FRANK BRIDGE (1879-1941)
String Quartet No.3 (1927)

Andante moderato -Allegro moderato
Andante con moto
Allegro energico

The four quartets of Frank Bridge punctuate his composing career much in the way that Bartók's did his. Spaced out as they were between 1906 (No. I) and 1938 (No.4), one can trace the evolution of Bridge's style in the musical language of the works after the 1920s, as he took account of musical developments in Europe. His rich and exploratory output during these years, starting with the landmark *Piano Sonata* of 1924, reaches a high point of success with the *String Quartet No.3* of 1925-27.

After disappointment over the question of the first performance at the hands of the Flonzaley Quartet, who rejected the new quartet for a proposed concert in the Washington Library of Congress, Bridge's patron and champion Mrs Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge came to his rescue by arranging the première in Vienna, on 17 September 1927, by Rudolf Kolisch's "Neuen Wiener Streichquartett". Having just performed Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite*, they were well placed to introduce Bridge's new work. Shortly after the première, Bridge sent a bound autograph copy of the score to Mrs Coolidge, with a dedicatory letter:

"That this score contains the best of me I do not doubt. It is most truly dedicated to you, being yours before a single note went down on paper, and in my heart it is remembered as a loving token of my devotion to you, dear Souzanne."

Elizabeth Coolidge was indeed the pre-eminent patron of chamber music worldwide during the inter-war years. Her Foundation commissioned many of the leading composers of the day, including, among many others, Schoenberg *(3rd Quartet)*, Bartók *(5th Quartet)*, and Stravinsky *(Apollo Musagetes)*, and also promoted their work in concerts and festivals all over Europe and in the USA. Frank Bridge was one of her special "lions". From the summer of 1923, when Bridge and his wife were among a distinguished guest-list of English composers and performers attending her annual Berkshire Festival in Pittsfield, Mass., until his death in 1941, Mrs Coolidge supported Bridge to the tune of $2,500 a year. This enabled him to cease teaching the violin (like his father, Bridge spent several days a week travelling to schools and colleges), and allowed him to "spread his wings" - as he often wrote - and to press ahead along the new stylistic paths he had longed to take since the end of the First World War. Although other composers were supported in this way - the American Leo Sowerby,for instance, and the Italian Francesco Malipiero - Bridge was her major protégé. He repaid this generosity by composing for her international frestivals his finest chamber works, beginning with this *Third Quartet*, and including the magnificent *Piano Trio (1929)* and the *Fourth Quartet* (1938).

Prior to the 1914-18 war, Bridge was known as much for his viola playing, and for his conducting, as for his composition. His own English String Quartet was highly regarded; and that the composer knew the quartet repertoire from the inside is apparent from his accomplished writing for the four instruments. In the event, the *Third Quartet* not only broke new ground in matters of style; it was Bridge's greatest international success. After its premiére, further performances in Paris (Pro Arte Quartet), Siena (Brosa Quartet), and the USA (Roth Quartet) followed within the year.

The newness of Bridge's style lies chiefly in his use of tonality. In this respect he pursued the path opened up by some Central Europeans, particularly Alban Berg. The tonal centre of this Quartet is C; but the tonality is not explicit, and the tritone (F sharp), with its tonal vagueness and ambiguity, and infinite number of harmonic possibilities, governs the character of the themes. The origin of this development among European late Romantics is usually attributed to the chord at the opening of Wagner's *Tristan* (F-B-D sharp - G sharp). This chord was in Bridge's mind when writing this Quartet. Instances from the first movement are the fluid harmony at the beginning of the cantabile theme at 7, and again at its end just before 13; also the percussive ostinato figure from 31 to the end, which is a developed version of its first appearance just before 3. The same sonority resulting from this chord is used in subsequent works, such as the cello concerto *Oration;* and the *Second Piano Trio* (1929) consists of variations on it.

The development of Bridge's style in this way is confined, in this Quartet, to the melodic/harmonic nature of the musical material. Other aspects of composition remain securely based on tradition. That is to say, the music is thematic; the treatment of the material is motivic, according to classical principles; and the structure of the three movements is standard. First a Sonata Allegro, next an Intermezzo, third a Rondo. The long development section of the first movement is followed first by a repetition of the cantabile second subject, with an expansive appassionato; next by a restatement of the first subject. The movement concludes with great energy, con fuoco.

After such an outburst there can be little if any development in the ensuing, freely constructed, lyrical Intermezzo. A repetitive,ticking accompaniment in the viola and cello sets a gentle pulse; the pace quickens slightly in the middle section, before the repetition of the first idea, with perhaps a hint of lyrical growth in the first violin, whereupon the music fades.

At the start of the Rondo, Bridge reverts to the *energico* of the first movement by quoting the ostinato figure. There are other recollections of the first movement *moderato* material, whose effect here is to hold in check the flow of the *risoluto* principal theme. That, and the various tonal inflections of some of the motifs making up the long theme, tinge the mood of *risoluto* with a certain ambiguity. Explicit tonal references are contradicted. In the middle section the pulse is allowed to reduce, and with it the rhythmic tension. The brilliant repeat of the principal theme cadences onto C at 33; but that is not final. An elaborate coda, with mutes, reduces the tension by recalling ideas from the earlier movements, and the music fades away to nothing.

