



Stephen DODGSON

**CHAMBER MUSIC, VOLUME TWO: THREE QUINTETS**

PIANO QUINTET NO. 1  
PIANO QUINTET NO. 2  
STRING QUINTET

Tippett Quartet  
Emma Abbate, piano  
Susan Monks, cello

## STEPHEN DODGSON: THREE QUINTETS

by John Warrack

Stephen Dodgson was born in London on 17 March 1924 and, after wartime service in the Navy, had some composition lessons from Bernard Stevens, a careful and scrupulous teacher, before going to the Royal College of Music, where his principal study was the horn. He also studied composition with two widely contrasting teachers: R. O. Morris, whose masterly books on counterpoint derived from creative practice but who maintained a reserved attitude to student individuality, and the genial and much-loved Patrick Hadley, who was an enthusiastic encourager of young composers trying to find their own voice rather than a meticulous purveyor of rules. Possibly they complemented each other in the growth of Dodgson's talent; certainly, his ability was evident to his fellow-students, and there was no surprise when in 1948 he won the Cobbett Memorial Prize for a *Fantasy String Quartet*. W. W. Cobbett had founded this prize in 1905 to encourage the revival of the Elizabethan form of the 'fancy', in which several movements of a sonata were compressed into a single movement; and it may be that the idea left a lasting impression on Dodgson.

On leaving the Royal College, he also won a travelling scholarship to Italy; on his return, new works included a number of pieces for chamber ensembles, including two string trios (1951 and 1964), a piano quartet and *Capriccio and Finale*, a sextet for flute, clarinet, harp and string trio, written in 1952 for The Wigmore Ensemble. The 1960s and '70s also saw the growth of his interest in the guitar, for which (though not himself a player) he wrote a corpus of music that makes him a major figure among modern composers for the instrument.

Dodgson's interest in the Baroque – doubtless encouraged by his marriage in 1959 to the harpsichordist and Couperin scholar Jane Clark – was naturally reflected in his music: his guitar works include four Partitas (1963–90), and his output for harpsichord features five sets of *Six Inventions* (written between 1955 and 1993)

and the *Sonata-Divisions* (1982). There is also a generous quantity of orchestral music, not least nine *Essays*, composed between 1980 and 2009, and concertos for bass trombone (1985) and piano (1959), as well as a *Serenade* for solo viola and orchestra (1956). Paradoxically, he preferred smaller forces for his bigger thoughts: his four symphonies (1952, 1954, 1988, 1989) are written for strings or chamber orchestra, and there are no fewer than eighteen *concertante* works with chamber-orchestral or string accompaniment, among them five *Concerti da camera* (1963–79).

Dodgson's personal preference was for writing vocal music. His catalogue boasts a generous quantity of solo and choral songs and cycles, both secular and sacred, and a number of larger-scale works, among them a *Te Deum* (1972) and *Magnificat* (1975), both requiring SATB soloists, mixed chorus and orchestra. He also wrote two chamber operas – *Margaret Catchpole: Two Worlds Apart* (1979) and *Nancy the Waterman* (2007) – and no fewer than eight children's operas.

But it is chiefly in the category of chamber music that the majority of Dodgson's roughly 250 works are to be found, not least because he was happy to compose for unusual combinations at the request of friends and other musical acquaintances. That did not involve a neglect of more traditional forms, as his series of nine string quartets (1984–2006) makes clear.

Among the obituaries prompted by his death, at the age of 89, on 13 April 2013, was an assessment by the recorder-player John Turner, for whom Dodgson wrote a considerable amount of music:

Stylistically, his music is tonal, though often ambiguously so. Like that of Janáček, a composer he admired and whose compositional method of developing small cells finds its echo in his own works, the music rarely follows an obvious path. Performers find initially that the music is surprising and unexpected – puzzling even – and almost always very intricate [...].

However, once the music reveals its secrets, it becomes intensely appealing. The influence of early music in his style manifests itself in numerous ways: not just in his choice of instrument, but also in a love of decoration and ornamentation, a fondness for

virtuoso display, baroque-style figuration, a predilection for variation form (often on medieval or folk-tune themes), and the choice of early vocal texts.<sup>1</sup>

In *Gramophone* Guy Rickards felt that

His often angular melodies have a knack of registering in the memory and are beautifully laid out for the instruments. He had a more romantic side, with lilting themes as evidenced in miniatures such as *Echoes of Autumn* for viola and guitar [1998] or the *Intermezzo* for four guitars [1987]. His mature style was one of refinement, sitting somewhere between post-Romanticism and Neoclassicism but individual works often varied this blueprint, having quirky, even spectral sides to them.<sup>2</sup>

### Piano Quintet No. 1

In 2000 Dodgson wrote a brief programme note to cover his two piano quintets. No. 1, he explained,

was commissioned by the Battle Festival (Sussex) to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the Norman Conquest, premiered in July 1966 by Bryan Vickers and the Alberni String Quartet. At the time I was much involved writing music for the BBC drama department, then in its heyday before the debilitating ascendancy of TV. On occasions the musical forces seemed almost to outnumber the actors. (Broadcasting in stereo was a recent introduction and an added stimulus.) Their task (and mine) was to maximise colour and excitement in the great historical dramas (Henry VI, Macbeth, Perkin Warbeck, Le Morte d'Arthur). An intoxicating experience. Some of my evocations of bell-chimes and the clash of arms found their way into my quintet in an attempt to evoke that battle of nearly a millennium ago.

