

The Quartet as a Place to Live

The String Quartets of Dafydd Bullock



Introduced and Discussed by
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Contents

Introduction **5**

String Quartet No. 1	Op. 24	9
String Quartet No. 2	Op. 35 <i>For Spring and a New Life!</i>	15
String Quartet No. 3	Op. 107 <i>Fachwen</i>	18
String Quartet No. 4	Op. 114 <i>Faust</i>	24
String Quartet No. 5	Op. 115 <i>Prague</i>	29
String Quartet No. 6	Op. 129	32
String Quartet No. 7	Op. 151 <i>Winds of Change</i>	36
String Quartet No. 8	Op. 152 <i>American</i>	40
String Quartet No. 9	Op. 159 <i>Denisa</i>	43
String Quartet No. 10	Op. 173 <i>Emynau - Hymns</i>	46
String Quartet No. 11	Op. 196 <i>Hinterthal</i>	49
String Quartet No. 12	Op. 207 <i>Winterlicht</i>	53
String Quartet No. 13	Op. 210 <i>Die Reise</i>	57
String Quartet No. 14	Op. 214 <i>Schatten</i>	61
String Quartet No. 15	Op. 226 <i>Fragmented Winter - Slow Return</i>	64
String Quartet No. 16	Op. 229	67
String Quartet No. 17	Op. 248 <i>Tiefen</i>	71
String Quartet No. 18	Op. 252	75
String Quartet No. 19	Op. 259 <i>Changing Times</i>	79
String Quartet No. 20	Op. 260 <i>Uncertain Times</i>	83
String Quartet No. 21	Op. 264 <i>Constantine</i>	88
String Quartet No. 22	Op. 275 <i>Pompeii</i>	92
String Quartet No. 23	Op. 285 <i>Abschied</i>	96
String Quartet No. 24	Op. 289 <i>St. Petersburg</i>	99
String Quartet No. 25	Op. 294	102
String Quartet No. 26	Op. 296 <i>Nadolig - Christmas</i>	106
String Quartet No. 27	Op. 304 <i>Alba</i>	110
String Quartet No. 28	Op. 311 <i>Frustgesang an Jens Spahn</i>	115
String Quartet No. 29	Op. 314 <i>Sussex</i>	119
String Quartet No. 30	Op. 318 <i>Evelyn</i>	122
String Quartet No. 31	Op. 321 <i>Michelangelo's Finger</i>	126
String Quartet No. 32	Op. 329 <i>Слава Україні - Glory to Ukraine</i>	129
String Quartet No. 33	Op. 330 <i>Bergklang</i>	133
String Quartet No. 34	Op. 336 <i>Auerbach's Keller</i>	137
String Quartet No. 35	Op. 340 <i>Norah</i>	140
String Quartet No. 36	Op. 347 <i>February</i>	144
String Quartet No. 37	Op. 351 <i>Sumer Is Icumen In</i>	147
String Quartet No. 38	Op. 357	150
String Quartet No. 39	Op. 361	154
String Quartet No. 40	Op. 363 <i>Distaw</i>	158
String Quartet No. 41	Op. 366 <i>November Moon</i>	163
String Quartet No. 42	Op. 367 <i>In Memoriam</i>	167
String Quartet No. 43	Op. 373 <i>Breuddwydion</i>	170
String Quartet No. 44	Op. 374 <i>Jordi</i>	174
Forty-Four Quartets: A Retrospective		178
Dafydd Bullock		183

Introduction

The Quartet as a Place to Live

There are composers for whom the string quartet remains a special and comparatively rare undertaking, approached at intervals and carrying with it the weight of an imposing historical tradition. The medium seems almost to demand a declaration of seriousness: four exposed voices, little possibility of concealment, and a repertory in which the achievements of the past are always somewhere in the background. For Dafydd Bullock, however, the forty-four quartets suggest a relationship with the medium that is at once less ceremonial and more intimate. The quartet has become a continuing part of his musical life, a form to which he returns not in order to solve the same problem repeatedly, but because it has proved capable of accommodating an unusually wide range of experience and reflection.

The range is immediately apparent from the sequence itself. Places, historical figures, literary characters, Welsh songs, family relationships, journeys, grief, political anger and memories of earlier homes all enter the quartets. Yet it would be misleading to regard the titles as programmes in any simple sense. The works rarely set out to describe their subjects literally. A place is not reduced to scenery, a person is not simply portrayed through a musical likeness, and an inherited melody is not treated as an object to be preserved unchanged. More often, the title identifies the point at which an experience entered the composer's imagination. What follows is a process of transformation in which the original impulse may remain recognisable, but is gradually absorbed into a musical argument with its own independent life.

This is particularly clear in those quartets that draw upon Welsh material. In *Nadolig*, familiar melodies are altered, redistributed and subjected to considerable transformation, even retrograde inversion. Their identity nevertheless remains important, and the resulting music occupies an intriguing space between recognition and change. The melodies belong to cultural memory, but they are also made to belong to the present musical language of the quartet. The same principle is developed differently in *Breuddwydion*, where remembered songs, physical movement and landscape are not all treated in the same way. Material may emerge directly, be suggested through rhythm or become so thoroughly absorbed into texture that its presence is felt more than explicitly heard. The source remains significant, but the music is not required to remain faithful to its original surface in order to preserve its identity.

