

## EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934)

### *String Quartet in E Minor Op.83 (1918)*

*Allegro moderato*  
*Piacevole (poco andante)*  
*Allegro molto*

The violinist Adolf Brodsky had urged Elgar to compose a string quartet since 1900 when, as leader of the Hallé Orchestra, he performed several of Elgar's works. But Elgar was not naturally a chamber music composer. Only the *Piacevole* movement of his string quartet has the natural, quintessential flow of chamber music; the other movements strive for a broader orchestral effect, a more brilliant and passionate expressivity, and greater intensity and virtuosity of performance.

Elgar's only string quartet is one of a triptych of chamber music pieces written at overlapping times at the end of the First World War, the other two being the *Violin Sonata Op.82* and the *Piano Quintet Op.84*. After a private performance at the composer's Hampstead home on 7 January 1919, all three works were given at a Wigmore Hall concert on 21 May.

The quartet was begun when the

composer was convalescing after a tonsillitis operation in March 1918. The Great War was approaching its final phase, yet the final months saw some of the fiercest fighting. Elgar's music, especially in the Quartet, reflects on the destruction of the world he knew, and of its values.

The opening movement was written during the final months of war in 1918. Two ideas make up the first subject; one is a rising figure in stepwise movement over a 2-bar phrase, probing, questioning; the other is an answer of descending fourths, always in pairs. These two motifs determine the musical character; the rising semitones suggest tension, conflict, the open intervals, usually descending, suggest emotional resolution. The tension reaches its highest point in the development section (bars 68-72) when the 2-bar semitonal phrase (D flat minor/B flat minor) is itself repeated a semitone higher (D minor/B minor). The answering descending fourths are extended into tritones, the harmony becoming totally chromatic and more rhythmically insistent, serving the structural purpose of a dramatic

and violent moment of climax. No such ferocity can last for ever. Elgar ends the movement with the question he asked at the beginning; but he closes on the reassuring security of E major.

The slow movement, *Piacevole*, was begun in October, when the end of the war was in sight. It was finished on 26 November, after the Armistice. The two motifs that generated the theme of the *Allegro* are transposed into antecedent and consequent of the songlike *Andante*, with a gently moving triple metre. The stepwise motif climbs slowly, in short phrases, to a brief moment of joy (*mf espress.*), only to be answered by the open interval motif, always falling, as if in doubt of any such optimism. The long sequential cantabile theme occurs, in full, three times, separated by subsidiary episodes which are consistent with the principal theme, and derived from it, using chromatic development. At its second full occurrence (fig.27), *ff espress.*, both motifs combine, leading inevitably to the dramatic climax of the movement (fig.28), the expressive and structural centre of gravity. The long dying fall with which the movement closes has already been implied by the open intervals of the second motif, and is consistent with

the melodic theme from the start.

The third movement was written in December 1918. After the probing of the first movement, and the peace of the second, the impassioned ecstasy of the third movement completes the artistic wholeness of Elgar's vision. The brilliance is melodic rather than rhythmic. The broadly sweeping phrases of the first subject, and *vivace* semiquavers, sometimes in unison, sometime in repeated chords, remind us of the *Introduction and Allegro for Strings* (1905). The second subject in A major (fig.42) takes the upbeat *risoluto* semiquavers of the opening motif of the first subject, and by rhythmic transformation turns them into the perfect melodic foil (*p dolce*) for the headlong rush of the *Allegro molto*. The answer again uses the device of repeating a 2-bar phrase a semitone higher (bars 63-68), with in this case the effect of enveloping the A major tonality with a pan-chromatic haze. Firmly rooted as the work is in classical structure and diatonic tonality, the motifs that make up the main theme of the *Allegro molto* are vividly enough contrasted, so that the music crackles and burns in a headlong burst of chromatic counterpoint as it speeds towards the final climactic E major.

# FRANCIS ROUTH (1927-)

## *Divertimento for String Quartet Op.66 (1998)*

I	Introduction, Theme Variations 1-5	<i>Andante moderato</i> <i>Vivace energico</i>
II	Variations 6-8	<i>Adagio</i>
III	Variations 9-15 Coda	<i>Allegro molto</i> <i>Andante moderato</i>

Following the *Diversions for Solo Violin Op.47* written for Michael Bochmann, Francis Routh was commissioned by the Bochmann Quartet in 1997 to compose a string quartet. The decision to compose a *Divertimento*, falling within a fifteen minute duration, was reached after much discussion, based on the stylistic wishes of the composer and the performance requirements of the Quartet.

The work was written in February/March 1998, at a time when Routh was engaged in the *Scenes for Piano III* and *Scenes for Piano IV, Bretagne*. The timing is important. There is a strong similarity between the *vivace* style of the different works, and each uses the structural basis of theme and variations.

