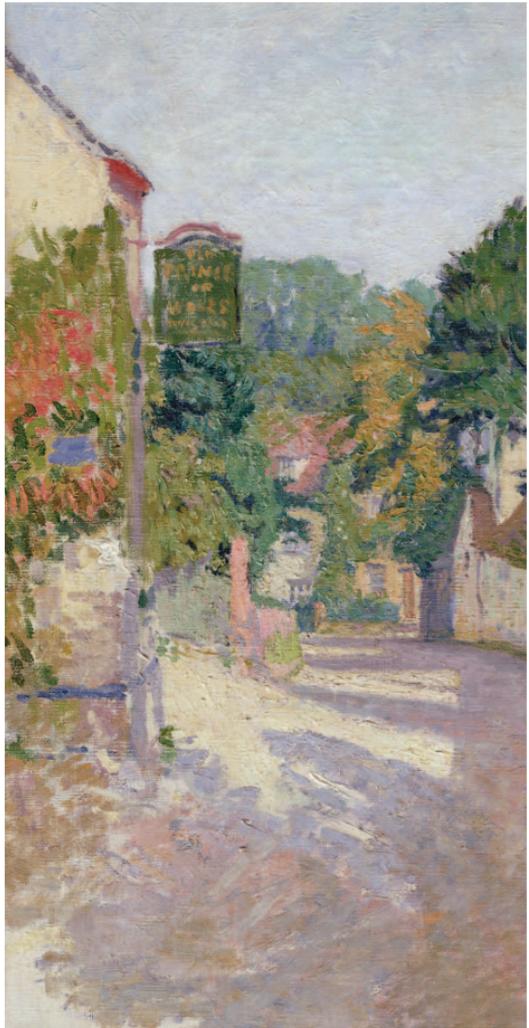


NAXOS

Lennox
BERKELEY

String Quartets
Nos. 1-3

Maggini Quartet



Lennox Berkeley (1903-1989)

String Quartets Nos. 1-3

Lennox Berkeley was born near Oxford on 12th May 1903. He studied at Gresham's School, Holt (which his colleague and sometime collaborator Benjamin Britten was to attend a decade later), then read French and Philology at Merton College, Oxford. Graduating in 1926, he then moved to Paris where, on the advice of Ravel, he studied with Nadia Boulanger. In 1928 he became a Roman Catholic, which was to have a profound effect on his work. During the Second World War, he worked as programme planner for the BBC in London, and married Elizabeth Freda Bernstein in 1946 (his eldest son, Michael, has achieved recognition as a composer in his own right). From 1946-68 Berkeley was Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music, with pupils including Richard Rodney Bennett, William Mathias and Nicholas Maw. He was made a CBE in 1957 and was knighted in 1974. Other honours include the Papal Knighthood of St Gregory (1973), a doctorate from Oxford University (1970) and membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1980). During 1976-79 he was a Professor at Keele University, and from 1977 to 1983 was President of the Cheltenham Festival. His later years were marked by declining health, but he continued composing regularly until his 75th year. Berkeley died in London on 26th December 1989.

Although his early years were marked by uncertainty over stylistic direction, Berkeley amassed a catalogue of over a hundred works and contributed to almost every genre. His major works included four operas, four symphonies and several concertos, while his choral music [a selection is on Naxos 8.557277] ranks among the most significant from British composers of his generation. His chamber output includes pieces written for a wide variety of ensembles and combinations. Central to this are the three string quartets that occur at regular intervals during the first half of his career.

The *First Quartet, Op. 6*, was written in 1935, the

year that saw the start of his friendship with Britten and the première of his oratorio *Jonah* at the Leeds Festival. Both these works evince an astringent, Stravinskian neo-classicism that recalls Berkeley's years in Paris, while the quartet also suggests the presence of Bartók, whose *Fifth Quartet* had had its première two years earlier.

