



Edward
GREGSON

Chamber Music

String Quartet No. 1

Le Jardin à Giverny

Triptych

Benedictus

String Quartet No. 2

Navarra Quartet

Benjamin Marquise

Gilmore, Violin

Alison Teale, Cor anglais

Rob Buckland, Alto saxophone



Edward
GREGSON
(b. 1945)

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String Quartet No. 1 (2014)		27:00
①	I. Dramatically (Tempo 1) – Fast, with energy (Tempo 2) – Expressively (Tempo 3)	9:44
②	II. Fantasia on a Chorale	10:39
③	III. Not too fast, but with energy	6:32
 ④ Le Jardin à Giverny for cor anglais and string quartet (1964/2016)		6:25
Triptych for solo violin (2011, rev. 2020)		13:36
⑤	I. A Dionysian Dialogue	5:50
⑥	II. Liebeslied	3:53
⑦	III. Moto perpetuo	3:44
 ⑧ Benedictus (1988) (version for alto saxophone and string quartet, 2021)		3:20
 ⑨ String Quartet No. 2 (2017)		16:08
Quasi una Siciliana – Alla marcia – Come prima (Appassionata) – Alla scherzo – Siciliana		

Edward Gregson (b. 1945)

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When the biography of Edward Gregson comes to be written, its author could approach his music from a number of angles. Focusing on the series of concertos that form the spine of his work would reveal the evolution of his style from the Romanticism of the *Concertante for Piano and Brass Band* (1966) to the postmodern eclecticism of his *Oboe Concerto* (2019). Exploring the reception of his music for band would demonstrate how much his work is admired and performed around the world. Reflection on his chamber and instrumental music would yield a more experimental, enquiring voice, a composer in the workshop, expanding and refining his technique. Early in his career – throughout the 1970s and 80s in particular – Gregson's approach was predominantly abstract in concept. Rarely did he set out to describe in a programmatic or narrative sense. However, in recent years, and particularly since the turn of the century, he has enriched his work with greater expressive range and emotional depth. He has also been bolder in sharing with his audience and performers how his work relates to the music that has informed or influenced it, through stylistic allusion or specific reference. A rich seam of expression has emerged by exploring musical opposites – darkness and light, past and present, reality and dream – and working towards a rapprochement.

String Quartet No. 1 (2014)

For a composer steeped in Classical and Romantic heritage, a lover of Beethoven, Brahms and Bartók, one might have expected Gregson to have turned to the string quartet earlier in his career. Brahms famously wrestled with the form for 20 years before he was content to release his two *Op. 51* masterpieces. Gregson left it even later before embarking on what he describes as 'a composer's ultimate challenge'. However, it was a lack of opportunity rather than the weight of inherited traditions that held him back until his late sixties.

He clearly relished the challenge, creating a compelling 'debut' quartet. On 14 January 2015 at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the Navarra Quartet's premiere performance made a lasting impression on the audience of the Manchester Mid-day Concerts Society, not least myself as the commissioner of the work and the Manchester Evening News music critic Robert Beale, whose described it as 'an extraordinary work, both gritty and serene'. As its then artistic director, I was delighted when Edward Gregson, former principal of the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) and still very much at the heart of the city's music scene, accepted my invitation to write a work to celebrate the Society's centenary. As he recalls, 'Paul gave me the luxury of deciding "what" and "who for". One of the fondest memories I have of my time at the RNCM was helping to nurture the next generation of professional chamber music performers. The Navarra Quartet was one such outstanding group, so it seemed natural for me to want to write my first quartet especially for them.' As Beale perceptively observed, its three movements 'are packed with ideas – fugues, variations, cadenzas, a chorale and a march – [contained] within the traditional structures of sonata, freely developing fantasia and rondo, and bound together by evolving motives and tonal anchorages providing a sense of journey to a promised land.'