This capacity for transformation extends far beyond the use of pre-existing material. One of the most persistent characteristics of the quartets is the way in which musical ideas are placed in changing conditions. A melody may become rhythmically charged; a repeated figure may cease to be merely a figure and become part of a larger sense of motion; active writing may give way to sustained sonority; one instrumental voice may inherit material from another. In No. 16, a work whose declared subject is music itself, these processes are unusually exposed. The quartet explores melody, harmony, rhythm, texture and tonal environment by allowing them to alter one another, so that the same musical identity may be perceived differently when its surroundings change. What is striking in retrospect is that this way of thinking is not confined to the abstract works. It appears throughout the sequence, whether the subject is intensely personal or apparently unrelated to the world outside the score.

The early quartets already contain much of this compositional instinct. In *Fachwen*, for example, continuity is achieved not simply by presenting themes and developing them according to a

conventional pattern, but through changes of density, rhythm, register, instrumental distribution and expressive intensity. The music repeatedly discovers new possibilities within the material already established. That approach would become increasingly flexible in later works, but the retrospective view makes it difficult to speak of a simple progression from one style to another. Characteristics that may initially seem to belong to the mature quartets can often be recognised much earlier, while later works sometimes return to directness, lyricism or energetic argument with undiminished force.

The development of the quartets is therefore real, but it is not linear. Ideas disappear and return; earlier works acquire new meanings when their material is recalled in later ones; musical memories can survive for decades before finding another context. This is particularly evident in the relationship between *Fachwen*, *Hinterthal* and *Bergklang*. When Bullock moved from Wales to Austria, the principal theme of *Fachwen* entered the new quartet, not as an ornamental quotation but as an active memory of the home that had been left behind. *Hinterthal* becomes an attempt to reconcile that remembered world with the sounds and experiences of the Austrian Alps. In *Bergklang*, written at the moment of another departure, the relationship acquires a further dimension. The remembered Welsh music returns within the Austrian landscape, so that one farewell contains the memory of another. The retrospective significance of this connection is considerable: the past is no longer something simply left behind, but something capable of entering the present and altering its meaning.

This is one of the reasons why place occupies such an important position in the quartets without ever becoming merely descriptive. A place may be listened to, remembered, left, revisited or carried elsewhere. The physical world becomes inseparable from the consciousness moving through it. In *Hinterthal*, the question is whether a new place can become home without the old one ceasing to matter; the Austrian material and the *Fachwen* theme are allowed to coexist rather than compete for possession of the music. By *Bergklang*, departure itself has become part of the subject. The music preserves what physical circumstances cannot, and the experience of a place is transformed into something capable of travelling beyond the period in which that place could actually be inhabited.

The same concern with continuity under changing circumstances appears in works that have no geographical programme. *Schatten* is particularly revealing because its later movements alter our understanding of what preceded them. Small gestures that initially appear quiet and tentative subsequently acquire speed and intensity, so that the listener begins to recognise possibilities in the earlier material that were not yet apparent. When the music eventually returns to a more lyrical and reflective condition, it does not restore the opening state. What has happened in the intervening movements remains part of the listener's understanding of the material. The effect is to make musical continuity a matter not simply of recurrence but of memory. Return carries experience with it.

This capacity for remembering is especially significant when the quartet engages directly with personal experience. The most immediate circumstances behind a work may be grief, separation, frustration or family affection, but the resulting music generally discovers a wider human implication. In the works associated with children and grandchildren, for example, musical identity emerges through relationship and continuity rather than through sentimental portraiture. *Jordi* begins with a three-note motif that had already appeared in the Symphony written for the composer's grandson. The motif therefore arrives in the quartet with a history of its own, linking the intimate world of four instruments to an earlier and larger musical context. At the same time, its future remains open: it has already belonged to one work and may acquire further significance in another.

The string quartet is particularly well suited to this kind of exploration because of the relationship between its four voices. It can behave as a conversation, an argument or a collective body, but it

never entirely loses the possibility of individual identity. This becomes especially explicit in *Constantine*, where the relationship between the individual and collective power forms an important part of the work's conception. The four instruments redistribute authority continually, making the quartet itself a kind of miniature society in which independence and unity must coexist. Yet the same principle can be felt throughout the sequence. The first violin may appear to lead, only for the centre of gravity to move elsewhere; an inner voice may suddenly become essential; the four instruments may merge into a collective sonority and subsequently separate again.

The relationship between individuality and continuity is, in fact, one of the larger themes that gradually emerges from the forty-four works. A melody remains itself while changing its environment. A place remains present after it has been left. An inherited song survives transformation. A person enters a family history without being defined by it. The four instruments become one body without surrendering their separate characters. The quartets repeatedly explore this paradox without turning it into a theoretical system.

Over time, another change becomes increasingly apparent: a growing confidence in the expressive possibilities of duration, sustained sound and silence. The earlier works are by no means lacking in stillness, and the later works certainly do not abandon forceful rhythm or rapid activity. What changes is the freedom with which contrasting states can coexist. In No. 38, rapid motion and sustained sonority continually generate one another. The active passages create harmonic consequences that become audible when the motion subsides, while the quieter movement allows small gestures and individual entrances to assume unusual significance within a larger field of silence.

By No. 44, this confidence has become one of the defining features of the music. *Jordi* explicitly declines the expectation that a string quartet must depend upon conflict, thematic confrontation or dramatic rhetoric. Its opening allows notes to appear singly or in small groups, separated by silence and given time to acquire weight. Tonal direction emerges from the interaction of melodic lines rather than from emphatic harmonic assertion, and the result is a continuity that feels organic rather than imposed. This does not represent a rejection of energy or drama; rather, those qualities have become part of a broader expressive vocabulary in which stillness no longer needs to justify itself as a preparation for something else.

