

Arnold COOKE

COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS, VOLUME TWO
VARIATIONS ON AN ORIGINAL THEME
STRING QUARTET NO. 2
STRING QUARTET NO. 4

The Bridge Quartet

FIRST RECORDINGS

ARNOLD COOKE: STRING QUARTETS, VOLUME TWO

by Peter Marchbank

Arnold Atkinson Cooke was born into a prosperous family in the village of Gomersal, near Leeds, West Yorkshire, in 1906 and went to Repton School, where he showed promise as a young cellist. From there, he gained a place at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, in 1925; there he studied history. After obtaining his degree, he changed to music, thus coming under the influence of Professor Edward Dent. It was at this time that he began to compose and at a Saturday evening concert of the University Music Club, on 12 March 1927, the programme announced that A. A. Cooke would perform his Cello Sonata. It would eventually come to be his Opus 1, and the manuscript in the archive of the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester reveals a work of many diverse influences, including Delius, Elgar and Grieg. One of his contemporaries at that time was William Glock, then Organ Scholar at Caius, and at a College Concert on 8 March 1928 they collaborated in a performance of Beethoven's Cello Sonata in A major, which *The Caian* reported 'gave us moments of real beauty'.¹ The two men went, with the assistance of Professor Edward Dent, to study in Berlin: Cooke in 1929 to study composition with Hindemith at the Hochschule and, a year later, Glock to study piano with Artur Schnabel. After three years, Cooke returned to England and, following a year as Music Director of the Festival Theatre in Cambridge, began a life of composition and teaching, first at the Royal Manchester College of Music and later at Trinity College in London. The University of Cambridge awarded him a Doctorate for his First Symphony in 1948. His works include two operas, *Jabez and the Devil*, commissioned for the Royal Ballet, six symphonies, a number of concertos (including one for orchestra) and a large amount of solo, chamber and choral music. He died in Kent in 2005.

¹ *The Caian*, 1927–28 edition.

In 1942, Cooke volunteered to join the Royal Navy. Because of his educational background, he was put on to an officers' training course and, in due course, became a sub-lieutenant. His naval service gave him little time for composition. It was only in 1944, when he was the liaison officer on board the D. S. Thames, a Dutch ocean-going tug, that he found time to compose and read. He had joined the ship at the beginning of that year at Tilbury Dock and found that patrolling the Thames Estuary was what the Navy called 'a quiet number'. He began to compose a Piano Trio and also a set of *Variations on an Original Theme* for string quartet, which he completed by the end of April 1945. Harvey Davies, an authority on Cooke's music, has found no evidence that the Variations were written for a particular quartet and suggests that Cooke was simply 'keeping his hand in' at composition: since the work has no dedication, the score was never checked and no parts were ever made, it is his belief that it was composed as an exercise.² Davies has catalogued all of Cooke's works and has given the Variations the number D35.³

As with all good variation themes, Cooke's [5] is simple and contains a number of sequences and opportunities for modulation. It is followed by eleven short variations ending with a larger-scale fugue. The first three variations [6]–[8] gradually increase in tempo, whereas the fourth, marked *Lento e tranquillo* [9], is notable for the interplay between the *pizzicati* of the first violin and the cello over the sustained chords of the second violin and the viola. The fifth variation [10] is very fast, and the sixth [11] a languid canon. The seventh [12] is a scherzo with the feel of an old English dance; the eighth [13], too, is also dance-like – in this instance, a slow waltz. The ninth variation [14] is slow and dies away into silence, which is broken by the vigorous *Alla marcia* [15] which comes next. The penultimate variation [16] is slow and makes much play of the shifting dissonant harmonies. The final fugue [17] is based on an eight-note figure which uses the sequences of the original theme to considerable effect before its final peroration brings a triumphant ending in G minor. The work was never performed in Cooke's lifetime. Its

² In conversation.

