

CD REVIEW 81

ROBERT CRAWFORD

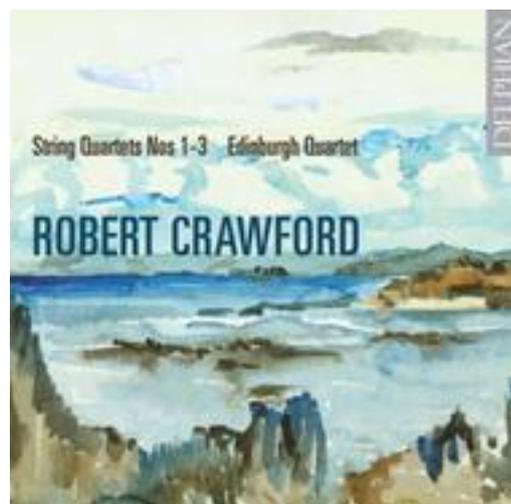
String Quartets 1 Op 4; 2, Op 8 and 3 (2008).

Edinburgh Quartet.

Delphian DCD 34091

(62 minutes)

Robert Crawford is a very fine musician, usually a slow worker at composition because he takes great care about every detail. He is a quiet, unassuming and courteous man and hugely knowledgeable about music. He is a confident conversationalist with precise comments and he knows what goes on in the musical world.



He was born in Edinburgh on 18 April 1925 and was evacuated to Keswick where he took lessons from Bertha Pells who was to marry the composer Bernard Stevens. He also studied at the Guildhall School of Music in London after some years of study with Hans Gal in Edinburgh.

[*\(See article about this composer on this site\)*](#)

His impressive String Quartet no.1 Op 4 dates from 1949 and was premiered by the Berlin Quartet at a ISCM Festival in Frankfurt in 1951. It has a coherent form and is strong and vibrant. Thea Musgrave said, "This is real music!". It is a major achievement in which variations or quasi variations exploit and develop the material with contrapuntal skill. There is no narcissism, pomp or grand empty gestures, thank goodness. And it has a kind of spirituality as in the profound Andante section.

Robbie's first commission came from the McEwen Commission of Glasgow University and saw the composition of the String Quartet no 2 Op 8. Christopher Grier called it a work of elegance, wit, attractive astringency and real beauty. The Glasgow Herald said it was a work of intensity and called it a masterpiece. It is a masterpiece brilliantly conceived and with a final rondo which may hint at Haydnesque humour. It really is a very very fine piece.

The Quartet no 3 dates from 2008 and was written at the request of Paul Baxter of Delphian Records to make up a CD. Like his other quartets, Crawford explores the possibilities of musical false relations and there is a coherence of form and a rich chromaticism but it is never overwhelming but subtle. His works are always lucid. He uses the four instruments as equal. The music may be a little more severe but, while non-musicians may not understand this, the dissonances are natural.

The performances are very good, as is the sound.

A fourth quartet was completed in 2010.

Robbie Crawford has written some good piano music recorded by Nicholas Ashton including the fascinating Piano Quintet, Delphian DCD43055, and some exquisite chamber music on a CD he shares with another friend John Veale, Metier MSV 28520, and Hammered Brass is on Linn CKD162.

[*\(See review on the Metier CD on this site\)*](#)

His only orchestra work Lunula shows his enviable understanding of the orchestra and it is a pity that his intended Viola Concerto never materialised.

It leads us to consider other Scottish composers and, in particular another fine composer of string quartets, David Dorward who has a wide range of works in every genre. His Second Quartet is also a masterpiece.

No lover of both great chamber music and the intimacy of the string quartet should be without this CD.

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