



EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934)
String Quartet arr. for strings by David Matthews

SOMMCD 0145
COMPACT
DISC
DIGITAL AUDIO
DDD

MALCOLM ARNOLD (1921-2006)
Sonata for Strings arr. by David Matthews
after the String Quartet No. 2

ROBERT SIMPSON (1921-1997)
Allegro Deciso from String Quartet No. 3
arr. for strings by the composer

Orchestra of St Paul's · Ben Palmer conductor



Elgar (arr. Matthews): String Quartet Op. 83	(26:46)
① I. Allegro moderato	8:44
② II. Piacevole (poco Andante)	9:30
③ III. Finale – Allegro molto	8:32
Arnold (arr. Matthews): Sonata for Strings	(26:59)
④ I. Allegro	6:11
⑤ II. Maestoso con molto rubato – Allegro vivace	4:27
⑥ III. Andante	7:45
⑦ IV. Allegretto	8:36
Simpson (arr. by the composer)	
⑧ Allegro Deciso	12:00
Total duration:	66:15

Recorded at St. Mary's Church, Walthamstow on 24th and 25th March 2014.

Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Ben Connellan

Front Cover Photograph: *Shape of a violin* © Jan Krömer

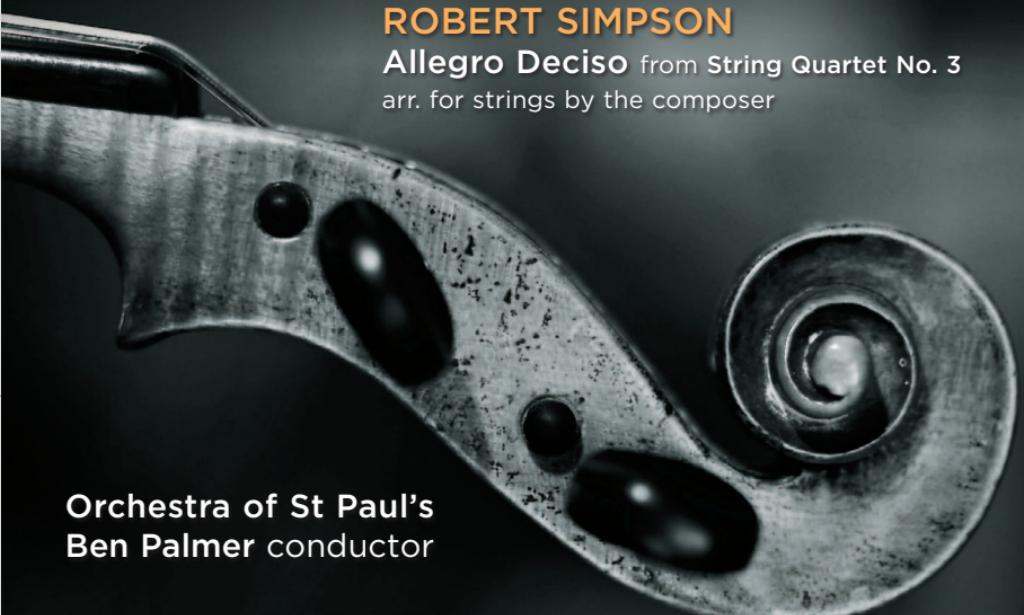
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String Quartet arr. for strings by David Matthews

MALCOLM ARNOLD
Sonata for Strings arr. by David Matthews
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ROBERT SIMPSON
Allegro Deciso from String Quartet No. 3
arr. for strings by the composer



Orchestra of St Paul's
Ben Palmer conductor

The practice of arranging, adapting and transcribing has been an integral part of Western music since its very origins, from the parody masses of the 16th century to Thomas Adès's contemporary retouchings of Couperin, with every permutation imaginable in between. The string quartet, so often a vessel for composers' most intimate and personal utterances, has provided a rich source for enterprising musicians wishing to expand the repertoire for string orchestra, a genre that has surprisingly few notable works of substantial duration.