Dodgson's maturity is shown in a piece which absorbs the beguilement of such imitations into a genuine piece of chamber music. The opening *Largo* [1] lays out the combination

<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian*, 15 April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> [www.gramophone.co.uk/classical-music-news/obituary-stephen-dodgson-composer](http://www.gramophone.co.uk/classical-music-news/obituary-stephen-dodgson-composer), posted 17 April 2013, accessed 9 July 2016.

of sounds, with the capacity of the piano to set delicately percussive textures against sustaining or busily contesting string activity, before embarking on a movement of considerable thematic energy. As so often in Dodgson's music, there is less concern with the development of themes than with their emergence in different functions. The gentle *Andantino* [2] opens on a passage of string *pizzicato*, with a sustaining melody then passed to the piano, and though these roles are ingeniously merged with the exchanging of melodic lines, it is on the piano's quiet patterns of rapid notes over held string phrases that the movement ends. It is to a more directly ferocious peasant aggression that the *Allegro assai* [3] sets off, with heftily emphasised fifths in the bass and rustic rhythmic cavortings, though these are absorbed into something more elusive in the middle of the movement. Similarly the closing *Maestoso* [4] sets off with the suggestion of tolling bells, before a strange section marked 'alla fantastica' with more bell implications leads to a lightening of the atmosphere into an unqualified 'giocoso' and strongly assertive, even celebratory closing pages. Perhaps the Normans are acknowledged to have brought more to the country than conquest and the death of the King.

## **Piano Quintet No. 2**

The Second Piano Quintet of 1999 marks a very different anniversary, the millennium. Written a little over thirty years after the First, it shows a consolidation of Dodgson's techniques. He began this section of his programme note by looking over the music he had written since the earlier quintet:

In the summer of 1999, when I completed this score (No. 2), circumstances were altogether different. Incidental music a far remove from current activity and myself more experienced, if no wiser, in the realm of chamber music by the completion of five string quartets, a string quintet and sextet, plus two piano trios and two string trios in the interim. And this time, not an unimaginably distant 1066 to commemorate, but an inescapable change in the calendar the whole world was simultaneously awaiting a few months ahead.

Also belonging to that 33-year interim was the whole of my teaching career at the Royal College of Music (where I had myself trained postwar) and a good deal of reviewing, lecturing, broadcasting, apart from composing a great deal of music for guitar, which I do not play, but for which I somehow acquired a reputation.

Since completing this quintet, I have made substantially revised versions of two works for wind orchestra (*Marchrider & Wind Symphony*), have completed a *Concertino* for Flute, Harp and Strings, and another *Essay* (No. 8) for orchestra – a series which still lay far ahead at the time of my ‘Battle’ quintet.

This piece lasts 17 minutes and follows a standard 3-movement format. The first movement [*Allegro comodo* 8] opens with a gyrating cello melody, quite short but returning periodically to mark out the paragraphs of the music, and which is the source of the richer harmonies and expressive moments. It also serves to emphasise by contrast the bolder and brighter elements which generally tend to dominate. But not at the ending, which fades away with the cello’s favourite final chord of B major.

Since our millennium was a celebration at midnight, the slow movement [*Alla Fantasia – Allegretto* 9] is a nocturne; the Strings muted, atmospheric, and lit with dramatic accents, silences and tremolandi. The ending, though calm, is questioning. The finale [*Moderato e pesante* 10] is more fully scored than the earlier movements, possessing an underlying rustic character (*pesante!*). It is like an abbreviated rondo. Its one transparent episode – a wistful conversation piece for the strings – encounters an increase in tempo after its second appearance which hurries the music on to a festive conclusion – in B major.

## String Quintet in B flat

For a number of years, Dodgson seemed wary of what might be called the core ensemble of chamber music, the string quartet. He wrote four between the ages of 24 and 30, then exiling them, as ‘over-written’ or ‘patchy’, to a shadowy re-numbered existence as Nos. -1 to -4. A return to the medium came only with a commission in 1984, and eventually a sequence of nine remarkable string quartets, though he did write the present string quintet in 1986. It is manifestly neither a quartet with an extra instrument, nor a sextet

missing a voice. Although it contains elements highly characteristic of Dodgson, it is nonetheless something of an experimental work, sometimes enigmatic, sometimes tinged with melancholy or uncertainty, exploring the music that is available given the nature of the ensemble. It opens, *Allegro moderato* [5], with eight bars of repeated chords, irregular in rhythm, before the introduction of a two-part melody on cellos. This disposition is then reversed, until interrupted by recitative exchanges between the instruments, as if querying the result. After a resumption, similar questionings ensue, and seem to haunt the work (there is even at one point the instruction ‘ghostly’). Various different exchanges between individual instruments mark the *Andante* second movement [6]. Some brilliant, more apparently confident writing follows with the *Allegretto* third movement [7], working a motto theme of three notes, as if a comfortable mastery of the five instruments and their handling of the theme has been won, until conclusion is reached with a few brief but restful *Allegretto* bars disconcertingly marked ‘innocent’. It is an unusual and attractive work.