Taken as a whole, the forty-four quartets therefore reveal less a succession of stylistic periods than an expanding musical life. Certain preoccupations recur because they continue to generate new possibilities: memory, transformation, melody, place, identity, departure and return, the relationship between individual voices and collective sound. Each appears under different circumstances and assumes different musical forms. The composer does not arrive at a final solution and then repeat it. The interest lies precisely in the fact that the same underlying concerns can be rediscovered from another direction.

The string quartet has consequently become something more than a particular genre within Bullock's catalogue. It is a continuing place of encounter between experience and musical thought. External events enter it, but are not simply represented. Earlier works survive within later ones, but are changed by their new circumstances. Four instruments remain distinct, yet continually discover new forms of relationship. Across forty-four works, the medium has proved sufficiently demanding to sustain serious exploration and sufficiently flexible to accommodate humour, grief, landscape, history, family and the purely musical pleasure of allowing sound to develop according to its own logic.

Perhaps that is the simplest way of understanding the extraordinary persistence of the quartet in this body of work. It has not been a form to be mastered and then left behind. It has remained a place to which the composer can return because, each time, something different can happen there.

String Quartet No. 1 Op. 24

Programme Note

Written in Luxembourg and London in 1988, **String Quartet No. 1** is a compact five-movement work which was, in the composer's words, intended as an "experimental attempt". Its five movements explore quite different musical situations, yet are held together by a recurring concern with the relationship between stability and change.

The **first movement** grows from sustained pedal notes, above which the three upper instruments develop increasingly independent melodic lines. The harmonic landscape therefore remains relatively stable while the music above it is constantly changing. What might at first seem static gradually acquires movement and tension through the changing relationships between the four voices.

The **second movement** takes the idea of persistence into the realm of rhythm. *Ostinato* figures provide a continuous underlying pulse, but are repeatedly interrupted by contrasting material. The resulting tension between repetition and interruption gives the movement its characteristic energy.

The **third movement** is more overtly dramatic: a dissonant, somewhat threnodic march is repeatedly interrupted by lyrical passages. Here the contrast between relentless rhythmic movement and moments of melodic suspension creates a darker emotional world. The lyrical episodes do not simply provide relief from the march; they temporarily suspend its sense of inevitability.

The **fourth movement** turns towards harmonic ambiguity. Sustained chords, changing tonal centres and the alternating use of *senza vibrato* and *con vibrato* create a deliberately unsettled sound-world. Tonal implications are continually suggested but rarely allowed to settle into conventional harmonic resolution. The music consequently seems to hover between familiarity and uncertainty.

The **final movement** is constructed as a series of variations over a ground bass. Once again, something persistent provides the foundation for continual change above it. Rhythmic and melodic activity gradually accumulates, only to subside towards the quiet, *senza vibrato* ending. The quartet thus closes almost as it began: with sustained sonorities and an atmosphere of suspension.

Although the five movements differ considerably in character, they can be heard as five variations on a single compositional idea: something remains while something else changes. Pedal point, *ostinato*, march, tonal ambiguity and ground bass are different ways of creating continuity; against each, melody, rhythm, harmony and texture are allowed to move freely.

The quartet is therefore experimental not because it abandons coherence, but because it investigates how much expressive and formal tension can be generated from relatively simple musical premises. Its language is already concerned less with stylistic allegiance than with the behaviour of musical material: how a melody alters the perception of harmony, how repetition creates expectation, and how a change in one voice can transform the meaning of the whole texture.

Written in 1988, the quartet stands at the beginning of the composer's subsequent long sequence of string quartets, but it is not merely a preliminary exercise. It establishes, with remarkable economy, a way of thinking about the quartet medium in which melody, harmony, rhythm and texture continually reshape one another. String Quartet No. 1 has received performances in Germany and

has also been performed on several occasions in Brazil, where the work found a further life beyond its European origins.

Discussion

Written in Luxembourg and London in 1988 and dedicated to the Lang Quartet of Heidelberg, **String Quartet No. 1** is a compact five-movement work of approximately sixteen minutes. Its five movements are described by the composer as successively exploring pedal point, *ostinato*, a dissonant threnodic march, tonal ambiguity and variations over a ground bass. That description is accurate, but it does not quite convey what makes the quartet distinctive. The work's central preoccupation is not really with any of those devices individually. It is with the relationship between persistence and change: what can happen to musical material when one element remains relatively stable while the others move around it. That principle governs virtually the whole quartet.

The **first movement** begins quietly and without conventional thematic proclamation. The cello establishes long, sustained notes while the upper three instruments enter successively, their phrases overlapping and changing the sonority around the sustained bass. The cello does not behave primarily as a bass line in the traditional harmonic sense; it functions as a floor, while the upper instruments create a constantly changing surface above it. The music therefore acquires direction without conventional harmonic propulsion.

At bars 5 - 15, the individual lines become more active and the dynamic profile expands, but the underlying principle remains unchanged: long-held notes coexist with melodic movement, and the harmony is consequently generated by the changing vertical relationships among the parts. This is why the composer's description of the movement as "quite static" is both true and slightly misleading. It is static in harmonic orientation, but it is not static in musical perception. The sonority is continuously being redefined.

The movement proceeds by accumulation rather than argument. The early bars are relatively sparse. From bar 16 the dynamic pressure increases considerably, and by bars 46 - 58 the texture becomes more insistently repetitive, with all four instruments participating in increasingly forceful recurring figures. The climax therefore feels earned rather than manufactured. The quartet does not introduce a new dramatic subject at the climax. Instead, it intensifies the behaviour already established at the beginning. The music's form is generated from the transformation of a condition rather than from the opposition of themes, and this is already quite an individual approach for a first quartet.