Among the finest transcriptions for strings are Gustav Mahler's arrangements of Beethoven's Op. 95 and Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, Sir Colin Davis's edition of Beethoven's Op. 131, and the Russian violist and conductor Rudolf Barshai's versions of the First, Fourth, Eighth and Tenth quartets of Shostakovich. Samuel Barber himself expanded the slow movement of his quartet into the ubiquitous *Adagio for Strings*, just as William Walton adapted his String Quartet in A minor into a *Sonata for String Orchestra*. In the hands of such skilful and sensitive arrangers, these adaptations preserve the original works' more private moments, and yet give full voice to the peaks of intensity which stretch the string quartet medium to its very limits.

For this recording, we have striven to maintain the internal balance of a string quartet, playing with four each of first and second violins, three each of violas and cellos, and two double basses. The violins are seated antiphonally, left and right of the conductor (as Elgar would have expected from an orchestra in 1919), a layout we feel favours all three works on the disc.

Begun in March 1918 and completed by Christmas of that year, EDWARD ELGAR's only String Quartet is dedicated to the Brodsky Quartet. Its cellist, Carl Fuchs, and

first violin, Adolph Brodsky (who was appointed leader of the Hallé in 1895, the same year he founded the quartet) had been urging Elgar to compose a piece for them since 1900. Elgar did indeed begin working on one in 1907, inspired by attending a Brodsky Quartet concert in Malvern, but after making substantial progress he put it aside to concentrate on his First Symphony. Thus, it was more than a decade later, stimulated by an evening of chamber music in London with W. H. Reed, that Elgar began to compose a new piece, the E minor quartet.

The first movement was written at Elgar's London home, Severn House in Hampstead, while he was convalescing from an operation to remove his tonsils. In May he travelled to Brinkwells, the Sussex cottage his wife Alice had found for them. After stopping work on the quartet to write the Violin Sonata and to begin the Piano Quintet, he started to write the second movement on Alice's birthday, 9 October. It was to be a favourite of hers, which she described as "like captured sunshine", and asked to have played at her funeral. The finale was begun exactly two months later, and finished on 23 December.

After a private performance at Severn House on 7 January 1919, the public première was given by the British String Quartet (comprising Albert Sammons, W. H. Reed, Raymond Jeremy and Felix Salmond) at Wigmore Hall on 21 May 1919, in a programme also including the first performances of the Piano Quintet and the Violin Sonata. Lady Elgar wrote of the occasion: "A most tremendous reception of each work & at the end an overwhelming ovation & when E. appeared more than ever. *Shouts & roars.*" H. C. Colles, writing in *The Times*, was less kind: "An immediate effect of listening to Sir Edward Elgar's opp. 82, 83 and 84 in succession is to give one a new sympathy with the modern revolt against beauty of line and colour. A stab of crude ugliness would be a relief from that overwhelming sense of beauty."

Cast in a lilting 12/8, the quartet opens with a whispered modal incantation. This motif is used throughout as a link between the movement's principal themes, and to propel the music forward into the next section, but is left as an unanswered question at the movement's close. The drama of the *Allegro moderato* is dispelled by a central C major *Piacevole* movement, which unfolds in true chamber-like manner, and is surely one of Elgar's most tender creations. The nervous, mercurial *Finale*, which Lady Elgar likened to the "galloping of stallions", races forward with an insistent dotted theme answered by chattering violin semiquavers. In the recapitulation the gentle second subject is heard first, enabling the resolute first idea to build towards an inexorably passionate and fiery conclusion.

Inspired by hearing a performance of the String Quartet given by the Sorrel Quartet, **David Matthews** had the idea of arranging the *Piacevole* for string orchestra. It was performed at the Hampstead and Highgate Festival in 2004, conducted by George Vass, who encouraging Matthews to complete the other two movements, to a commission from the Presteigne Festival. The complete work was premiered by the Presteigne Festival Orchestra, conducted by Vass, on 26 August 2010. In addition to reinforcing the cellos with double basses (either at pitch or the octave below), Matthews's arrangement subtly fills out Elgar's texture, adding occasional octave doublings, and providing harmonies implied by Elgar's four-part writing.

