excluded conventional tunes, risked tonal and developmental stasis, was unimportant to Scott. Debussy put his finger on it: 'His rhythmical experiments, his technique ... may at first sight appear strange and disconcerting. Inflexible severity however compels him to carry out to the full his particular system of aesthetics, and his only. The music unfolds itself somewhat after the manner of the Japanese rhapsodies which, instead of being confined within traditional forms, are the outcome of imagination displaying itself ... the incessantly changing aspects of the inner melody are an intoxication for the ear.' He wasn't referring to this quintet, but it is the work par excellence that mocks meaningful analysis and displays throughout what he – and Scott – had in mind. In the first 41 bars of the opening movement's *Andante con esaltazione*, an unbroken self-renewing melody shared between viola and violin over rippling piano figures, the score shows 31 changes of metre, while the ear detects only minor changes of inflection in a fluid pulse. A second theme, preceded *Allegro con spirito* by solo piano, is introduced by quiet strings alone. The development, a free *fantasia* with a tremendous climax partly metamorphosing the opening material, is joined by

another piano solo to the closing passage, a long, unresolved dying fade with strings muted.

In four movements as much for pragmatic as prescriptive reasons, the quintet is best seen as a continuous forty minute piece, reflecting *vedanta* teaching that all reality is a single principle by meditation (1 and 3) and exultation (2 and 4), with some agenda interplay to express its cohesive concept. Looked at conventionally, the short *Allegro grazioso* second movement, in modified ABA form (everything in this piece is modified) serves as *scherzo*. It is light and often joyful, though with reflective elements, permutes texture and timbre with great resource and scores the piano with economy, when it uses it at all, in a decorative rôle, as punctuation or to give the strings covering fire while they do things with mutes. It sparkles, sings, has passages of genuine if spectral dance and closes with a flourish. Following rapture and joy respectively in the first two movements, *Adagio con gran espressione* is about intensity, growing as, after an opening passage for quartet, cello, then violin, then *tutti* strings take up expressive material which turns out to be the joyous theme transformed at the end of the *scherzo*. Then a fresh motif develops a sustained stream of consciousness section of motivic renewal and extension, temporarily side-tracked by an *intermezzo* whose initial playfulness interrupts the emotion but is steadily ousted by the original theme which grows chromatically to a climax, gradually subsides and leads, with earlier music, to the *Finale*. This is formally complex and another *tour de force* of carefully organised metrical flux. The first section, based on two subjects, is marked *Allegro non troppo* and drives forward in exultant mood. The middle section, more reflective, presages the idyllic landscape of Howells's 1917 *Phantasy Quartet*. The mood is then flamboyantly restored in a grand roundup of earlier material, as befits a work with creative unity as its spiritual agenda, and rushes headlong to end in a massive *fortissimo* of rich sustained strings and crashing piano chords.

Piano Quintet No. 2 (1952) is another story for another day.

Giles Easterbrook

Raphael Terroni



Raphael Terroni was born in 1945, and studied the piano with John Vallier and Cyril Smith. For fifteen years he was Head of Piano at the London College of Music and Media, and examined and adjudicated at music festivals in Britain and abroad. He worked with broadcaster Richard Baker, giving first performances in Britain of several works for narrator and piano. He was active in concerts worldwide, and appeared at major festivals as a soloist, accompanist and chamber-music player. A founder member of the British Music Society, he served two terms as the Society's Chairman, and made several critically acclaimed recordings of music by British composers, Lennox Berkeley, Robin Milford, Howard Ferguson, Josef Holbrooke, Eric Coates and Arthur Butterworth among them. His 1989 recording of piano quintets by Cyril Scott and Frank Bridge with the Bingham Quartet was issued on CD for the first time shortly after his untimely death in 2012.

Bingham String Quartet



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Frank Bridge is today recognised as one of the most gifted figures in British musical life before World War I. His *Piano Quintet*, a work of personal significance prompted by the absence of his fiancée, is notable for its passionate, lyrical and forceful language, the Rachmaninov-like technical demands of the piano part calling for a virtuoso pianist. Debussy described Cyril Scott's exotic harmonic language as "an intoxication for the ear", and the *First Piano Quintet* is a multi-faceted work which mirrors Scott's flamboyant public persona while maintaining a genuinely poetic inner beauty.



Frank
BRIDGE
(1879-1941)

Piano Quintet in D minor, H49a (1904/1912)	29:19
1 I. Adagio – Allegro moderato	12:31
2 II. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro con brio – Adagio ma non troppo	10:03
3 III. Allegro energico	6:45

Cyril
SCOTT
(1879-1970)

Piano Quintet No. 1 (1911?)	37:46
4 I. Andante con esaltazione	13:11
5 II. Allegro grazioso ma non troppo	4:19
6 III. Adagio con gran espressione	9:25
7 IV. Finale: Allegro con molto spirito	10:51

Raphael Terroni, Piano
Bingham String Quartet

Steve Bingham, Violin I • Mark Messenger, Violin II
Brenda Stewart, Viola • Miriam Lowbury, Cello

Previously released on BMS

This recording was made with financial support from the Frank Bridge Trust.

Recorded at St Silas the Martyr, Chalk Farm, London, from 4th to 6th September, 1989

Producer and editor: Michael Ponder • Engineer: Mike Skeet • Digital restoration: Paul Arden-Taylor

Publishers: Stainer & Bell (tracks 1-3); Edition Peters (tracks 4-7)

Booklet notes: Giles Easterbrook • Cover photo: jk78 (iStockphoto.com)