The second movement begins with a markedly more rhythmic profile. The recurring figures in the upper strings and viola are supported by a clearly articulated cello foundation. Here the *ostinato* becomes more than harmonic support: it gives the music a physical pulse. But the *ostinato* is repeatedly interrupted or displaced. At bar 11 the tempo speeds up and the surface suddenly becomes much more active, while the longer sustained notes in the lower three instruments create a striking contrast with the rapid first-violin activity. This produces one of the quartet's recurring structural relationships: a stable background against an unstable foreground. The two are not enemies; they define one another. The *ostinato* makes the interruptions meaningful, while the interruptions prevent it from becoming merely mechanical. The composer's phrase "refreshing interruptions" is therefore particularly apt.

There is also something worth noticing about the rhythm. Bullock does not seem particularly interested in creating rhythmic complexity for its own sake. Instead, he juxtaposes simple repeated rhythmic behaviour with irregularity. The repeated patterns are usually immediately comprehensible. What becomes unpredictable is when they will stop, restart, accelerate or be interrupted. This is a very effective way of creating tension without resorting to continuous

rhythmic complication. The quartet's expressive energy consequently comes less from rhythmic intricacy than from rhythmic expectation.

Movement III is marked *pizzicato* in the cello, while the upper instruments initially combine sustained notes with short melodic gestures. The effect is immediately more severe. The movement's harmonic language is also noticeably more chromatic and unstable. The opening establishes a dark, unsettled atmosphere, while the cello's *pizzicato* gives the music a tread-like quality. The composer's description of this movement as a “dissonant somewhat threnodic march with lyrical interludes” is unusually precise. The important word is march. There is something inexorable about the rhythmic movement, but it is not a conventional march, because the underlying pulse repeatedly encounters lyrical suspension.

The lyrical material is not simply inserted as emotional relief. It changes the listener's perception of the march. The march passages establish inevitability; the lyrical passages establish vulnerability. The result is not merely a sequence of violent, beautiful and violent episodes. It is closer to a process of forward movement, suspension and renewed forward movement. The lyrical material seems to ask whether the march can actually continue unchanged after the interruption. The answer is: not quite. The musical landscape has been altered.

Movement IV perhaps the quartet's most revealing movement harmonically. All four instruments occasionally play *senza vibrato*; the texture is quiet, sustained and strongly chordal, but the pitch relationships are deliberately resistant to a single unequivocal tonal interpretation. This is the point at which the quartet's fascination with tonal ambiguity becomes explicit. Yet the music is not atonal in the sense of abandoning pitch hierarchy. Quite the opposite: it continually suggests tonal possibilities without allowing one of them to become completely authoritative. The harmony feels familiar but displaced.

The repeated use of *senza vibrato* deserves attention. It strips the strings of some of their conventional warmth and allows the pitch relationships themselves to become more exposed. Later, *con vibrato* returns, producing a subtle timbral transformation. The change is particularly effective because it coincides with changes in harmonic and melodic activity. Thus timbre participates in harmonic perception. The listener hears not simply a change of pitch material, but a change in how the pitch material exists. For a quartet written in 1988, that is an assured understanding of the medium.

There is another fascinating feature of the fourth movement. It repeatedly alternates between relatively active melodic gestures and passages in which the quartet seems almost to stop. At bars 14 onward, sustained notes and rests create a strong feeling of suspension. Then at bar 23, *con vibrato* returns and the melodic surface becomes more active; later there is a substantial dynamic rise, followed by *meno mosso* and very quiet writing. The movement's structure is therefore not really thematic development. It is successive changes in the degree of harmonic certainty. The music approaches tonal definition, withdraws from it, approaches it again, and finally leaves the listener in suspension. That is a subtle form of harmonic drama.

The finale. Here the quartet returns to the principle announced in the first movement, but now in a more explicitly variation-like form. The ground provides continuity while the upper voices become increasingly mobile. The opening is relatively restrained. By bars 8 - 14, the melodic activity begins to increase; by bars 15 - 28, the texture becomes more animated and the dynamic profile broadens. Again, therefore, the quartet's basic structural principle appears: something persists while something else changes. But the finale does not simply repeat the opening movement. It gives the principle a stronger sense of formal progression. The most impressive thing about Movement V is the way the music manages to become increasingly active without losing its underlying identity. At bars 36 - 49,

the music becomes more contrapuntally active and the dynamic level falls dramatically toward *pp*. Then the activity increases again. The result is a genuine variation process, but not one based merely upon decorating a theme. The whole musical environment is varied. This is an important distinction. At bar 78 the dynamic has fallen to *pp*, and by bar 85 the four instruments are marked *ppp* and *senza vibrato*. The final bars reduce the musical activity to sustained, exposed sonorities before the quartet closes quietly. The ending does not provide a conventional emphatic resolution. It withdraws.

That is entirely consistent with the quartet's opening. The work begins by asking us to listen to a slowly changing field. It ends by leaving us with the field after the activity has almost disappeared. In that sense, the finale does not merely conclude the quartet. It returns the listener to the condition from which the quartet began.

The quartet's individuality lies in the combination of several closely related characteristics. Pedal, *ostinato* and ground are used not merely as accompaniment but as structural environments. The upper instruments frequently behave as individual melodic voices rather than as components of block harmony. Musical continuity is repeatedly disturbed, but interruption itself becomes a structural principle. The music remains attached to pitch-centred thinking while resisting conventional functional resolution. And although the work can become forceful, mournful, lyrical or restless, its emotional transitions are produced through musical structure rather than through theatrical gesture.

