

Chandos

CHAN 8495

FRANK BRIDGE (1879-1941)

Piano Trio No. 2 (1929) (34:52)

- 1 I Allegro ben moderato (14:00)
- 2 II Molto allegro (4:54)
- 3 III Andante molto moderato (6:23)
- 4 IV Allegro ma non troppo (9:30)

SIR ARNOLD BAX (1883-1953)

Piano Trio in B flat (26:12)

- 5 I Allegro con brio (7:24)
- 6 II Adagio (alla breve) — con moto (11:11)
- 7 III Tempo moderato e molto ritmico (7:30)

TT = 61:12

DDD

THE BORODIN TRIO

Luba Edlina piano

Rotislav Dubinsky violin

Yuli Turovsky cello

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DIGITAL

BRIDGE Piano Trio No. 2
BAX Piano Trio in B flat



THE BORODIN TRIO

FRANK BRIDGE: Piano Trio No. 2

Frank Bridge was born in Brighton in February 1879, the third child of his father's third marriage. Bridge senior was a violin teacher and music hall conductor, and he taught young Frank not only the violin but all manner of practical musicianship to enable the boy to help his father both in family music making and in the theatre. He first went to the Royal College of Music as a student of the violin, though by then he was already far more the seasoned pro than are most students. In 1899 he won a Foundation Scholarship, becoming one of Stanford's composition students, and while at the College he changed from the violin to the viola. His standing at that time may be judged from the fact that in the first RCM 'Patron's Fund' Concert in May 1904, Bridge was the only composer represented on the programme twice.

He had left the College at the end of the Spring term of 1903, and had started to consolidate his student reputation in London music, making his living by playing the violin and viola and by teaching. Among many notable enterprises is the fact that in 1904 he was a member of the string quartet which gave the first British performance of Debussy's String Quartet. Bridge continued to compose and gradually orchestral works were heard as well as chamber ones: the tone poem *Isabella* at a Promenade Concert in 1907, and the suite *The Sea* — which confirmed his reputation as a composer — in 1912.

Bridge was now well known. His new works were played more or less as they appeared, while he was established as a performer, playing the viola, and conducting both at concerts and at the opera. There was a tendency for Bridge to be the man concert promoters turned to when things went wrong, and he was often called on as a substitute both as viola player and as conductor. For example when Emanuel Worth, the violist of the famous Joachim Quartet, fell ill during what was to be the quartet's last season, it was Bridge who was called in to fill the gap.

The War divided Bridge's life and music into two quite different worlds: it changed everything for him, and ultimately precipitated the tremendous

development of his style which caused his later works, including the piano trio, to be rejected at the time. Even as late as 1966, Frank Howes could write 'he began to uglify his music to keep it up to date', and the failure of his contemporaries to understand Bridge's later style or the magnitude of his achievement resulted in him becoming merely a name, remembered only as the teacher of Benjamin Britten. Bridge died on 10th January 1941, at the height of his powers, and this contributed to his ensuing neglect. Only in the late 1960s did the music begin to be performed again, and only in the 1980s has Bridge been recognised as one of the major British composers of the first half of the twentieth century, as well as probably the most forward-looking.

Bridge's post war works, including the tragic piano sonata, *Phantasm* for piano and orchestra, *Oration* for cello and orchestra and the third and fourth string quartets, all show him exploring an increasingly chromatic language in which a personal use of bitonality allowed him the freedom to deal with their largely tragic message. Bridge developed into a composer who, while writing in a wholly personal language, could be discussed in the same breath as the leading European composers of the day such as Berg and Bartók. The Piano Trio No. 2 is a high-point of this group of works. Composed in the Autumn of 1928, it was completed on 31st January 1929, and first performed the following November before an invited audience at London's Langham Hotel. It was not, however, understood at the time.

Formally the Trio is actually a pair of linked movements. There are a number of features which recur and give the work its elusive character, and possibly the most apparent of these is the use of repeated figurations and ostinati of sometimes unexpected pattern. These, coupled with the work's haunting harmonic feel — through an extensive use of bitonality — give it a power and reach for a post-tonal audience which eluded its first audiences, who were used to Bridge's neo-Brahmsian early chamber works. The individual sound world that Bridge has created in these late works is nowhere better exemplified than in this music's opening passage, as over ice-cold high piano ostinato the violin and cello declaim extended soaring contrapuntal lines. The contrast with the ensuing scherzo is emphasised by its use of pizzicato strings, Bridge still using onward moving ostinati to

propel the music constantly forward, the strings eventually adopting a passionate sustained line before, at a climax, there briefly appears an arpeggiated texture redolent of his earlier more traditional scores.

The second linked pair of movements sets out with a sustained almost hypnotic slow movement followed by another fast one, at the outset itself almost another scherzo. The haunting stillness of the slow music is created by an almost disembodied ostinato, including one unique passage in which the violin appears to search plaintively over the piano and cello's static figuration. In contrast the scherzando effect at the change to the final movement is quite marked. Then long breathed string lines underpinned by whirlwind piano writing carry the listener forward, encompassing a brief return to the trio's opening and later the second subject of the first movement. At the end there is no sense of winning through; rather does the music console at having at least maintained continuity, returning to the atmosphere of the opening. Whether the nightmare is over, no-one can say.