³ Arnold Cooke's *Chamber Music with Piano: Contexts, Stylistic Evolution and Performance*, Ph.D. thesis, Royal Northern College of Music/Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, 2001, p. 105.

first performance was given, some 78 years after its composition, by the Bridge Quartet in November 2023 in St Stephen's Church, Robin Hood's Bay, in Cooke's native county of Yorkshire. This performing edition has been prepared from the set of autograph parts held in the Arnold Cooke Archive at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. There are some discrepancies and various dynamic marks are missing. It is hoped that the majority have been corrected and that this delightful piece will be found rewarding both to perform and to hear.

During the War, naval postings and travel restrictions made concert-going difficult. But, in a letter to Professor Dent dated 27 November 1943, Cooke wrote that he had heard Britten's String Quartet No. 1 in Bradford played by the Griller Quartet. It was his opinion that 'Britten is one of the most talented composers we have and will go farther than any of them'.⁴ After the War, Cooke returned to his teaching at Trinity College of Music in London. By this time, his music was being performed in public and could be heard on the radio. Public music-making was also increasing and, in another letter to Dent, dated 31 October 1945, he writes that he had heard Bartok's Third and Fourth Quartets in Leeds and continues: 'I wish that I could hear the 5th and 6th'.⁵ Later in the year, he went to see Roberto Gerhard's ballet *Pandora* and found the music 'very effective'.⁶ Although he may have admired much of the recent music he had heard, it did not appear to affect his own compositional style, which was based on the Austro-German tradition, filtered through Hindemith's teaching, when he began to compose his Second String Quartet. It was completed on 22 November 1947 according to a note at the end of the autograph score (which is now in the Arnold Cooke Archive at the Royal Northern College of Music). The work was given its first performance by the Sturdy Quartet on 6 October 1948 in the Council Chamber of Chelsea Town Hall. The same group gave the first broadcast on the BBC Third Programme on 14 May 1949. A subsequent broadcast was given by the Macgibbon String Quartet, on 1 June 1959.

⁴ Letter held in the Edward Dent Archive at King's College, Cambridge (https://archivesearch.lib.cam.ac.uk/repositories/7/archival_objects/274889).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

The first performance in recent times was given by the Bridge String Quartet in Huddersfield, in January 2025. The Second Quartet, D43 in Harvey Davies' catalogue,⁷ is the most substantial and perhaps the most Brahmsian in style of Cooke's five quartets and is in the conventional four movements, though the scherzo comes second and is followed by the slow movement. The general tonality of the outer movements is F, whereas the scherzo has the feel of A minor and the slow movement is in B flat. Much of the harmony is based on the interval of the fourth, a system pioneered by his mentor, Hindemith, as are many of the short thematic motifs – though Cooke is not afraid to write long arching melodies. Throughout, Cooke displays his contrapuntal mastery in the free and varied interplay of these motifs. The first movement [18] is the only one of the five quartets to have a slow introduction, leading into an *Allegro moderato*. It is in a modified sonata form, and the motifs that dominate the quick section are all derived from the melodic figures that appear in the introduction. The recapitulation opens with the lyrical second subject; the first subject becomes the elegiac coda which brings the movement to a quiet close. The mercurial Scherzo in $\frac{5}{4}$ time [19] has a slower song-like trio section, after which the lively Scherzo returns. The *Andante* slow movement [20] begins with a languid melody, followed by a quicker section, with a lively figure which is passed around the four instruments, and the movement ends with the languid melody and the lively figure combined. The dance-like Finale, *Molto allegro* [21], has a short fugue at its heart. In the *Presto* coda, the dance and the fugue subject are combined, bringing the quartet to a resounding conclusion.

Composed in 1976, some 28 years after Cooke's Second Quartet and eight years after the Third, the Fourth String Quartet, D135, is very different from its predecessors: sparer and more transparent in texture. Many of the thematic ideas are still based on the interval of the fourth and, in the outer movements, there is still a lot of contrapuntal interplay. Though not composed for them, the work was taken up by the Delme String Quartet, which gave the first performance in a BBC broadcast on 18 July 1978 and went on to perform the work several times during the next few years. The first performances

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 108.