A dramatic opening gesture embodies the work's principal thematic content. A simple rising motif opens out into a gritty, assertive series of chords, rooted in G, but distorted through polytonal dissonance and disturbed by rhythmic cross questioning. This core motif returns in varied form at key moments throughout the movement and crucially at the end of the work, both to define the structure and test the emotional temperature. The work's 'dark' material emerges in turbulent contrapuntal fashion. A contrasting chordal idea offers contrast but little relief. With Schubertian sleight of hand, Gregson changes tack to offer us a glimpse of 'light' – a serene, gently accompanied melody marked to be played as if 'singing sweetly'. The core motif clearly delineates the start and finish of the development section. Tension rises so high that a return to a conventional recapitulation would impede the emotional journey, so instead as the composer explains, 'a process of continuous development (in the manner of Bartók) results in presenting earlier material via a rather manic fugue that includes a reference to the BACH cypher'. A poignant memory of the lyrical second theme is quickly cast aside as the music darkens. At the end first violin and cello are poles apart. Matters are far from resolved.

In the central movement, *Fantasia on a Chorale*, Gregson looks back through a contemporary 'lens' as it were to Elizabethan and Jacobean times, when the most popular form of string chamber music was the *fantasie* or *fancie* played by a consort of viols. In his 21st-century interpretation, Gregson adopts a loose variation form of his own. The simple, modal chorale, re-shaping the core material, is never heard complete but becomes the ground to which wide ranging flights of fancy return. We hear a wistful viola cadenza, something more dramatic from the cello, and a brusque, Bartókian march that a fleeting memory of the Hungarian master's sixth quartet makes clear. The *Fantasia* ends with a gentle lullaby derived from the chorale that gradually fades away to the distance.

The spell is abruptly swept away by the boisterous sounds of the final rondo. This is full of rhythmic vitality and pent up energy, with the tempo held back at this stage. Gregson offers us two contrasting episodes, 'the first a broad, sweeping melody announced on viola, the second a helter-skelter fugue, the subject of which is derived from the rising four-note cell heard at the opening of the movement'. Then the transformation begins. The pace gathers, the syncopated rhythms are smoothed out, and the main theme is heard for the first time supported by consonant chords. Finally, the opening motif returns transformed by the sunlight of G major. As Gregson writes, 'thus the journey from darkness to light (a major preoccupation in my recent music) is complete'.

Le Jardin à Giverny (1964/2016)

One of the first compositions Gregson completed during his first year at the Royal Academy of Music in 1964 was a *Romance* for clarinet and piano, written for fellow student Robert Hill, later principal clarinet of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Some 52 years later, he revisited the work, substantially reworking it for cor anglais and string quartet especially for Alison Teale. By enhancing the flowing chromatic harmonies that he had discovered as a 19-year-old student in the work of composers like John Ireland (1879–1962), Gregson has fashioned an evocative miniature impression for which a title borrowed from Claude Monet seems entirely appropriate – *Le Jardin à Giverny*.

Triptych (2011, rev. 2020)

In 2011, Gregson accepted a commission from the RNCM to compose the test piece for the RNCM Manchester International Violin Competition. *Triptych* is unquestionably a virtuoso tour de force, as demanding to play as the solo sonatas of the Belgian violinist and composer Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931). It is also full of musical interest, embracing for a single instrument the stylistic and conceptual preoccupations apparent in other orchestral and chamber works.

A Dionysian Dialogue takes up this idea of opposing musical forces, as the composer explains: 'The dialogue is between Dionysus and Apollo, or the metaphorical representation of this within all of us.' The Dionysian music is brusque, earthy, elemental. The Apollonian is serene, dream-like, calm. True to form Gregson incorporates a number of specific quotations designed 'to evoke a layer of subconscious memory (mainly for violinists it should be said), as well as underlining the opposites'. References to Bach and Walton (*Violin Concerto*) are symbolic of the Apollonian sensibility, while quotations from Stravinsky (*L'Histoire du soldat*) and Shostakovich (*Violin Concerto No. 1*) represent the opposite.

