

Bridge

Suite for Strings • Summer
There Is a Willow Grows aslant a Brook

Butterworth

The Banks of Green Willow

Bantock

The Pierrot of the Minute

Bournemouth Sinfonietta
Norman Del Mar

collect

Sir Granville Bantock (1868–1946)

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | The Pierrot of the Minute
Comedy Overture | 11:02 |
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Frank Bridge (1879–1941)

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| 2 | Summer
Tone Poem for Orchestra | 10:36 |
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George Butterworth (1885–1916)

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| 3 | The Banks of Green Willow
Idyll for Small Orchestra | 5:57 |
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| 4 | There Is a Willow Grows aslant a Brook
(Hamlet) Impression for Small Orchestra | 9:19 |
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Suite for String Orchestra

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| 5 | Prelude | 7:03 |
| 6 | Intermezzo | 3:46 |
| 7 | Nocturne | 6:16 |
| 8 | Finale | 3:40 |
| | | TT 58:11 |

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Bantock / Bridge / Butterworth

Until recently the three composers represented here were relegated to the ranks of the lesser 'B's of English music, their work neglected except for a few essentially popular pieces, and their names listed with composers who were admired by a faithful few but failed to win wide popularity. Today we are finding a special flavour in the music of this period, and can better appreciate the highly individual personalities of composers from a richly versatile era.

It is doubtful whether we shall ever have the opportunity of hearing the more extravagant works of Sir Granville Bantock, which include a vast cantata setting the complete 104 stanzas of Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* and two large symphonies scored only for voices – the first of which a setting of Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* in which the voices are divided orchestrally into twenty parts. At one time he planned a series of twenty-four symphonic poems, but apparently abandoned the idea after composing two, because it would not be practical to perform the whole set in a single concert! Oriental mysticism and Gaelic and Celtic legends were constant sources of inspiration, and Bantock's *Hebridean*

Symphony is a superb example of atmospheric sea music.

Besides having a reputation as a composer, Bantock was well known as a conductor, writer and teacher: he founded the *New Quarterly Musical Review*, was a Professor at Birmingham University, became Principal of Birmingham's School of Music, and Chairman of the Corporation of Trinity College of Music in London.

The Comedy Overture **The Pierrot of the Minute** was one of Bantock's most popular works. Composed in 1908, it is remarkable for the delicacy of sound which Bantock achieves from a full orchestra. Much of the gossamer quality is due to the masterly dynamic control and facilitated by many divisions within the string parts. The overture is concerned with Pierrot's dream, during which he falls in love with a Moon Maiden. She tells him that their love must die at dawn, but he will not listen. He wakes to realise that his dream of a perfect love lasted a mere minute.

There is a dream quality, too, in the opening and closing moments of Frank Bridge's **Summer**, a tone poem in which Bridge moves towards the English folk traditions explored by some of his contemporaries, especially

Sir Arnold Bax, John Ireland and, uniquely, Delius. The insubstantial string sounds of the opening catch the atmosphere of a gentle breeze over dry leaves on a summer day, the timelessness of this atmosphere underlined by an expressive oboe melody which blooms as naturally, and as imperceptibly, as a lovely English rose. The work's central section carries us back to this melody, which rises to a passionate climax before fading gently back to the music of the opening.

Summer was written in 1914, just before the First World War brought a terrible awakening to the realities of man's inhumanity to man. Art was never to be the same again; and for some the war proved fatal. One of the most promising composers killed on the battlefield was George Butterworth whose small legacy of works pointed to a significant future.

George was the son of Sir Alexander Butterworth, the General Manager of the North Eastern Railway. He first studied at Eton School before going to Trinity College, Oxford, where his musical gifts were encouraged by Sir Hugh Allen. In London he studied at the Royal College of Music, and was soon working with Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams, researching English folk music. He even danced in Paris while demonstrating English folk dances.