This is where I would slightly revise the composer's own description of the work as an "experimental attempt". It is experimental in the sense that it is testing what a string quartet can do with relatively simple structural means. But the score does not sound like a composer who does not know what he is doing. Rather, it sounds like a composer who has discovered a set of compositional problems that interest him and is testing them systematically. The five movements almost constitute five experiments on one question: how much can musical continuity be created without conventional developmental argument? The answers are pedal point, *ostinato*, march rhythm, tonal suspension and ground bass. And the remarkable thing is that the answers turn out to be related.

Although the five movements are strongly contrasted, the quartet is therefore more unified than its five-movement design might initially suggest. All five movements are concerned with the same fundamental opposition: persistence versus change. Movement I sets pedal against melodic movement; Movement II sets *ostinato* against interruption; Movement III sets march against lyricism; Movement IV sets tonal implication against ambiguity; and Movement V sets ground against variation. That gives the work an underlying intellectual coherence which is much stronger than the word experimental alone would suggest.

Its limitations are also part of its character. The harmonic language can sometimes remain within a relatively narrow expressive range, and the five-movement design occasionally produces a sense of juxtaposition rather than complete organic inevitability. The third movement's threnodic intensity, for example, is considerably more rhetorically charged than the surrounding movements. But those are not failures of technique. They arise from the work's central aesthetic. This is music that deliberately prefers continuity of atmosphere to conventional developmental argument, and within that aesthetic the quartet is remarkably consistent.

Its greatest strength is its refusal to confuse complexity with depth. The music often uses very simple means: a sustained bass, a repeated figure, a short melodic cell, a changing interval, a recurring rhythmic pattern or a silence. But those simple elements are continually placed into new relationships. That is enough.

There is a particularly attractive paradox at the heart of Quartet No. 1. It is a work that calls itself experimental, yet its deepest characteristic is confidence in limitation. It does not try to demonstrate everything that four string players can do. It selects a small number of musical behaviours and examines them with considerable concentration. The result is a quartet about musical persistence. Something remains, something changes, something interrupts, something returns. And because the listener becomes conscious of those processes, the music acquires an unusual sense of time. We are not simply being taken from one musical event to another. We are being asked to notice how the meaning of an event changes because something else has remained constant around it.

That, I think, is the real achievement of Op. 24. And it is why, on hearing and reading the whole score now, I would be reluctant to describe it simply as “the first quartet”. It is more accurate to call it the first fully articulated statement of a compositional way of thinking. The five movements may be experiments, but the musical thought behind them is already unmistakably that of an experienced composer.

String Quartet No. 2 Op. 35

For Spring and a New Life!

Programme Note

Composed in Luxembourg between 12 and 14 March 1989, **String Quartet No. 2, Op. 35**, bears the exuberant title *For Spring and a New Life!* The title suggests renewal, but the music does not attempt to depict spring in any literal sense. Instead, renewal is expressed through the music's constant capacity for movement, transformation and reawakening.

The four movements present markedly different aspects of this process. The **opening movement** establishes a lyrical, energetic world in which the four instruments are immediately engaged in a lively exchange. Melodic lines are continually supported, interrupted or answered by the other instruments, while changes of metre give the music a natural flexibility. The movement breathes through alternating periods of activity and repose, and its harmonic language moves freely between diatonic stability and chromatic colour.

The **second movement** is more concentrated in its rhythmic character. Its *molto cantabile* marking is significant: alongside the long melodic lines there is a persistent flow of quavers, giving the music a sense of buoyant forward motion rather than nervous agitation. Changing metres continually alter the shape of the phrases, while the instruments exchange roles between melody, accompaniment and rhythmic propulsion. The movement's energy is repeatedly gathered and released, eventually giving way to a quieter conclusion.

The **third movement** turns towards greater lyricism and introspection. Long, *legato* phrases are coloured by changes between *vibrato* and *senza vibrato*, *arco* and *pizzicato*. These changes of articulation and tone colour become part of the musical expression itself. The music remains gently active beneath its sustained melodic surface, so that even its quieter passages retain a sense of latent movement.

The final **movement** is the most overtly energetic. Beginning at a rapid tempo, it develops an increasingly vigorous interplay of rhythmic figures and melodic gestures. *Pizzicato* and *arco*, changing metres and accelerating passages contribute to an atmosphere of physical vitality. Eventually the momentum subsides into a markedly slower and more spacious final section.

The quartet therefore ends not with a simple assertion of triumph, but with renewed life becoming stillness. The final music is quiet, spacious and sustained, bringing the work to rest after its earlier energy.

For Spring and a New Life! is ultimately a celebration not of spring as landscape, but of renewal as a musical experience: the ability of a musical idea to change its character, gather new energy, fall silent, and begin again.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 35, composed in Luxembourg in March 1989, is an early work, but it already reveals a distinctive conception of quartet writing. Its title '*For Spring and a New Life!*' might initially suggest a work of uncomplicated optimism. The score, however, is more interesting than that. Its essential subject is not spring as an external phenomenon but renewal as a process.

The music continually moves between states: activity and repose, lyricism and rhythm, individual lines and collective textures, sustained sound and articulated gesture. What gives the quartet its coherence is not the maintenance of a single musical surface but the ability of its material to change while retaining its identity. That is already a significant compositional preoccupation.