ALAN BUSH (1900-1996)
Dialectic for String Quartet Op.15 (1929)

Many interlocking features make up the style of Bush's *Dialectic*. The year of its composition, 1929, saw him at his most active and exploratory. He had been appointed to teach composition at the Academy in 1925; he had completed a period of private study with John Ireland, 1922-27; he was reaching his peak as a pianist, starting to study with Schnabel in 1928; he was actively becoming involved in politics, and entered the Humboldt University in Berlin in 1929 to read Philosophy - to discover, as he put it, "more about the world, more about politics"; in composition he had reached new heights, both in artistic certainty and aesthetic conviction, to say nothing of pianistic virtuosity, with the solo piano works *Prelude and Fugue*, Op.9 (1927) and *Relinquishment*, Op.11 (1928), which he played in November 1928 at the Bechstein Hall in Berlin.

The same intellectual rigour found in the piano music also governs *Dialectic*. He was not only immersed in the English tradition, conversant with the ecclesiastical modes as much as with folk-song, but he was also an internationalist and sought rational answers in his composition to contemporary problems. The abandon-ment by some 20th century Western European comp-osers of the unified musical language based on the diatonic scale, which had served music for at least 200 years, presented uncertainties to the composers of Bush's generation. If they were to communicate to a wide general public they were required to go back to the first principles of music, and to choose their musical material. Bush's solution in *Dialectic*, as it had been in *Relinquishment*, was a language based on the tonality which results from combining a diatonic key (E minor) with a mode (Aeolian).

The structure of the 15-minute piece is equally composite. The title *Dialectic* means that philosophical process by which absolute truth is put to the test of logical discussion. Bush applies this not to words or ideas, but to a musical theme. He describes it as being "the shifting of the mind from one point of view to its opposite." A statement of the musical theme is tested by being pitted against its opposite. Starting in melodic and rhythmic unison, in just three parts to avoid duplication of the unison, the music thereafter unfolds as a thing of contrasts and tension. Varied rhythmic movement set against the regularity of repeated ostinato patterns; unison phrases set against harmony; parallel movement of parts, in notes of long duration and rhythmic unison, set against florid parts in notes of small duration, in contrary motion; all parts sounding together, set against all parts in independent counterpoint.

The stitching together of such contrasted ideas is done on the principle of an English 17th century Fantasia. The sections are played continuously, with or without connecting episodes. The little connecting episodes pick up a pattern or a rhythm from the cadential phrase at the end of the preceding section, and lead the music forward to the next section. Each section has its characteristic texture and sonority, is self-sufficient, and builds to a climax or point of arrival, when a chartacteristic feature is introduced to bind the texture at that point. For example in the first section the climax is reached at the second bar of 2 with the pedal F sharp, which leads the music forward over the next 8 bars into the next section at 3.

In the next section the climax is reached at the third bar of 5 with the introduction of a Purcellian dotted rhythm for the first violin and viola, soon taken up by the other violin, and spilling over into the next section. The slow section after 8 is a fugal exposition, in an F sharp tonality, sempre tranquillo, whose point of arrival is marked by trills in the first violin and gradually leading, with a unison transitional episode at 10, to the development section, which is long, based first on the repeated note ostinato, next (after the second bar of 13) on a dotted rhythm. So the work consists not so much of variations on a theme, as of separate, contrasted treatments of that theme.The theme, which is the material, is made of a few notes of melodic patterns, derived from superimposed fourths. A ten bar exposition sets the harmonic basis for what is to follow, with flexible phrases of unequal length, and fluid tonality. The phrases are directional, either cresc. or dim.

All these qualities make the work as a whole concentrated and demanding, occasionally dense in texture, occasionally sparse, as the elements of the counterpoint fuse together or dissolve. For the listener the overall sonority is intense, as the harmony is always moving, never static,and the tonality is not explicit, built in fourths rather than thirds.

The idiom discovered by Bush in this rigorous, radical composition was new territory; it was however not one which he chose to pursue. *Dialectic* represents an unique achievement in his output. He had come a long way since the first *String Quartet in A minor* of 1923; and by the time he composed another - the *Serenade*, Op.70 (1969) and the *Suite of Six*, Op.81 (1975) - his style had lost both the intellectual rigour, and the tension of fresh discovery, of *Dialectic*.

Dialectic had to wait six years for its first perfor-mance, by the Brosa Quartet on 29 March 1935. Later that year it was given again at the ISCM in Prague. Thereafter it was performed several times internationally. The score was published in 1938. The composer re-scored the piece for string orchestra, in which form it was given its most committed performance,under his direction, by the London String Orchestra, at the Wigmore Hall on 9 February 1946. His origins in the English tradition were explicitly stated at this concert, when the 17th century was represented by two of Dowland's *Lachrimae*, and three *Fantasias* by Purcell. Those are the roots from which *Dialectic* sprang. The mind accepts the logic, and the ear perceives the passionate energy, the eloquence, the elegance, with which corners are rounded and peaks mounted. This is strong music; its toughness lies not in the dissonance, which is prepared for, and resolved, but in its compression.