The genesis of *Divertimento* is derived from an idea from 30 years earlier, in a piece for violin and piano, *Duo Op. 12*, and lies in the spontaneous, energetic growth of music from a single 4-note motif. In the true character of such a piece, the music is intended as a diversion for players and audience alike. The theme asks a question, hesitant and somewhat probing; the variations give an answer, abrupt, energetic, passionate, rhythmically brilliant and vigorous.

The introductory four notes, given out by the viola at the opening, are the matrix of the work and spell out the nature of the material. This consists of two intervals, the semitone (D - E flat) and the tritone (B - F), which generate the structure of each variation. The theme immediately evolves, melodically and harmonically, and thereafter the fifteen variations fall into the three-movement structure of a classical work.

The first variation, *vivace energico*, breaks in abruptly, and variations 1-5 treat the two intervals with different rhythmic characteristics, all *vivace*:

- 1 theme in unison viola and cello, against articulated chords for the violins
- 2 pp subito
- 3 tritone viola, f martellato; semitone violin, f marc.
- 4 calmando pp violins in canon at the unison
- 5 semitone theme violins; tritone accompaniment viola and cello

A short bridge, *Lento liberamente*, leads to the slow movement, whose three variations introduce a slow decorated lyricism in the form of a duet for two violins. This is after the manner of a trio sonata of

the 17th century, and the material is based on the melodic form of the 4-note motif, in the triple metre of a Berceuse or Lullaby. The viola and cello provide the accompaniment, like the continuo of the Baroque period. The mood is subdued and the pace relaxed.

The third movement reverts to the exploitation of rhythmic *vivace* in a succession of dance-variations. 9, 10 use duple metre; 11, 12 use triple metre; 13 *alla marcia*; 14 uses violins in canon at the fifth, p *vivace*.

A final statement of the theme is followed by a coda, recalling the introduction.

# ALAN RAWSTHORNE (1905-1971)

## String Quartet No.3 (1964)

*Allegro deciso - Allegretto - Allegro deciso*  
*Andante (Alla Ciaccona) - Molto vivace*

Although his output contains some vocal and choral works, it is in his instrumental music that Rawsthorne's style reaches the fullest and most characteristic fulfilment. The tonal subtleties of his textures, particularly when overlaid with rhythmic complexities, are more naturally suited to versatile instrumental groups, such as the strings, than to voices. Moreover his idiom of melodic counterpoint and extended tonality seems to find fuller scope in the private world of chamber music, where it is concentrated, than in the public orchestral works, where it is more diffuse. Particularly does this apply to the string quartets. You can, after all, exercise more freedom with four instruments than you can with forty. Rawsthorne's delight in inventing textures, and developing ideas, for a small group of solo instruments is what endears him to musicians wherever the musical art is seriously practised. In fact his music calls for a certain amount of intellectual and technical insight if the musical logic is to

be fully enjoyed by the listener.

This is the last of his quartets and is also the most intensely concentrated and abstruse. Rawsthorne's tonal idiom is derived from Bartók, not so much from the Second Viennese School. His melodic material gives prominence to the interval of the minor third, and thus also the tritone (which consists of two adjacent minor thirds). Indeed the minor mode prevails throughout. So does his fondness for the juxtaposition of tonal centres a semitone apart. This has to do with the "axis" system of tonal centres, whereby each of the three axes - tonic, subdominant, dominant - operates four distinct tonal centres in the circle of perfect fifths. Each of these tonal centres is a minor third apart. Thus arises the somewhat Bartókian flavour of many of Rawsthorne's melodic ideas. It also explains the structural importance of the minor third. Scalar ideas which begin with one tonal inflection finish with another as the centre shifts. Thus Rawsthorne discovers new possibilities in the tonal language. The ideas are capable of widely contrasted treatment - sustained

lyricism, rhythmic incisiveness, an energetic scherzando, a brilliant Beethoven-like unison.

The two sections into which the quartet is divided contain within them the four movements of a classical quartet. The first movement, *Allegretto*, is a shortened sonata movement, preceded by a 6-bar introduction

consisting of the *Allegro deciso* theme, the matrix of the whole piece. The second movement, *Allegro deciso*, forms the Scherzo, with the Trio at letter H, in chordal texture, and the repeat of the Scherzo at letter K. The slow movement is the Chaconne, framed by a 6-bar chordal passage at the beginning and the end. The Rondo finale is *Molto vivace*.

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Edward Elgar           String Quartet  
Francis Routh         Divertimento for String Quartet  
Alan Rawsthorne       String Quartet No. 3

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