in recent times were given by the Bridge Quartet in Bristol, Norwich and Manchester in 2024. The first movement, an *Allegro* in a modified sonata form [1], is introduced by a six-bar melody out of which most of the thematic material is derived. This melody punctuates the movement, opening the development section and the coda. The second movement is a short and quicksilver scherzo, marked *Molto allegro* [2]. The slow movement, an *Adagio* [3], is remarkable for its rapt stillness. Unusually for Cooke, it opens with a twelve-note melody made up from all the notes of the chromatic scale. Again, many of the melodic ideas are derived from this theme. At the heart of the movement comes a section that appears to be quicker, though the basic pulse of the movement remains constant – a feature that was to be repeated in the central section of the Fifth Quartet – before the music of the opening returns to bring the movement to a quiet and reflective conclusion. The finale [4] is the most substantial of the four movements, a lively and attractive rondo with the tempo indication of *Allegro vivace*. Cooke still manages to punctuate it with fugal episodes before the opening flourish returns to close the work on a unison F. On their retirement, the members of the Delme Quartet donated their library of quartet parts to the British Library, and as a result I have been able to incorporate various revisions and amendments made to the autograph score in the light of their rehearsals and performances attended by the composer.

This album completes the recording of all Arnold Cooke's music for string quartet.⁸ Composed over a period of 45 years, between the years of 1933 and 1978, the cycle of five quartets represents a remarkable thread through British chamber music in the mid-twentieth century. The longest surviving pupil of Hindemith in England, he admittedly used the language and mannerisms of his teacher – but with restraint and always with an ear for lyrical beauty. With such a large compositional output, embracing so many musical forms, it is sad that Cooke's innate modesty prevented his music from being more frequently published and performed and thus better known. Let us hope that the future is kinder to his memory and to his music.

⁸ String Quartets Nos. 1, 3 and 5 can be found on Toccata Classics TOCC 0696.

Like Arnold Cooke, Peter Marchbank studied music at Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge. Thereafter, much of his working life was spent in the BBC, including thirteen years as Senior Producer, responsible for the artistic planning, of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. A free-lance life followed: conducting, writing about music, running a festival and, more recently, bringing back to life music, undeservedly neglected, of composers he knew and admired.



The reputation of the **Bridge Quartet** – Colin Twigg and Catherine Schofield, violins, Michael Schofield, viola, and Lucy Wilding, cello – as an ambassador for English music is universally recognised. The group has travelled widely to festivals in USA, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Italy, Spain and Kenya and has broadcast English music live on the BBC and on various continental radio stations. Their recording legacy began with three CDs for Meridian of early and mature

quartets by their namesake Frank Bridge and a consequent catalogue of recordings has been sprinkled with discoveries, most notably for EMR Records. The Quartet has unearthed and brought to life neglected works by Goossens, Hurlstone, Howells, Norman O'Neill and Sir Hubert Parry, to name only a few. A review in the American magazine *Fanfare* acknowledged this ambassadorial role: 'The Bridge Quartet's players are, as can always be counted on, exemplary in technical address and masters of musicality. They are also serious artists dedicated to promoting the works of their native English composers'. With Michael Dussek (piano) their most recent CDs, *Heracleitus* and *Blue Remembered Hills*, have featured Ivor Gurney song-cycles with the tenor Charles Daniels and baritone Roderick Williams respectively.

The quartet has been established for over 30 years, with its founder leader, Colin Twigg, returning and recently celebrating over ten years in his second tenure. Colin is also a composer whose works have been performed by the CBSO, recorded by the Bridge Quartet and featured in the Deal Festival. His *Phantasy Quartet on a Theme of Haydn* was recently streamed from a live concert by UMKC (USA) in their 'Chamber Conversations' series. The same *Phantasy Quartet* opened a Toccata Classics album of Colin Twigg's chamber music, released in 2017 (rocc 0387). Writing for the website MusicWeb International, Stephen Greenbank 'found this CD album very rewarding, enabling me to explore some uncharted by-ways. The music is both accessible and deftly crafted, and the recording boasts warm, radiant sound. [...] I have nothing but praise for this delightful release'.

