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BRIDGE

String Quartets Nos. 1 and 3

Maggini Quartet



Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

String Quartets Nos. 1 & 3

Frank Bridge studied the violin and composition at the Royal College of Music in London, where he was a pupil of Stanford from 1899 to 1903. Apart from composition, his career embraced performance as the viola player in several quartets, most notably the English String Quartet, conducting, in which he frequently deputised for Sir Henry Wood, and teaching, with Benjamin Britten his best-known pupil. Perhaps no other British composer of the first half of the century reveals such a stylistic journey in his music. His early works, such as the *First String Quartet* (1906), the *Phantasy Piano Trio* (1907) and the orchestral suite *The Sea* (1910-11), follow in the late-Romantic tradition bearing a kinship with Fauré; subsequently, in the orchestral tone poem *Summer* (1914), for instance, Bridge comes close to the orbit of Delius. After the First World War, however, his music became intense and chromatic as in the Scriabin-esque *Piano Sonata* (1921-4). The radical language of the sonata was pursued in his chamber works of the 1920s, so that in the *String Quartet No. 3* (1926) Bridge rubs shoulders with the early works of the Second Viennese School. Also to this decade belong two orchestral masterpieces, *Enter Spring* (1927) and *Oration* (1930). Finding little favour with public or critics, his late work, for example the *Fourth String Quartet* (1934-8), languished and despite Britten's advocacy, it was not until the 1970s that Bridge's remarkable legacy received the attention it deserved.

At the outset of his career Bridge established his name through a series of chamber works in which he demonstrated impeccable craftsmanship, and a wholly idiomatic understanding of string instruments, with the viola, his own main instrument frequently having prominence. A further influence on the form of these works lay in the prizes instituted by Walter Wilson Cobbett, an amateur musician whose interests were chamber music and the period of the Elizabethan and

Jacobean composers. In particular he was interested in the instrumental 'fantasy' or 'phantasy' form of that time, in which several unrelated but varied sections formed the basis for an extended work. In 1905 Cobbett established a prize for chamber compositions in one movement and Bridge submitted several works for his competitions, winning first prize in 1907 and 1915. What was significant, though, was that Bridge adapted aspects of the phantasy form within subsequent compositions, so that thematic unity within a work of one or several movements became a hallmark of his compositions.

This is apparent in Bridge's *First String Quartet*, which was written in haste in the space of a month during 1906, in response to a competition organized by the Accademia Filarmonica, Bologna, hence the quartet's sobriquet. Of the 67 quartets submitted only Bridge's received a 'mention d'honneur'. He had had to work at such speed that there was no time to copy a second set of parts, and it took the Accademia two-and-a-half years to return the originals; consequently, the work was not given its first performance until 1909 when the English String Quartet performed it in London.

The first movement begins with a characteristic structural feature of Bridge's works that is clearly linked to the experience of writing his Cobbett compositions: a short slow introduction in which key thematic ideas are introduced. Here it is a two-bar, sad, falling chromatic cello phrase. Two *pianissimo* chords follow, pregnant with anticipation, before the music plunges direct into the drama of the *Allegro appassionato* with the first violin taking over the motif. Overall the mood is turbulent, although respite is supplied by the movement's other main thematic idea, a tender melody introduced by the viola. Cast in an arch shape, the *Adagio molto* opens with mysterious chords, alternating with a plaintive first violin phrase. An

extended theme on viola follows, whose initial reticence is transformed into a passionate burst of emotion. The middle of the movement is more animated, then the opening ideas return with the cello taking up the viola's melody, in dialogue with the first violin. The *Scherzo* is all dancing airiness and light, whilst the trio is graced by a melody shared between first violin and viola whose rhythm is frequently at odds with the underlying pizzicato accompaniment. Later in the trio Bridge clearly alludes to the main motif of the opening movement. Both the main melodic ideas of the finale are heard initially from the first violin, and both are flowing in character, the first one accompanied by sonorous texture and the second incorporating triplets. In a masterly stroke of thematic unity, Bridge reintroduces the main motif of the first movement at the end of the work. The music fades, all comes full circle as the cello intones the motif for the last time and the quartet ends in a mood of sombre tragedy.

The *Third String Quartet* was commissioned by the American patroness of music Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge and dedicated to her. It was composed in 1925-6 and first performed by the Kolisch Quartet in Vienna in 1927. In it Bridge's advanced mature voice is fully revealed for the first time. The quartet's language shows kinship with Berg and Bartók; the twelve semitones are constantly in play; octave doublings are avoided, and the music is driven by a relentless momentum through the rigorous development of its ideas. These are generally short motifs from which the web is spun and throughout the music is interrelated.