SAMUEL WESLEY (1766-1837)

String Quartet in E flat (c.1810)

Allegro spiritoso
Adagio con moto
Menuetto, Trio
Finale: Allegro molto

Wesley's friend Vincent Novello said of him: "Samuel Wesley was one of the greatest musical geniuses that England has ever produced." This is true. He was the most important composer of the classical period in England, whose work covered every genre except opera. But Novello seemed unable to affect the public taste of his day. The composer was largely ignored during his lifetime, and after his death the arbiters of Victorian taste disowned him. Why this was so is a complex question, whose answer lies more in the social, religious and political, rather than the musical history of the times.

By the close of the 19th century, Wesley's music had receded so much into the past that it was virtually unknown. So there exists now no proper account of Wesley's life and work, and no public perception of his stature. The re-discovery of Wesley in our day is recent, and began with the performance of *Confitebor* in York Minster in June 1972. Since then there have been some revelatory premières, mainly of the choral works.

Up to 1784, when he was 18, Wesley wrote a large number of juvenilia - vocal and keyboard works, symphonies, concertos, overtures - some of which, particularly the early symphonies, give a foretaste of future mastery; but no more than that. There is an interesting parallel here with the early *String Symphonies* of Mendelssohn, in which one can also detect a hint of what is to come. But in neither case can a complete impression be gained, from the early pieces, of the composer's mature style. In Wesley's case, some of the early works were performed at the house concerts which were arranged by Samuel and his elder brother Charles at their Marylebone house between 1779-1787. These concerts were, for Samuel, his "gradus ad Parnassum". He played violin on these occasions, and the concerts gave him his first experience, in the days when schools of music did not exist in London, of performing to a live audience.

Wesley's maturity begins in 1784, with the *Missa de Spiritu Sancto*, and from then until about 1800 he focussed chiefly on choral works, including the three large-scale pieces by which he is chiefly known so far: *The Ode to St Cecilia* (1794), the *Confitebor* (1799) and the Mass already mentioned. Wesley's chamber music works, and instrumental works, belong to the second period of his maturity, after 1800. They are few, as the opportunities for performance were few. Little indeed is known about the String Quartet. Even its date is uncertain; perhaps 1810, or later; and no direct evidence exists as to when, where or if it was performed. But what facts are known make supposition reasonable.Chamber music was becoming increasingly popular in the early 19th century. "Music Parties" were a regular feature of social life, particularly in houses of the nobility. Vincent Novello himself organised some, and there is every reason to suppose that he would have invited his friend Wesley to take part. The artist Turner depicts one such an event, in his famous watercolour "Music Party at East Cowes Castle" (1830-35), which shows the hostess, the wife of the architect John Nash, playing a square piano. The repertoire on such occasions was built round the Viennese composers of the day, Mozart and Haydn; it is at such a "String Quartet Party" that Wesley's Quartet would have been heard, perhaps with the composer himself performing.

The repertory of British String Quartets begins with Wesley's single work in this category. His was not the first quartet to be written by an 18th century British composer; several small pieces exist, for the most part short and simple, including a set of six by Wesley's brother Charles; but Samuel's was the first quartet by a major composer to take into account the European tradition into which it fits.

Two features dominate Wesley's style; he was a master of counterpoint, and his melodic invention is marked by an altogether individual chromatic subtlety. Two distinct thematic ideas make up the phrase with which the first movement opens. The bold opening motif, extending over a tenth, with its quick upward-moving semiquavers, which retain the tonal centre of the first-beat chord (E flat) for the duration of the bar, occurs at many points throughout the first movement, but never in the same way twice. It is either given a different bass, a different harmony, or a different resolution. The triadic harmony of these first two bars of the opening phrase is answered by chromatic movement in the next two. Even at the recapitulation (bar 140), when one would expect an exact repetition of the motif in its original form, the first two bars are given dominant harmony, which reverts to the original progression by the third bar of the theme (bar 142); but the tonic version of the opening motif is not reached until much later (bar 181).

The same unexpected twist in the treatment of the B flat theme occurs in the slow movement.Instead of repeating the melody in the tonic, Wesley repeats it twice, once in E flat (bar 23) modulating to G minor, once in F (bar 40) modulating to D minor, and reaching the tonic only in the concluding four bars.

The Menuetto is a witty scherzando in G minor, closing at the half-way stage into B flat. The two distinct ideas that make up the opening of the first movement here appear again; the first four bars of the antecedent are bold, triadic, in canon at the unison; they are answered in the consequent by chromatic scales in contrary movement. The brilliance of the scherzando style is characterised by the plentiful use of cross rhythms, as well as the unexpected Haydnesque balancing of phrases of unequal length. Symmetry is restored in the Trio.

Material from the Menuetto, the cadential phrase at bar 20, spills over into the Allegro molto of the rondo finale. The unifying factor is the chromatic element of the second thematic idea, which is maintained throughout with a consistency of texture, velocity and brilliance.

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