*John Warrack was formerly a Lecturer in music at Oxford University, and is the author of books on Weber and Tchaikovsky and a history of German opera, among much else.*

For over a decade-and-a-half the **Tippett Quartet** – John Mills and Jeremy Isaac, violins, Lydia Lowndes-Northcott, viola, and Bozidar Vukotic, cello – has delighted critics and audiences alike with its animated, virtuosic performances and its inspired and attractive programming. It has performed at the BBC Proms, Cheltenham Festival, Snape Proms and numerous other festivals throughout the UK and abroad. The Quartet regularly appears at Kings Place, Purcell Room, Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Bridgewater Hall and frequently performs on BBC Radio 3. Alongside a busy touring schedule, which has taken it across Europe and round Canada and Mexico, the Tippett Quartet pursues a keen interest in educational work with both schools and universities



and was Ensemble in Residence at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge University, for 2012–13. In September 2015 the Quartet began an exciting new residency at Royal Holloway, University of London, and regularly visits the Royal Academy of Music.

A broad and diverse repertoire is indicative of refreshing versatility: the Quartet is equally at home with the giants of the classical world as it is with major contemporary composers. Its impressive catalogue of over twenty releases has not only topped the classical ratings but has also entered the pop charts.

The Quartet website can be found at [www.tippettquartet.co.uk](http://www.tippettquartet.co.uk) and they can be followed on Twitter @tippettquartet.

**Emma Abbate** – for the leading Italian magazine *Musica*, ‘an amazingly talented pianist’ – enjoys a demanding career as a piano accompanist and chamber musician, working with some of the finest singers and instrumentalists of her generation. She has performed in duo recitals for international festivals and concert societies in Ischia, Kosciierzyna, Lisbon, Naples, Salzburg and Sorrento, and at many prestigious British venues, such as the Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Royal Opera House and St John’s, Smith Square, in London, St George’s, Bristol, and the Aldeburgh Festival, in addition to broadcasts on BBC Radio 3.

Emma is currently releasing a series of albums devoted to twentieth-century Italian vocal chamber music, the most recent of which was the first recording of *Shakespeare Sonnets* by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco with the baritone Ashley Riches for Resonus Classics, highly praised both by *International Record Review* and on BBC Radio 3’s *CD Review*. Emma previously released *L’Infinito* for Urania Records, a musical journey through twentieth-century Italian songs with the mezzo-soprano Kamelia Kader. Her discography also includes first recordings of works for cello and piano by Krzysztof Meyer, Algernon Ashton and Stephen Dodgson, with Evva Mizerska, all for Toccata Classics; the US magazine *Fanfare* chose their Meyer album as one of the five best releases of 2009. A first volume of Mozart’s complete duo keyboard sonatas with Julian Perkins, recorded on original instruments at Finchcocks Musical Museum, was recently released by Resonus Classics.



Based in London, Emma is a professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Following her graduation from the S. Pietro a Majella Conservatoire in Naples and an Advanced Diploma from the S. Cecilia Conservatoire in Rome, Emma studied in London with Yonty Solomon. She completed her studies with Geoffrey Pratley as a scholar at the Royal Academy of Music, whence she graduated with distinction. She was also awarded an Italian Literature and Culture degree *cum laude* from the Federico II University in Naples.

Her website can be found at [www.emmaabbate.com](http://www.emmaabbate.com).

**Susan Monks** studied at the Yehudi Menuhin school with Jennifer Ward Clarke and William Pleeth. Concert tours included a series of performances of Brahms Sextets with Lord Menuhin. She then went on to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama to continue her studies with Raphael Wallfisch. Susan was a founder member of the Mistry String Quartet, tutored by Hans Keller. The Quartet held a residency at the University of York and made recordings with pianist David Owen Norris for both Chandos and Decca. Susan is currently Principal Cello of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which she joined in 1992.



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## STEPHEN DODGSON Chamber Music, Volume Two: Three Quintets

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### Piano Quintet No. 1 in C (1966)

**30:08**

1 I *Largo e sostenuto – Allegro con brio* 9:31

2 II *Andantino* 8:29

3 III *Allegro assai* 4:53

4 IV *Maestoso* 7:15

### String Quintet (1986)

**31:38**

5 I *Allegro moderato* 12:00

6 II *Andante* 8:36

7 III *Allegretto* 11:02

### Piano Quintet No. 2 (1999)

**19:43**

8 I *Allegro comodo* 7:27

9 II *Alla Fantasia – Allegretto* 5:12

10 III *Moderato e pesante* 7:04

### Tippett Quartet

**TT 81:32**

Emma Abbate, piano 1–4 8–10

FIRST RECORDINGS

Susan Monks, cello 5–7