Butterworth was the first composer to

discover the musical undertones in the poems of A.E. Housman, and his song cycle *A Shropshire Lad* is a classic. From it Butterworth took the material for his *Rhapsody* of the same name, scored for orchestra and first played at the Leeds Festival of 1913. The conductor was the great Arthur Nikisch whose championship of the *Rhapsody* made a strong impression. In 1914 Butterworth wrote his Idyll *The Banks of Green Willow*, first performed in London. Here the inspiration came directly from folk melodies, set out in simple, natural terms, with especially sensitive scoring for strings, including a serene passage for four solo cellos.

At the outbreak of war Butterworth enlisted in the army, and was killed in action at Pozières on the Somme. His gallantry earned him a posthumous Military Cross. Frank Bridge conducted the first performance of his *Summer* at a war-time concert on 13 March 1916, five months before Butterworth's death. A sincere pacifist, he hid his loathing of war and his sorrow at the useless slaughter under a portly figure, a walrus moustache and thick-lensed spectacles.

A native of Brighton, Bridge won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music where he was a fellow pupil with Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst and John Ireland, all destined to participate in England's musical

renaissance. He was a wholly practical musician whose mastery of the viola secured him places in both the Joachim Quartet and the English String Quartet. As a conductor he was best known outside England, although Sir Henry Wood often called on Bridge to deputise for him. His experience of quartet playing must have had a bearing on the excellence of his First String Quartet, his first significant work, which won a composition prize in Bologna in 1906. The same year saw the *Three Idylls* for string quartet, from the second of which Bridge's pupil Benjamin Britten took inspiration for his *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* in 1937. In 1908 came the *Dance Rhapsody*, an orchestral work full of guts and gaiety, which deserves reviving, and, in 1910, the four-movement suite *The Sea*, one of the few works by Bridge to have stayed in the repertoire.

The aftermath of war led Bridge to a rich period of inner questioning, and to music, beginning with the Third String Quartet, which was to prove too radical for most of the public to comprehend. Yet Bridge, who understood the world of Alban Berg and his contemporaries, and was able to assimilate new ideas into a wholly English idiom, was still exploring and searching for new paths when he died in 1941 – ironically in the middle of an even greater world conflagration than the 1914–18 tragedy.

There Is a Willow Grows aslant a Brook is an Impression for small orchestra, completed at Bridge's Sussex home at Friston in January 1927. The idyllic world of *Summer* is a restless memory, for here the mood is of autumn converging on winter. Once again the opening conjures up a rustling, but now the wind has a rocking sound which is never far distant. And again it is the oboe which sings, but this is a plaintive song. The strings rise higher into their harmonics and the oboe resumes low and hesitant. The rustling becomes icy and the clarinet plays a bitter cadenza which drops into the depths where the strings, divided into nine parts, join the woodwind in quiet cries. Over chords played by some of the strings half the first violins now begin a lament which inexorably reaches a climax before the work dissolves into a bare soundscape, the clarinet reminding us of the minor third rocking figuration, and the eerie sound of harmonics returning on the strings.

The *Suite for String Orchestra* belongs to Bridge's middle period. It was begun on Boxing Day 1909 and completed early in January 1910. The 'Prelude' opens with a melodic phrase given by violins and violas and rounded off by pizzicato cellos and basses. Out of this, and the secondary theme which follows, Bridge allows a number of ideas to come and go, although each seems to have developed from the original material. Finally,

the opening phrase is played by a solo viola, echoed pizzicato by the double-bass.

The 'Intermezzo' is built around the graceful staccato theme played at the outset by the first violins. This main theme, now in the lower strings, even intrudes upon a more lyrical idea in the central section, but both are aired in the short coda.

Expressive solos are a feature of the

beautiful 'Nocturne', in which the strings are muted throughout.

The 'Finale' is a joyous romp, temporarily tamed for a glowing melody on the violins which is soon swept into the uninhibited brilliance of the opening music. Towards the end the second violins recall the 'Intermezzo', and the work closes in full-blooded optimism.

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BANTOCK/BRIDGE/BUTTERWORTH: ORCHESTRAL WORKS

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