Liebeslied is a haunting love song without words with contrast provided by two variations. The first is rather wistful and the second a playful but technically challenging exercise in double-stopping. The song returns as a nostalgic 'fade-out' lovelorn ending. Based on the final movement of Gregson's *Violin Concerto* (2000), the *Moto perpetuo* finale is described by the composer as a 'tarantella-like romp, where sheer virtuosity is the order of the day'. As the movement unfolds, chromatic elements are transformed into diatonic ones. The spirit of Italy morphs into a toe-tapping Irish jig.

Benedictus (1988, rev. 2021)

This beautiful melody was originally part of *Missa Brevis Pacem* ('a short Mass for peace'), sung by solo treble voice. The work was commissioned by the National School Band Association and received its first performance at the Snape Maltings Concert Hall in April 1988 under the composer's direction. The melody unfolds simply and expressively and now enjoys an independent existence re-scored as a song without words for alto saxophone and string quartet.

String Quartet No. 2 (2017)

String Quartet No. 2 was commissioned for the 35th Presteigne Festival, Herefordshire, during Gregson's time as the festival's resident composer. As Gregson explains, 'When the festival director George Vass asked me what I would like to write, I immediately responded with "a new string quartet". It may seem a bit strange that I wanted to write another so soon after the first, but the truth is that I had contracted the bug, despite all the challenges that this most difficult of genres presents.'

While some of this second quartet's features may seem familiar from the first – the flowing sometimes turbulent counterpoint, the rhetoric of repeated cluster chords, the richness of double-stopping and the evocative colour of harmonics and *glissandi* – it is a very different work in concept and effect. Cast in a compact single movement, it begins and ends with the gentle lilt of a *siciliana*, a favourite Gregson dance pulse. The musical argument one might expect of a multi-movement quartet is compressed into five intense sections, each of which is built from a series of contrasting but dynamic, progressive paragraphs. Gregson had employed a similar approach before – albeit of a more extreme mosaic quality – in his Tippett-inspired *Piano Sonata* (1983). At the heart of the work, the *siciliana* material is transformed into a passionate lyrical outpouring that builds to a searing climax. The slower music is balanced by two 'developmental' fast episodes; a determined march, in which the 'shadow' of Mahler is audible, and developed from it, a fleet of foot *scherzo* that in turn heralds a joyful reimagining of the pensive opening material.

Gregson describes the extended final *siciliana* as 'the resolution the music has been waiting for'. Its simple melodic contour and modal G major roots dissipates the tension created by the more dissonant harmonic profile and intense fragmentation of the rest of the work. The quartet closes with the ethereal sound of upward *glissandi* and high sustained harmonics, before 'fading into the silence from whence the music first began its journey'.

Paul Hindmarsh

Edward Gregson

Photo: Simon McComb



Edward Gregson (born 1945) is one of the leading composers of his generation, whose music has been performed, broadcast and recorded worldwide. He studied composition and piano at the Royal Academy of Music from 1963 to 1967. His numerous commissions have included works for the English Chamber, Bournemouth, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, and Hallé orchestras, with performances by many other orchestras, soloists and ensembles around the world. In addition, his contribution to the wind and brass repertoire has been hugely significant. In 2019 he was the recipient of an Ivors Academy Composer Award for *The Salamander and the Moonraker*, a Hallé Concerts Society commission for children's choir, narrators and orchestra. Most of his music has been commercially recorded, with five volumes of his orchestral music and concertos on the Chandos label, and three volumes of his instrumental and chamber music on the Naxos label. He has also enjoyed a highly successful academic career, latterly as Principal of the Royal

Northern College of Music (1996 to 2008), where he is now a Companion and Emeritus Professor.

www.edwardgregson.com

Benjamin Marquise Gilmore

Photo: Marina Vidor



Benjamin Marquise Gilmore has been concertmaster of the Philharmonia since 2019, and a member of the Navarra Quartet since 2021. He is also a member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and formerly leader of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He studied with Natalia Boyarskaya at the Yehudi Menuhin School and with Pavel Vernikov in Vienna, and received further guidance and inspiration from Julian Rachlin and Miriam Fried. He won prizes at the Oskar Back, Joseph Joachim and Salzburg Mozart competitions, and has participated in festivals such as Kuhmo, Prussia Cove and Ravinia. Benjamin's father was the musicologist Bob Gilmore, his grandfather is the conductor Lev Markiz, and his mother Maria Markiz has variously been a musicologist, interpreter, equestrian and data analyst. He is married to Hannah Shaw, a violist, and enjoys cooking and cycling, in both of which disciplines he makes up in enthusiasm what he lacks in proficiency.

