

William
SHIELD

Complete Chamber Works • 1

Six String Quartets, Op. 3

The Dorrit Ensemble



William Shield (1748–1829)

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1782 was a landmark year for William Shield, witnessing his appointment as ‘house’ composer to Covent Garden, the premiere of *Rosina*, his most enduring operatic success, and the publication of the *Op. 3* string quartets – arguably the finest written by a native English composer during the 18th century.

William Shield, born in Swalwell, County Durham, was taught the violin by his father but music lessons were suspended when the death of his father saw the boy apprenticed to a Tyneside boat-builder. Shield soon extricated himself from the apprenticeship to take up violin and composition with Charles Avison. His reputation as a concert performer spread rapidly, and, on the advice of Felice Giardini, he travelled south to London where he secured the position of first violin, later first viola, in the orchestra of the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket. The opera repertoire seems to have stimulated Shield into writing his own stage music, and *The Flitch of Bacon* (1778), written for the Haymarket Little Theatre, was a hit. About this time the viola player William Napier became Shield’s publisher, issuing two sets of violin duets as *Op. 1* (1778) and *Op. 2* (c. 1780). Following his appointment at Covent Garden, Shield wrote a string of successful operas and pantomimes; the most popular were afterpieces, for example *Rosina* (1782), *The Poor Soldier* (1783), and *The Farmer* (1787), but his mainpieces, for example *Robin Hood* (1784), *Fontainbleau* (1784), and *The Noble Peasant* (1784), contain high-range arias of Queen of the Night-like difficulty. Haydn attended an early performance of *The Woodman* (1791), and he and Shield became friends. Shield often said that he learned more about music in the company of Haydn than from any other source, and Haydn, impressed by Shield’s ability to write extended arias with colourful concertante wind parts, presented him with a copy of *Pietà di me*. During 1791 Shield travelled abroad and began work on a set of string trios (1796) and two musical anthologies – *An Introduction to Harmony* (1800) and *The Rudiments of Thoroughbass* (1815). Shield, appointed Master of the King’s Music in 1817, wrote the last of all court odes. He was buried in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, and willed his Stainer viola to George IV.

The *Op. 3* quartets show most exactly the balance in Shield’s creativity between performer and composer. Clearly composed out of enthusiasm, all are written with a string player’s grasp of textural matters, particularly the phrasing and articulation of themes and the transparency of parts which offers rewarding activity to each individual player. The *First Quartet* opens with a light set of variations followed by a central movement including fugal counterpoint and a *Rondo* finale. The first movement of the *Second Quartet*, in which violin II may alternatively be played by oboe, is a gracefully energetic *Allegro moderato* and, by contrast, the second is a 6/8 ‘hunting’ scene replete with imitation horn calls and an energetic run on first violin to depict the fleeing fox. Musically, the musical effects of the *Third Quartet Allegro moderato*, with active passage work and sudden contrasts, inhabits the world of *Sturm und Drang*, while the *Minuet* is more relaxed. For the *Fourth Quartet*, Shield imaginatively maps the geography of his bucolic operas in a three-movement sequence featuring the hunt, duetting lovers, and a robust folk song (Shield collected folk songs) with drone accompaniment. An alert fanfare in the first violin, starting the *Fifth Quartet Allegro maestoso*, is later played by all instruments in unison and, after a gentle *Adagio*, comes a *Rondo* based on a bright duple-timed theme. The last quartet in C minor is the most progressive and the unified impulse which sweeps across all three movements, as well as the strength of feeling it communicates, must have been surprising to early listeners. The *Allegro* is all passion and urgency, the forward thrust released into dislocating effects and outbursts. The *Adagio*, in the relative major, includes some harmonic sidesteps expressive of darker implications, and a piquant finale draws the set to a close.

Robert Hoskins

The Dorrit Ensemble



Photo: Edith Salzman

The Dorrit Ensemble is dedicated to performing chamber music from early Classical repertoire to the music of today, and approaches previously unrecorded works with musical skill and maturity. The ensemble is based at the Elder Conservatorium, one of Australia's leading tertiary music institutions, at The University of Adelaide. Its core members are University of Adelaide lecturers Elizabeth Layton and Edith Salzman, and they are joined on this recording by Caroline Henbest from the Australian National Academy of Music and Elizabeth Sellars from the Flinders Quartet, Melbourne. For project work, they are also joined by other renowned Australian and New Zealand musicians, such as Michael Endres and Konstantin Shamray. The Dorrit Ensemble has been performing regularly throughout Australia and New Zealand since 2019. Members of the ensemble are regularly invited to perform and tour for chamber music presenters such as Musica Viva Australia, and they are in demand at festivals throughout Australia, Europe and North America, often performing with the world's most well-known musicians.

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Sources

The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 3, No. 1

Edited by Robert Hoskins – Artaria Editions AE220
Oxford, Bodleian Library – Mus 177c.69 (Napier, 1782)

String Quartet in F major, Op. 3, No. 2

Edited by Robert Hoskins – Artaria Editions AE221
Oxford, Bodleian Library – Mus 177c.69 (Napier, 1782)

String Quartet in C major, Op. 3, No. 3

Edited by Robert Hoskins – Artaria Editions AE222
Oxford, Bodleian Library – Mus 177c.69 (Napier, 1782)

String Quartet in E flat major, Op. 3, No. 4

Edited by Robert Hoskins – Artaria Editions AE223
Oxford, Bodleian Library – Mus 177c.69 (Napier, 1782)

String Quartet in D major, Op. 3, No. 5

Edited by Robert Hoskins – Artaria Editions AE224
Oxford, Bodleian Library – Mus 177c.69 (Napier, 1782)

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 3, No. 6

Edited by Robert Hoskins – Artaria Editions AE225
Oxford, Bodleian Library – Mus 177c.69 (Napier, 1782)



William Shield rose from relatively humble beginnings to become the ‘house’ composer to Covent Garden, for which he wrote stage works full of panache and tunefulness. He met and befriended Haydn who was to prove a lasting influence. In 1782 Shield published his *Six String Quartets, Op. 3*, some of the most richly rewarding works of their type in 18th-century England. The transparency of parts, use of imitation, infusion of *Sturm und Drang* elements as well as the bucolic and folkloric writing, all demonstrate Shield’s art, as does the progressive writing of the last of the six, in C minor.



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(1748–1829)



Six String Quartets, Op. 3 (pub. 1782)

No. 1 in B flat major*	8:21	No. 4 in E flat major*	7:58
1 I. Aria con variazione	2:27	8 I. Allegro	2:18
2 II. Fuga: Allegro con spirito	3:02	9 II. Adagio	2:43
3 III. Rondo: Allegro	2:52	10 III. Rondo: Allegro	2:57
No. 2 in F major*	8:03	No. 5 in D major*	11:18
4 I. Allegro moderato	5:50	11 I. Allegro maestoso	6:39
5 II. Allegretto	2:13	12 II. Adagio	1:33
No. 3 in C major*	13:29	13 III. Rondo: Allegro	3:06
6 I. Allegro moderato	8:00	No. 6 in C minor	11:22
7 II. Tempo di minuetto	5:29	14 I. Allegro	4:09
		15 II. Adagio	4:35
		16 III. Allegretto	2:38

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

The Dorrit Ensemble

Elizabeth Layton, Elizabeth Sellars, Violin
Caroline Henbest, Viola • Edith Salzmann, Cello

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