It is often a mistake to try to understand, explain or justify a composer's output by the events that have shaped their life, but **MALCOLM ARNOLD** was unequivocal when he stated that, "My string quartets and symphonies are the story of my life." Born in Northampton in 1921, Arnold took up the trumpet at the age of twelve after meeting Louis Armstrong, who was playing at the Royal Bath Hotel in

Bournemouth. He was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music at the age of sixteen, but left the following year to take up a position as second trumpet with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, where he was soon promoted to principal. He left the LPO in 1948 to concentrate on composing, though he came to feel undervalued as a serious composer, dismissed by critics for his film scores and lighter pieces. The frantic pace of work (he was to write 132 film scores throughout his life) took its toll, and in the early 1960s he suffered from a period of depression, together with worsening alcoholism, and the break-up of his first marriage. After settling in Cornwall and remarrying, Arnold moved to Dublin in 1972, remaining there until his second marriage failed in 1977, whereupon he returned to England. With the help of a carer, Anthony Day, he overcame his depression and alcoholism in later years, writing the last of his nine symphonies in 1986.

Completed in 1975 in Dublin, the four-movement String Quartet No. 2 thus came at an extremely troubling time in the composer's life. It is a thrillingly intense and deeply personal work, uncompromising in its juxtapositions of bleak despair, aggression and, as if from nowhere, the most heart-melting, beautiful melodies imaginable. Beginning as a dialogue between the outer and inner voices, the *Allegro* is notable for its ever-changing textures, sudden violent outbursts and cascades of scales. The bluesy second subject eventually finds the movement's release in a rather unlikely slow D major coda, foreshadowing the work's final apotheosis. The scherzo second movement starts with a tragic cadenza for solo violin, characterised by repeating double-stopped *glissandi*, which leads without pause into an unaccompanied Irish reel, undoubtedly in homage to the quartet's dedicatee, the Irish violinist, Hugh Maguire. Within a few bars, however, this apparently cheerful G major tune is subjected to a furious bitonal assault by the other strings, in C sharp minor. The fiddler plays on with increasingly desperate virtuosity, winning out at the end of

this astonishing movement with three emphatic chords. The *Andante*, an arch-shaped slow movement with an intensity worthy of Shostakovich, builds twice to a beautifully harmonised chorale, the first time whispered *sul tasto*, the second declaimed in impassioned *fortissimo*. Arnold's 9/8 finale is cast in two substantial parts, a long-breathed *Allegretto* melody over (and later under) a murmured accompaniment, and a frenzied, combative *Vivace*, which accelerates so much that it collapses in on itself, revealing a radiant *Lento* D major coda, with the long-breathed theme given out in augmentation.

The String Quartet No. 2 was premièred by the Allegri Quartet, and its leader Hugh Maguire, at Dublin Castle on 9 June 1976. David Matthews recast the work as *Sonata for Strings* at the suggestion of the publisher he shares with Arnold, Faber Music, who hoped to bring the quartet to a wider audience. Though Arnold was still alive when the transcription was made in, he was in too poor health to be involved in the process. The *Sonata* was performed for the first time by the Manning Camerata, conducted by Peter Manning, at Waltham Abbey on 16 April 2005, just under a year and a half before Arnold's death at the age of 84.

Born seven months before Arnold, in March 1921 in Leamington Spa, **ROBERT SIMPSON** spent two years studying medicine in London before deciding to make a career in music. A conscientious objector in the Second World War, he served with a mobile surgical unit during the London Blitz, whilst studying privately with Herbert Howells. He was awarded a doctorate from the University of Durham in 1951, the submitted work being his First Symphony; he would go on to write ten more throughout his life. That same year he joined the music staff of the BBC, becoming one of its most respected music producers in his nearly three decades

at the Corporation. He resigned in 1980 on a matter of principle, just months shy of being able to retire with a full pension, over a clash with management about the proposed decommissioning of five of the eleven BBC orchestras. A staunch anti-Thatcherite, he moved to Ireland in 1986.