The **first movement** establishes the quartet's basic vocabulary with considerable confidence. The instruments do not behave as a simple hierarchy of melody and accompaniment. Instead, melodic material passes through a texture in which each instrument has its own degree of rhythmic and harmonic independence. The music is therefore inherently conversational. The frequent changes of metre contribute to this quality. They do not seem intended primarily to disrupt continuity. Rather, they alter the length and weight of individual gestures, allowing phrases to expand, contract and breathe. This is important because it means that rhythm becomes part of the melodic character. The music does not simply place melodies inside a regular metrical framework. The framework itself responds to the shape of the music. At the same time, the harmonic language demonstrates an early interest in maintaining tonal coherence without restricting the music to straightforward functional progression. Diatonic sonorities are continually coloured by chromatic notes, altered pitches and changes of register. The result is a tonal world that is mobile without being rootless.

The **second movement** offers perhaps the clearest example of Bullock's instinct to combine apparently contrasting musical functions. It is marked *molto cantabile*, yet it is animated by a continuous flow of quavers. This distinction is important. The rhythmic writing is not hyperactive; it has a broad, flowing pulse that allows the melodic material to remain prominent. The movement therefore embodies an intriguing paradox: the music sings because it moves. The quaver patterns provide continuity beneath the longer melodic gestures, while changes of metre continually prevent that continuity from becoming monotonous.

This is a particularly effective quartet technique because the rhythmic patterns are shared among the instruments without necessarily becoming identical. One instrument may provide the pulse while another extends the phrase across it; another may reinforce the harmony while simultaneously introducing a new melodic direction. The quartet consequently behaves as a network of musical relationships rather than a melody accompanied by three supporting voices. That is already a characteristic way of thinking about chamber music.

The **third movement** changes the expressive temperature of the work. Here the notation places much greater emphasis upon the physical means by which sound is produced. *Senza vibrato*, *con vibrato*, *pizzicato* and *arco* are explicitly distinguished. These instructions matter because they demonstrate that timbre is not merely decorative. The same instrumental voice can acquire a different expressive identity simply through the manner of its production. A *senza vibrato phrase* is more exposed; *vibrato* introduces warmth and continuity; *pizzicato* makes the sound transient and percussive; *arco* restores sustained resonance. In other words, the musical material is being renewed through colour. This is closely related to the larger conception of the quartet. Renewal does not mean introducing entirely new material. It can mean allowing existing material to exist differently. That distinction seems increasingly important when one looks at the work retrospectively.

The **fourth movement** provides the most obvious expression of the title's energetic dimension. Its rapid opening immediately establishes a strong rhythmic motor. The cello and inner voices provide persistent movement while the upper instruments project longer melodic gestures above it. The changing metres prevent the rhythmic activity from settling into mechanical repetition. Instead, the movement acquires a flexible, almost dance-like propulsion. There is also a striking physicality in the alternation of *arco* and *pizzicato*. The music seems repeatedly to change the manner in which it moves. As the movement develops, the energy becomes increasingly collective. The four instruments are no longer simply exchanging material; they are participating in a common rhythmic organism.

And then Bullock does something structurally important: he withdraws the energy. The late *molto meno mosso* passage radically alters the temporal scale of the music. Sustained notes, tremulous sonorities and increasingly spacious phrases replace the earlier rhythmic insistence. The effect is not anticlimactic. It is the completion of the process. The quartet has moved through energy into repose, and repose is revealed not as the negation of vitality but as its consequence. This makes the title rather more profound than it might initially appear. The quartet does not portray spring through bird calls, pastoral gestures or other conventional musical imagery. Instead, it translates the idea of spring into formal behaviour.

Things repeatedly emerge, gather energy, transform, recede, become quiet and return in altered form. The musical equivalent of spring is therefore not a particular melody. It is the capacity for renewal. This also explains why the quartet can contain passages of considerable introspection without contradicting its title. New life does not imply uninterrupted activity. The quiet passages are essential because they provide the space in which transformation can occur.

There is, finally, something particularly interesting about encountering this quartet now, with the much later quartets in view. I would not claim that No. 2 already contains the fully developed compositional philosophy of the mature works. That would be misleading. But one can already see the beginnings of a very characteristic principle: musical identity is not dependent upon remaining unchanged.

A gesture can move from one instrument to another. A melodic idea can become rhythmic material. A texture can change from *arco* to *pizzicato*. A sustained phrase can acquire a different expressive identity through the removal of *vibrato*. A rhythmic figure can accelerate, relax, disappear and re-emerge. The continuity lies underneath the surface. This is perhaps the most interesting thing about the quartet from a retrospective perspective. Its unity does not depend upon a single stylistic manner. It depends upon relationships between changing states. And that, of course, makes the work a surprisingly apt early companion to the much later quartets.

String Quartet No. 2 is an exuberant work, but its exuberance is not superficial. The exclamation mark in *For Spring and a New Life!* is justified by the sheer pleasure the music takes in movement, rhythm and instrumental colour. Yet beneath that vitality lies a more serious idea. The quartet understands renewal as something that happens through transformation. Life moves, changes colour, loses momentum, gathers it again, and eventually becomes still. The final pages, bring the work to rest without cancelling the energy that preceded them. In that sense, the quartet's deepest gesture is not its fast music but its ability to let that music become silence without losing its identity. I think that is where No. 2 becomes particularly revealing in retrospect. It is an early work, certainly, but already there is a composer less interested in preserving musical objects than in discovering how far they can travel and still remain themselves.