Alison Teale



Alison Teale is co-principal oboe with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, having held the post of principal cor anglais with the same orchestra from 2008 for twelve years. She is an oboe professor at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and is frequently invited to give masterclasses and lectures at other music institutions around the UK and Europe.

www.alisonteale.com

Rob Buckland



Rob Buckland has crafted a career around his primary work as a saxophonist that defies categorisation. Moving effortlessly between genres, he is in high demand as a classical soloist, chamber musician, contemporary specialist, improviser, arranger, composer, conductor and producer with an international reputation as an insightful and forward-thinking educator. Renowned for a highly distinctive, original sound, combined with an open-minded approach to repertoire and performance styles, his work takes him around the globe in a variety of musical settings. He is leader of the Apollo Saxophone Quartet and is professor of saxophone at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester.

www.robuckland.com

Navarra String Quartet

Benjamin Marquise Gilmore, Violin • Bartosz Woroch, Violin • Sasha Bota, Viola • Brian O'Kane, Cello



Photo: Mircea Belei

Left to right: Sasha Bota, Bartosz Woroch, Benjamin Marquise Gilmore, Brian O'Kane

Formed in 2002, the Navarra String Quartet was selected for representation by the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) from 2006 to 2010 and has been awarded the MIDEM Classique Young Artist Award, a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, the Dutch Kersjespreis, a Musica Viva tour, and prizes at the Banff, Melbourne and Florence International String Quartet Competitions. The quartet has appeared at major venues throughout the world including Wigmore Hall, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Konzerthaus Berlin, as well as international festivals and the BBC Proms. The quartet collaborates with numerous eminent artists, and has been the dedicatee of new commissions by Simon Rowland-Jones, Joseph Phibbs and Manuel Hidalgo. Highly acclaimed recordings include Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross* (Altara) and an album of Pēteris Vasks' first three *String Quartets* (Challenge Classics), recorded while working closely with the composer himself, which was nominated for the Schallplattenkritik Award. More recent recordings include an album for NMC featuring the music of Joseph Phibbs and *Love & Death* (Orchid Classics). Since 2014, the quartet has been in charge of the artistic vision of the Chamber Music Weesp. The ensemble plays on a variety

of fine instruments which include an unknown, old English viola and a Grancino cello made in Milan in 1698, generously on loan from the Cruft-Grancino Trust which is administered by The Royal Society of Musicians.

www.rayfieldallied.com/artists/navarra-string-quartet

Edward Gregson is a composer of international standing whose music has been performed, broadcast, and commercially recorded worldwide. Gregson is renowned for his concertos and music for band, but his chamber music reveals a more enquiring voice. In recent years these works have been enriched with greater expressive and emotional depth, ranging here from youthful impressionism to the fearsome virtuosity of *Triptych*, a competition test piece. Gregson's *First String Quartet* was acclaimed by one critic as 'an extraordinary work, both gritty and serene', while the evocative colours of the *Second* are framed by the gentle lilt of a *Siciliana*.



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|------------|---|--------------|
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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Alison Teale, Cor anglais 4 • Rob Buckland, Alto saxophone 8

Navarra String Quartet

Benjamin Marquise Gilmore, Violin I 1–3 8, Violin II 4 9, Solo violin 5–7

Bartosz Woroch, Violin I 4 9, Violin II 1–3 8

Sascha Bota, Viola 1–4 8 9 • Brian O’Kane, Cello 1–4 8 9

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded: 20 and 21 November 2021 (in the presence of the composer) at St John The Evangelist,

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