Simpson's orchestration of the finale to his own String Quartet No. 3 was made at the suggestion of the composer and conductor Walter Goehr, himself a prolific arranger of works such as Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Composed in 1953-54, the Third Quartet is unusual in being cast in just two movements, a lamenting *Adagio* in C major, and the pulsating energy of the E minor *Allegro Deciso*. Simpson regarded his first three quartets (No. 1 was begun in 1951) as forming a natural sequence, so this epic 12-minute display of virtuosic counterpoint may also be regarded as the conclusion to a larger work. Like Shostakovich, Simpson wrote fifteen string quartets, spanning forty years to 1991. A sixteenth remained uncompleted at the time of his death in 1997.

As a standalone movement for string orchestra, the *Allegro Deciso* seems remarkable for its relentless propulsion, constantly developing two main thematic groups (in duple and triple time respectively). The first group begins as an aggressive dialogue between first violins and cellos, marked *risoluto*, driven by an open-string bare-fifths fanfare from the inner voices. The second thematic group, which begins softly, is characterised by quietly insistent repeated notes. Simpson's tireless contrapuntal invention builds to a climactic coda where the work's various themes gradually begin to align, until, at last, the closing bars are given in near unison, ending with an emphatic, if not necessarily triumphant, chord of E major.

Programme notes by Ben Palmer © 2015

The Orchestra of St Paul's is one of London's most dynamic and versatile chamber orchestras. Under the baton of Artistic Director Ben Palmer, OSP has developed a reputation for imaginative programming and exciting, stylish performances. Resident at the famous Actors' Church in Covent Garden, the orchestra performs regularly at Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room, at St John's, Smith Square, and at prestigious venues and festivals throughout the UK and internationally. Based around a core of principal players, OSP adapts to each project, varying its layout, playing style and lineup, ranging in size from a small ensemble to an orchestra of 60 or more. The orchestra's patron is Sir Roger Norrington, one of the world's leading exponents of historical performance. In 2011 OSP appointed award-winning Irish composer Solfa Carlile as the orchestra's first Composer-in-Residence. The orchestra has worked with such acclaimed soloists as Roderick Williams, Steven Osborne and David Owen Norris (as both composer and pianist), and with actors Samuel West and Clemency Burton-Hill.

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Violin I

Francesca Barratt
Sophie Mather
Rachel Spencer
Emanuela Buta

Violin II

Esther King Smith
Helena Nicholls
Willemijn Steenbakkers
Elaine Ambridge

Viola

Helen Sanders-Hewett
Matthew Kettle
Steve Doman

Cello

Morwenna Del Mar
Alex Rolton
Amy Jolly

Bass

Ben Griffiths
Alice Kent



Orchestra of St Paul's

photograph: Andy Staples

Ben Palmer



Ben Palmer is Artistic Director of the Orchestra of St Paul's, and is in demand as a guest conductor throughout the UK and abroad. Acclaimed for his innovative and imaginative programming, he is increasingly gaining recognition as an inspiring and versatile conductor. Recent debuts include the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, the Kazakh State Chamber Orchestra and the London Mozart Players. Other orchestras he has conducted include the Hallé, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Britten Sinfonia and Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. He is regularly invited to work as rehearsal conductor for the Royal College of Music Symphony Orchestra, preparing Berlioz and Schubert for Sir Roger Norrington, Mahler for Bernard Haitink and *The Rite of Spring* for Jac van Steen. He has worked closely with Norrington since 2011, acting as his assistant conductor for concerts, recordings and on tour, and at the BBC Proms. He is in demand as a composer, arranger and orchestrator (recent commissions include the Deutsches Kammerorchester Berlin) and is increasingly making a speciality of conducting films live to screen.

www.benpalmer.net
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David Matthews

David Matthews was born in London in 1943 and started composing at the age of sixteen. He was mainly self-taught, though he studied privately with Anthony Milner and was greatly helped by Nicholas Maw and Peter Sculthorpe. He also learned much from being an assistant to Benjamin Britten in the late 1960s. His large output includes eight symphonies, five symphonic poems, six concertos, twelve string quartets and many chamber and vocal works. A large number of his works are available on CD. Many of his pieces are inspired by the natural world, by paintings and literary texts, and by collaborations with instrumentalist friends. He has composed six pieces for the BBC Philharmonic, including his last two symphonies, and ten for the Nash Ensemble. He has also written books on Tippett and Britten, and has worked extensively as an arranger.

www.david-matthews.co.uk

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