SIR ARNOLD BAX: Piano Trio in B flat

Arnold Bax was born in the south London suburb of Streatham on 8th November 1883 and died in Cork, Eire, on 3rd October 1953, just short of his 70th birthday. The facts of his life are now comparatively well known: the eldest son of a wealthy middle-class family, he spent the most impressionable years of his youth at the family's Hampstead mansion, Ivy Bank, in whose extensive gardens he had a small study, specially built for him to work in. Bax enjoyed a charmed youth and young manhood, and having a private income (he never had to take a paid position) he was free to follow his enthusiasms as the mood took him.

He studied at the Royal Academy of Music between 1900 and 1905, where his teachers were Frederick Corder for composition and Tobias Matthay for piano. Wonderfully gifted as both pianist and composer, he preferred to remain the talented amateur performer (later refusing to appear in public at

all) and took quite a long time in establishing himself as a composer.

Bax soaked up influences as a young man, yet almost from the first his musical personality shone through in practically everything he did. Wagner, Strauss, Elgar, the Russians, Debussy, Sibelius: he responded to them all in turn, yet it required the catalyst of Irish folk music and dance, and non-musical literary and scenic influences, to enable him to forge his fully mature style.

After writing music in all forms except opera and oratorio, including seven celebrated symphonies, Bax was knighted and made Master of the King's Musick. The Second World War really marked the end of his creative world, yet during his last years he wrote two celebrated film scores, *Malta GC* and *Oliver Twist* — both of which became very popular — and a number of other works in a relaxed late style. One of the very best of these is the trio we have here.

Bax had always written chamber music and, while a student, two string quartets appeared from his pen. A piano trio with viola instead of cello was his first published work in 1907. In 1908 appeared a massive and uneven *String Quintet* and just after the outbreak of the Great War he completed the sprawling *Piano Quintet* which was often heard in the inter-war years. Then came an *Elegiac Trio* for flute, viola and harp, and later, three numbered string quartets, the piano quartet and various scores for quintets or larger mixed ensembles. His last chamber work was this *Piano Trio* written for his friend the pianist Harry Isaacs, for his first post-Second War recital season.

Bax always held that the medium of piano trio was an impossible one, claiming that the only composer to have tackled it successfully was Dvořák in the 'Dumky'. However, he changed his mind and wrote the three movements of this trio during the Autumn of 1945, completing it on 9th January 1946. It was performed two months later.

While this music is less personal and expansive than his earlier chamber works, nevertheless the vigour with which Bax presents his themes makes for an attractive extrovert piece. The vigorous first movement is characterised by the way Bax maintains the impetus behind the music, and by his use of 'scotch snap' to propel the rhythm. In contrast the beautiful

reflective slow movement evokes the long-remembered serenity of remote country with its long opening cantilena, and its quietly singing lines. Bax described the last movement by referring to a quotation from Act III of *Hamlet*: 'This is miching mallecho — it means mischief'. With its combination of a 5/8 time signature and sustained scherzando character this is a new departure for Bax. Eventually the music takes on a more solemn note and a sustained theme appears in the piano chords, before running passage-work from the cello returns us to the dry humour of the opening. The slow theme rounds the work off in a miniature coda.

LEWIS FOREMAN

The **Borodin Trio** was formed after the three members emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1976, since when they have established themselves as one of the best piano trios of our generation, having played in all the major cities of Europe and America, as well as making a tour of Australasia. Their British debut at the Wigmore Hall in July 1978 was 'an outstanding success in anyone's book' (*Daily Telegraph*), and other appearances have included the Bath, Malvern and Boston Festivals.

Rostislav Dubinsky was founder and first violinist of the legendary Borodin Quartet for thirty years. He met his wife Luba Edlina at the Moscow Conservatory when they were both students. She is best known for her many brilliant performances and recordings as a pianist with the Borodin Quartet. The Dubinskys now live in the USA, where they both teach at one of America's most prestigious schools of music, that of Indiana University.

Cellist Yuli Turovsky also studied at the Moscow Conservatory; he was a prize-winner of the Third Soviet Cello Competition and a laureate at the 22nd International Prague Spring Competition in 1970. His many performances as soloist with the Moscow Chamber Orchestra won him acclaim before he emigrated to Montreal, where he now teaches at the Conservatoire de Musique. He is founding Music Director and conductor of Canadian chamber orchestra, I Musici de Montréal.

Recordings for Chandos by the Borodin Trio include piano trios by Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninov, Ravel, Schubert, Shostakovich, Smetana and Tchaikovsky, as well as much other chamber music.

Chamber music by Bridge and Bax on Chandos

FRANK BRIDGE:

Music for String Quartet: Quartet No. 2, Cherry Ripe, Londonderry Air, Sally in our Alley, Sir Roger de Coverley

Delmé String Quartet

ABRD 1073 LP, ABTD 1073 MC, CHAN 8426 CD

BRIDGE: Cello Sonata, & BAX: Rhapsodic Ballad

c/w Delius and Walton

Raphael and Peter Wallfisch *cello and piano*

ABRD 1209 LP, ABTD 1209 MC, CHAN 8499 CD

ARNOLD BAX:

String Quartet No. 1, Piano Quartet, Harp Quintet

McCabe, Kanga, English String Quartet

ABRD 1113 LP, ABTD 1113 MC, CHAN 8391 CD

Oboe Quintet

c/w Holst, Moeran, Jacob

Sarah Francis, English String Quartet

ABRD 1114 LP, ABTD 1114 MC, CHAN 8392 CD

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

c/w Bliss and Vaughan Williams

ABRD 1078 LP & ABTD 1078 MC

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Rotislav Dubinsky violin
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