The opening movement starts with an incisive theme that features all four players in vigorous counterpoint, complemented by a swaver though no less animated second theme. The development begins with forceful chords, then passes through an arresting passage where solo gestures sound over a rocking accompaniment, before the modified reprise. This allows more room for the second theme, and leads to a coda of relative calm but, as the swelling final chords and ghostly harmonics confirm, hardly repose. Over a walking accompaniment, the second movement unfolds in expressive polyphony, but takes on greater ambiguity as it proceeds. There is a brief climax, but otherwise the music moves thoughtfully between diatonic and chromatic harmony as it winds down to its close. Only a half-close, however, as the *Scherzo* launches with barely a pause; athletic exchanges between players underlined by rhythmic syncopation and unexpected harmonies. The trio section is no less impulsive, then the modified return of the initial music is concluded with a tapering off into silence. Out of this the finale emerges: six variations on the ruminative theme heard at the outset. The first variation transforms it into a driving toccata, and the reflective second is informed by an appealing lilt. The third proceeds with purposeful intent and much imitative writing, then the fourth inhabits a ghostly nocturnal landscape. With its coursing rhythms, the fifth is an outburst of energy, while the sixth is an elegiac variation that sees the work to its subdued but intense close.

The *Second Quartet, Op. 15*, followed in 1941, in a period that gave rise to orchestral works such as the

First Symphony, Serenade and Divertimento, and vocal works such as *Four Poems of St Teresa of Avila* and a setting of the *Stabat Mater*. The influences evident in its predecessor have now been thoroughly absorbed, while the balance between formal clarity and expressive depth has been effortlessly achieved.

The first movement opens passively but assumes greater dynamism with its first main theme. The second theme is lighter and more quizzical in intent, without undermining momentum as the exposition reaches an impassioned climax. The development sets off with similar resolve, but initially vague references to the second theme gradually extend its emotional range. There is a shortened reprise, after which the movement winds down to a questioning close. The *Lento* is one of Berkeley's deepest slow movements, its initial theme yielding a number of motifs that are resourcefully discussed over its course. The theme itself is reassembled on the way to a poignant climax, after which the movement closes with its various motifs gently mused upon by the players. Opening with brusquely rhythmic gestures interspersed with expectant solo phrases, the finale settles upon an uneasy theme that finds productive contrast with the more inward episode that intervenes. The main theme returns with renewed force, driving the music to a heightened reappearance of those initial rhythmic gestures, followed by a coda that funnels the accumulated energy into a decisive final cadence.

The *Third Quartet, Op. 76*, did not appear until 1970, at the end of a decade that saw his final opera *Castaway*, the *Third Symphony* and the *Magnificat*. The period is also notable for Berkeley's recourse to

elements of the serial technique that he had previously eschewed, but his approach is anything but dogmatic and, indeed, accords well with the stylistic ambit mined over the previous quarter-century.

The opening movement begins with a forceful theme in wide-ranging harmonies, complemented by a more relaxed theme that evinces greater passion as it unfolds. The development pointedly integrates these themes, bringing about a free reprise (almost a continuation of the development) before the movement ends with a haunting transformation of the second theme. The scherzo unfolds in driving counterpoint that moves through a number of distinctive gestures without settling on a theme as such. Nor is there a contrasting trio section; rather the movement reiterates its salient motifs through to the teasing close. Beginning with ghostly harmonics, the *Lento* is the emotional heart of the work: its initial introspection gradually builds to a climax of no mean intensity, followed by a plaintive discourse whose sureness of motion ensures a sense of purpose as the movement returns to the inwardness with which it began. The finale seems intent on dispelling any resulting uncertainty with its engaging initial theme, one that finds ready contrast with a more passive idea. The development at first elides between these moods with ease, but the emergence of a ghostly recollection of the slow movement sees an emphatic change of course. At length the main theme returns and the movement heads into its final stage with an accumulating energy that brings the decisive if peremptory close.