String Quartet No. 3 Op. 107

Fachwen

Programme Note

The *Fachwen Quartet* was composed at *Sŵn y Llyn*, the composer's home in Wales, during the turbulent and unpredictable summer of 1997. The work is dedicated to his daughters, Kate and Amelia, who offered love, light, hope and sanity during these tormented and difficult weeks.

Fachwen is a four-movement string quartet in which musical ideas are less developed through conventional thematic argument than through changes of scale, texture, rhythm and expressive condition. The **opening movement** establishes a lyrical and spacious musical world. Its material unfolds through long melodic lines, sustained sonorities and carefully graduated changes of density. Moments of greater intensity grow out of the same basic material rather than arriving as sharply contrasting episodes. The movement's sense of form is consequently created largely by the expansion and withdrawal of musical texture.

The **second movement** proceeds differently. Its recurring rhythmic figures give the music a persistent forward motion, while the instruction *molto cantabile* allows longer melodic lines to emerge above and within that rhythmic framework. The movement's character comes from the coexistence of rhythmic persistence and lyricism: one element does not replace the other, but both remain active throughout.

The **third movement** is more episodic and spacious. Its alternating 3/4 and 4/4 bars, short figures, sustained notes, *pizzicato* interventions and later use of *sul ponticello* create a markedly different sense of musical time. The small gestures of its opening gradually acquire longer melodic and harmonic dimensions. By the central cantabile passage, beginning at bar 93, there is sustained lyrical writing; thereafter the music progressively returns to the more compact gestural language of the opening.

The **finale** begins with an explicit instruction that the sixteenth notes are to be played *sul ponticello*. Against these restless semiquaver figures, the outer instruments frequently sustain long notes at high dynamic levels. The effect is one of intense kinetic energy continually interrupted by massive, sustained sonorities. As the movement progresses, this energy is repeatedly accumulated and released. Eventually the movement turns towards sustained, quieter writing, ending *pp* and *senza vibrato*.

The quartet therefore ends not with a final display of accumulated energy but with its disappearance. What begins as a four-movement exploration of melody, rhythm, gesture and texture ultimately arrives at stillness. The final *senza vibrato* sonority leaves the listener with not so much a conventional resolution as the sensation of sound gradually withdrawing from the musical space.

Fachwen is, in this sense, concerned throughout with how music occupies time: how a melody can expand, how a rhythm can persist, how a small gesture can acquire larger dimensions, and how accumulated movement can finally come to rest.

Discussion

Dafydd Bullock's **String Quartet No. 3, 'Fachwen', Op. 107**, was composed in August 1997 and is dedicated to his daughters Kate and Amelia. The score presents a four-movement work whose surface contrasts are considerable: lyrical and spacious writing in the opening movement, persistent rhythmic activity in the second, an unusually mobile treatment of metre and gesture in the third, and an increasingly intense confrontation between rapid figuration and sustained sonority in the finale. Yet beneath these differences there is a strong compositional continuity.

The quartet's essential concern is not the generation of a large number of themes, but the transformation of musical conditions. Bullock repeatedly introduces a relatively simple musical situation and then changes its density, register, rhythmic character, instrumental distribution, harmonic environment or expressive intensity. Material is consequently developed less by conventional thematic fragmentation than by altering the space in which it exists. This gives *Fachwen* a distinctive formal character. The music feels organic without depending upon a conventional organicist rhetoric: things grow because their existing possibilities are progressively revealed. The **opening movement** begins *espressivo*. From its first bars, the quartet is conceived as a collective rather than as a soloist accompanied by three instruments. The four parts introduce sustained notes, lyrical fragments and small intervals of motion in a texture whose vertical sonorities are as important as its individual lines.

One of the most characteristic features of this opening is the coexistence of melodic direction and harmonic suspension. A line may move by only a few notes while another instrument sustains a tone beneath it. The resulting effect is neither conventionally tonal in the functional sense nor statically atonal. Rather, the music continually creates a sense of a tonal field whose centre is being modified by the movement of individual voices. This is already close to an important principle in Bullock's mature music: melody does not merely occupy harmony; it appears to generate changes in the harmonic environment through its movement.

The opening is consequently more developmental than it initially appears. Material is repeatedly presented, intensified and re-contextualised. By bar 18 the music becomes more rhythmically active, and the marking *crescendo, poco stringendo* makes the process explicitly cumulative. The resulting acceleration culminates in a strong passage around bars 29 - 40, where the rhythmic surface becomes more animated and the dynamic reaches *ff*.

What is important is what happens afterwards. The work does not simply continue to escalate. It withdraws. By bar 45 the dynamic has returned to *mf*, and the expressive character again becomes lyrical. Later, at bar 64, *molto cantabile* appears, now at *pp*, while the accompaniment becomes more regular and repetitive. The movement therefore establishes a fundamental structural polarity between activity and repose, agitation and lyricism, density and space. The important point is that these are not oppositional materials. They are different states of the same musical world.

The *molto cantabile* section is particularly revealing. Its sustained melodic writing emerges from a texture that has previously been rhythmically active, and the repeated notes beneath the melody create a kind of internal pulse without becoming a conventional accompaniment. By the later stages of the movement, the music has become increasingly spacious. Dynamic energy is repeatedly accumulated and released, and the movement ultimately arrives at a quiet, sustained sonority. The form is therefore not simply an arch in the conventional sense. It is an alternation of states, with each return subtly altered by what has preceded it.

The **second movement** immediately changes the listener's sense of time. The upper strings introduce short, repeated figures. The rhythmic cell is strikingly persistent. Rather than developing through conventional thematic variation, it becomes a surface of continuity against which other musical events can take place.

