

CD REVIEW 137

PETER RACINE FRICKER The String Quartets

Number 1 Op 8 (1948-49)

Number 2 Op 20 (1952-53)

Number 3 Op. 73 (1976)

Adagio and Scherzo (1943)

Villiers Quartet. Naxos 8.571374 (DDD (70. 23)



In the 1950s, through to the early 1970s, there were three British composers highly regarded in contemporary music circles namely Humphrey Searle, Peter Racine Fricker and Iain Hamilton.

Fricker was born in London on 5 September 1920 and his awakening to music came while he was at St Paul's School where his main interest was the organ which he was to study with Henry Wilson and Ralph Downes and, at RCM, with Wilson and Ernest Bullock.

He was in military service from 1941 and, after the war, he was at Morley College and studied with the great Matyas Seiber which Peter and many others have said was the greatest teacher of the 20th century.

The String Quartet no 1 was premiered the day after his 29th birthday and was described as original and striking. It is a fine piece lasting about 15 minutes and is in seven sections played without a break. The opening is very intense and gives way to a spellbinding allegro. There are slower sections often of great beauty and an energetic finale. It is a very good work, a model for all composers and a joy to hear. The Amadeus Quartet took it up with great success and asked Fricker to write another quartet for them

The Quartet no 2 is quite different from the first and is cast in three movements, the first being labelled inquieto allegro lasting over ten minutes. It is in sonata form and includes a fugue. The molto allegro follows and the finale is a deeply felt adagio. It received a warm reception but the composer did not return to this form until 1976.

By this time, he was teaching at Santa Barbara, California having arrived there in 1964. Since his move to the USA many thought that the British music scene forgot him

Elliot Carter is the dedicatee of Fricker's Quartet no 3 and is more advanced in although still composed in usual notation. There is a strange flippancy in one movement and the adagio seems tragic or introspective. The quick music is hugely entertaining and exciting. The Chillingirian Quartet gave the premiere in 1984.

The wartime Adagio and Scherzo is a mature work and it is not slight but purposeful. This and the Quartet no 3 are world premiere recordings.

Following with the scores, I soon put them to one side and enjoyed the performances which are excellent and has a most acceptable sound.

Peter died of terminal cancer in February 1990. He was 69,

I have not referred to other works or biographical details since you can read all about them on the composers page of my website wrightmusic.net

This CD is most welcome following Lyrita's CD of Peter's Vision of Judgement, our finest British choral work, an undeniable masterpiece.

Buy this CD of the string quartets. For those of you who may not like 'modern' music you really must try this. It is a real find. Perhaps we can expect further CDs of this talented and original composer.

Why did we have to wait so long for these works ? What other fine works are waiting recordings ?

Thank you Villiers.

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