Richard Whitehouse

The Maggini Quartet

Lorraine McAslan, Violin I • David Angel, Violin II • Martin Outram, Viola • Michal Kaznowski, Cello



Donohoe (8.554646) was nominated for a Gramophone Award, as well as being an Editor's Choice in *The Gramophone* and the *BBC Music Magazine*, and the CD of Bax *Quartets Nos. 1 and 2* (8.555282) won a 2002 Cannes Classical Award. The first CD of repertoire by Bliss (8.557108) was nominated for a Grammy Award 2004. The CD of Frank Bridge's *Quartets Nos. 1 and 3* (8.557133) was also nominated for a Grammy Award, and *Quartets Nos. 2 and 4* (8.557283) was The Gramophone CD of the Month in May 2005. The CD of John Ireland's *Quartets* (8.557777) was an Editor's Choice in *The Gramophone* August 2006. Planned releases include repertoire by William Alwyn and Edmund Rubbra. The Maggini Quartet has won similar praise for other recordings and has commissioned a number of works, including James MacMillan's *Second Quartet*, Robert Simpson's *Cello Quintet* (his last work) and works by Eleanor Alberga and Roxanna Panufnik. Since 2002 the Maggini Quartet has enjoyed a unique collaboration with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, performing and recording his ten new *Naxos Quartets*. Commissioned by Naxos, the works fulfil the composer's long-held intention of bringing a major contribution to chamber music repertoire, and the project has allowed performers and composer to work closely together over a five-year period. The first CD of *Naxos Quartets Nos. 1 and 2* (8.557396) was an Editor's Choice in *The Gramophone*, and the CDs of *Quartets Nos. 3 and 4* (8.557397), *Quartets Nos. 5 and 6* (8.557398) and *Quartets Nos. 7 and 8* (8.557399) have also received an enthusiastic welcome. The Maggini Quartet takes its name from the famous sixteenth-century Brescian violin-maker Giovanni Paolo Maggini, an example of whose work is played by David Angel.

Formed in 1988, the Maggini Quartet is established as one of the finest string quartets on the international chamber music circuit, performing at major festivals and concert halls throughout Europe, the United States and the Far East. Renowned for championing British composers, the Quartet won The Gramophone Chamber Music CD of the Year 2001 for the *String Quartets* and *Phantasy Quintet* of Vaughan Williams (8.555300), part of The Gramophone Award-winning Naxos series that has brought world-wide sales of more than 100,000 discs. The recording of Elgar's *String Quartet* and *Piano Quintet* (8.553737) with Peter Donohoe was a 1997 winner of the Diapason d'Or, France's most prestigious award for classical music recordings, and the release of the *String Quartets* and *Trio* (8.554079) by E. J. Moeran proved to be one of the best selling chamber music CDs of 1998. The Maggini has also recorded all the Britten *String Quartets* for Naxos (8.553883 and 8.554360), winning praise from *Diapason* in France, while the second volume was an Editor's Choice in *The Gramophone* and in *Classic CD*. The recording of Walton's *String Quartet* and *Piano Quartet* with Peter

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Playing Time
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Central to Lennox Berkeley's chamber music output are the three string quartets that occur at regular intervals during the first half of his career. The *First Quartet* suggests the presence of Bartók and Stravinsky, its style recalling Berkeley's years in Paris, while by the time of the *Second Quartet*, in which the balance between formal clarity and expressive depth is effortlessly achieved, these influences have been thoroughly absorbed. Written in 1970, the *Third Quartet* features one of the composer's finest slow movements, a *Lento* which begins with ghostly harmonics before building to a climax of considerable intensity.

Lennox BERKELEY

(1903-1989)

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 6 (1935) 26:27

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Allegro – Moderato | 7:51 |
| 2 | Andante non troppo – Lento | 5:55 |
| 3 | Scherzo: Vivace | 3:53 |
| 4 | Tema and 6 variations – Moderato | 8:48 |

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 15 (1941) 18:30

- | | | |
|---|------------------|------|
| 5 | Allegro moderato | 7:12 |
| 6 | Lento | 5:30 |
| 7 | Allegro | 5:48 |

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 76 (1970) 18:05

- | | | |
|----|------------------|------|
| 8 | Allegro moderato | 4:32 |
| 9 | Allegro vivace | 2:21 |
| 10 | Lento | 6:05 |
| 11 | Molto vivace | 5:07 |

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