The first volume of this survey of Arnold Cooke's string quartets (rocc 0696) was likewise well received by the critics. Richard Whitehouse, writing for Arcana.fm, felt that 'his music has a technical rigour and a feel for communication [...]'. It helps when, in the Bridge Quartet, it has exponents so well versed in the lineage of British quartet writing – not least the composer who provided this ensemble's name – and as attentive to the wealth of contrapuntal invention as to the greater design with each of these pieces'. Hubert Culot summed up his review for MusicWeb International thus: 'The Bridge Quartet play with immaculate technique and understanding. The fine recording and the informative notes add value to a release that does full justice to Cooke's solid and strongly crafted music'. And in *Fanfare* Henry Fogel agreed: 'The performances by the Bridge Quartet sound completely committed, and Toccata's recorded sound is well balanced and placed at just the right perspective to provide both warmth and clarity'.



TOCCATA DISCOVERY CLUB



Join today to discover unknown music
from the Renaissance to the present day.
Experience our Classical music discoveries
from around the world before anyone else!

toccataclassics.com/discovery

Also available on Toccata Classics

TOCC 0696



'The performance is committed and enthusiastic. The Bridge Quartet has played these works at concert venues over the past few years, and are clearly powerful advocates of Cooke's chamber music. The recording is ideal.'

—MusicWeb International

TOCC 0659



'Ideal performances, ideally recorded, amply documented, on a generously filled disc. This music cries out for addition to the record collection of every organ aficionado, and to the repertory'

—*Fanfare*



Recorded on 29 April 2024 (Quartet No. 4) and on 29 and 30 April 2025 in St George's, Pinner View, Harrow, Middlesex, UK

Producer-engineer: Michael Ponder

Editor: Adaq Khan

Series executive producer: Peter Marchbank

Financial assistance in the making of this recording is gratefully acknowledged from the Bridge Quartet Initiative Trust, the Ida Carroll Trust, the Joan Silberstein Music Fund and the RVW Foundation.

Booklet text: Peter Marchbank

Cover: Arnold Cooke as naval rating in 1942, photograph sent to Edward Dent, held in The Papers of Edward Joseph Dent, The Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge Repository, and reproduced courtesy of the Archivist

Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)

Typesetting and lay-out: ALN Design, St Albans

Executive Producer: Martin Anderson

© Toccata Classics, London, 2025

® Toccata Classics, London, 2025

Toccata Classics CDs are available in the shops and can also be ordered from our distributors around the world, a list of whom can be found at www.toccataclassics.com. If we have no representation in your country, please contact:

Toccata Classics, 16 Dalkeith Court, Vincent Street, London SW1P 4HH, UK

Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com

ARNOLD COOKE Complete String Quartets, Volume Two

String Quartet No. 4 (1976)	22:10
1 I <i>Allegro</i>	5:16
2 II <i>Scherzo: Molto allegro</i>	3:00
3 III <i>Adagio</i>	8:56
4 IV <i>Allegro vivace</i>	4:58

Variations on an Original Theme (1945)	16:23
5 Theme: <i>Allegretto semplice</i>	1:04
6 Variation 1: <i>L'istesso tempo</i> –	0:44
7 Variation 2: <i>Più agitato</i> –	0:42
8 Variation 3	0:51
9 Variation 4: <i>Lento e tranquillo</i>	1:18
10 Variation 5: <i>Vivace</i>	0:37
11 Variation 6: Canon. <i>Andante</i>	1:43
12 Variation 7: <i>Scherzo. Allegro molto</i>	0:34
13 Variation 8: <i>Andante con moto</i>	0:58
14 Variation 9: <i>Più lento</i> –	1:36
15 Variation 10: <i>Alla marcia</i>	1:17
16 Variation 11: <i>Adagio ma non troppo</i>	2:20
17 Variation 12: Fuga. <i>Allegro</i>	2:39

String Quartet No. 2 (1947)	30:30
18 I <i>Adagio – Allegro moderato</i>	7:43
19 II <i>Scherzo. Allegro</i>	8:34
20 III <i>Andante</i>	8:56
21 IV <i>Molto allegro</i>	5:17

The Bridge Quartet

Colin Twigg and Catherine Schofield, violins
Michael Schofield, viola
Lucy Wilding, cello

TT 69:06

FIRST RECORDINGS