In the slow introduction and opening bars of the *Allegro*, the thematic motifs, and harmonic elements of the first movement, indeed the whole work, are laid bare, ideas that are ripe for infinite change and transformation in the highly charged sonata structure that follows. Of particular importance is a four-note

semiquaver group that turns in on itself and is pervasive through the quartet, whilst the main first subject begins on the first violin with a wide leap upwards, and an angular falling back. A rising, eerie sequence in rhythmic unison leads to the second group of ideas with the viola leading the way. These rise to a glorious climax when a magical change of harmony is like a ray of sunlight breaking through clouds. The movement ends with an exciting coda and a terse concluding note. The ternary form *Andante con moto* is utterly different, a shrouded, crepuscular world of shadows and half-lights, evocative of the Sussex down-land where Bridge settled and which he loved, at dawn or dusk. It inhabits a mood of melancholy established by the wistful, muted dialogue between the violins heard against pizzicato viola and single notes on the cello. Throughout links, either veiled or obvious, can be heard to the musical material exposed in the first movement. In the finale, a sonata rondo, the energetic contrapuntal dialectic of the first movement is enjoined again and much of the musical material resurfaces in new guises. An athletic long-limbed theme heard on the first violin, accompanied by dissonant chords forms the main idea, whilst the second is an agitated theme played by the cello high in its range. In the development section the main themes of the first movement are considered again, whilst in the recapitulation the second subject, now on viola, precedes the first. After a last climax, the work ends with an extended epilogue section in which the strands are brought together with references to all three movements. In his dedicatory letter to his patron, Bridge wrote 'That this score contains the best of me I do not doubt'. Undoubtedly he was correct, for in its evident mastery of the medium the *Third Quartet* is one of his highest achievements.

Andrew Burn

The Maggini Quartet

Laurence Jackson, Violin I
David Angel, Violin II
Martin Outram, Viola
Michal Kaznowski, Cello

Formed in 1988, the Maggini Quartet is established as one of the finest string quartets on the international chamber music circuit, performing at major festivals and concert halls throughout Europe, the United States and the Far East. Renowned for championing British composers, the Quartet won *Gramophone* Chamber Music CD of the Year for the April 2001 release of the *String Quartets* and *Phantasy Quintet* of Vaughan Williams, part of the *Gramophone* Award-winning Naxos series that has brought world-wide sales of more than 100,000 discs. Other recordings for the series have also received high praise, with the CD of works by Frank Bridge attracting critical acclaim, while the recording of Elgar's *String Quartet* and *Piano Quintet* with Peter Donohoe was a 1997 winner of the *Diapason d'Or*, France's most prestigious award for classical music recordings, and the release of the *String Quartets* and *Trio* by E. J. Moeran proved to be one of the best selling chamber music CDs of 1998. The Maggini has also recorded all the Britten *String Quartets* for Naxos, winning praise from *Diapason* in France, while the second volume was an Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* in September 1999 and in *Classic CD* the following November. The recording of Walton's *String Quartet* and *Piano Quartet* with Peter Donohoe was nominated for a *Gramophone* Award, as well as being an Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* in July 2000 and in the *BBC Music Magazine* in August 2000, and the CD of Bax *Quartets Nos.1 and 2* won a 2002 Cannes Classical Award. Future releases include repertoire by Bliss, Bridge, Rawsthorne, Arnold and John Ireland. The Maggini Quartet has won similar praise for other recordings and has commissioned a number of works, including Robert Simpson's last work, his *Cello Quintet*, first performed at the Cheltenham International Festival in 1996, a year which also saw the first performance of *Olivia* by Roxanna Panufnik, commissioned for the Maggini by Brunel University Arts Centre in London. The Maggini's 10th Anniversary commission was James MacMillan's *Second Quartet*, which received its world première at the Wigmore Hall in London in 1998, with subsequent performances in North America and Europe. The Maggini has embarked on an exciting collaboration with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies to perform and record his ten new *Naxos Quartets*, the first of which was premièred at the Wigmore Hall in London in October 2002. The Wigmore will host performances of all ten works. Commissioned by Naxos, the works will fulfill the composer's long-held intention of bringing a major contribution to chamber music repertoire, and the project will provide a unique opportunity for performers and composer to work together over a five-year period. The Quartet takes its name from the famous sixteenth-century Brescian violin-maker Giovanni Paolo Maggini, an example of whose work is played by David Angel.

Perhaps no other British composer of the first half of the twentieth century reveals a stylistic musical journey as great as Frank Bridge. His early works follow in the late-Romantic tradition bearing a kinship with Fauré; later Bridge comes close to Delius. After the First World War, however, his music became intense and chromatic. In his *String Quartet No. 3* (1926), Bridge rubs shoulders with the early works of the Second Viennese School. Commissioned by the American patroness Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, it fully revealed for the first time Bridge's advanced mature voice. The work's language shows kinship with Berg and Bartók; the twelve semitones are constantly in play; octave doublings are avoided, and the music is driven by a relentless momentum. Bridge's *First String Quartet* was written in haste in the space of a month in response to a competition organized by the Accademia Filarmonica, Bologna. Of the 67 quartets submitted only Bridge's received a 'mention d'honneur'.

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	String Quartet No. 1 in E minor 'Bologna'	29:01
①	Adagio - Allegro appassionato	8:40
②	Adagio molto	9:27
③	Allegretto grazioso - Animato	4:47
④	Allegro agitato - Allegro moderato - Adagio molto	5:55
	String Quartet No. 3	30:35
⑤	Andante moderato - Allegro moderato	11:52
⑥	Andante con moto	8:00
⑦	Allegro energico	10:38

Maggini Quartet

Laurence Jackson, David Angel, Violins • Martin Outram, Viola • Michal Kaznowski, Cello

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