The cello, for example, often provides longer notes or recurring bass gestures, while the viola introduces a more melodic dimension. The result is a layered rhythmic hierarchy: repeated figures above, sustained or measured movement below, and occasional longer melodic gestures emerging from within the texture. This is where Bullock's *molto cantabile* marking becomes particularly significant. It occurs not as a retreat from rhythmic activity but within it.

The lyrical and rhythmic elements consequently coexist. That coexistence is fundamental to the quartet. Bullock does not appear to regard lyricism and rhythmic energy as mutually exclusive musical characters. Instead, lyricism can emerge from rhythmic persistence.

The effect is particularly clear in the long central passage of the movement. The repeated upper-string patterns continue with remarkable consistency, while the lower voices articulate a slower harmonic rhythm. The listener therefore experiences two different temporal scales simultaneously. This becomes one of the quartet's most important structural techniques: different instruments inhabit different speeds of musical time. The effect is not merely rhythmic. It creates a sense of depth.

The movement later becomes increasingly varied in its dynamics and instrumental distribution. *Molto crescendo* passages lead towards stronger sonorities, while subsequent *molto cantabile* passages restore lyricism. Around bars 57 - 66, the music again brings together emphatic rhythmic gestures and cantabile writing, demonstrating that the two principal characters of the movement have become interdependent. Thus the second movement develops a principle that was already latent in the first: continuity can be maintained while the expressive identity of the musical surface changes.

The **third movement** is perhaps the most formally intriguing movement of the quartet. It immediately establishes a characteristic alternation of 3/4 and 4/4. The first violin presents a compact, energetic figure while the other instruments answer with sustained notes, *pizzicato* gestures and brief rhythmic interventions.

The alternation between 3/4 and 4/4 is important because it prevents the music from settling into an entirely regular metric flow. The listener is continually aware of a slight displacement of expectation. The movement's opening gestures are small, and that turns out to be crucial. Rather than presenting a large theme and subsequently fragmenting it, Bullock begins with relatively modest musical objects and progressively changes their scale.

At bars 11 - 21 the basic rhythmic and gestural character persists, but the texture becomes increasingly colouristic. Around bar 21, the *sul ponticello* indication introduces a new sonority, while the dynamic remains pp. The effect is almost paradoxical: the music becomes more intense in colour while becoming quieter dynamically. This is characteristic of Bullock's handling of expression. Musical intensity is not simply equated with loudness.

The movement continues to alternate between compact rhythmic figures and sustained sonorities. Around bars 21 - 39 the first violin and second violin exchange short melodic figures, while the lower instruments sustain longer notes. The result is a particularly clear instance of the quartet's general technique: small gestures acquire structural importance through repetition and context rather than through literal thematic development.

The central section of the movement is where this process becomes most apparent. Around bars 54 - 82, the musical language opens out. Sustained notes in the lower instruments create a harmonic space in which the upper lines can move more freely. The dynamic scale contracts from *mf* towards *pp*, and *sul ponticello* becomes an important part of the colouristic vocabulary. Then, at bar 93, the character changes decisively. The score marks *cantabile*, and the four instruments begin to sustain longer melodic lines. This is not merely a lyrical interlude placed in the centre of an otherwise rhythmic movement. It is the expansion of the movement's earlier gestures into a new temporal scale. The compact figures of the opening have become phrases; the phrases have become lines; and the lines now inhabit a much larger harmonic space.

The significance of this passage is therefore formal rather than merely expressive. Bullock has demonstrated that the material introduced at the beginning can support a much slower and more expansive conception of musical time. The subsequent return is equally important. From bar 124 the earlier rhythmic language reappears, including the alternation of 3/4 and 4/4 and the characteristic short figures. The movement has therefore travelled from gesture through expansion and lyricism to contraction and back to gesture. This is one of the clearest examples in the quartet of Bullock's ability to create large-scale form without relying upon extensive thematic invention.

The **fourth movement** changes the physical character of the quartet immediately. Bullock specifies that all sixteenth notes are to be played *sul ponticello*. The movement begins with long, forceful notes in the outer instruments while the inner parts introduce rapid semiquaver figuration.

The contrast is extraordinary. The outer instruments appear almost immovable, while the inner voices are restless. The result is a fundamental opposition between sustained sonority and kinetic energy. This opposition becomes the principal generative mechanism of the movement. Rapid figures recur, but their significance changes according to the sonority against which they are placed. Likewise, the sustained notes are not merely harmonic support: they become blocks of resistance against which the rhythmic material presses.

The *sul ponticello* writing gives the rhythmic material an abrasive, almost nervous quality, yet the sustained notes retain a kind of monumental stability. The movement therefore establishes two kinds of musical time: the immediate, repetitive time of the semiquavers and the extended, almost timeless duration of the sustained notes. The same idea of multiple temporal scales that appeared in the second and third movements is here pushed to an extreme.

As the finale proceeds, the rapid figures become increasingly insistent. The notation repeatedly marks *crescendo* and *molto crescendo*, while the rhythmic patterns are extended across larger portions of the texture. The resulting effect is not conventional thematic development. Instead, Bullock increases density and pressure. The music becomes more compelling because there is increasingly little escape from its rhythmic mechanism.

This culminates in the passages where the four instruments participate simultaneously in the rapid figures, followed by abrupt or massive sustained sonorities. The movement's form consequently resembles a process of accumulation and discharge. But the real achievement is what happens after the climax. After the extraordinary concentration of rhythmic activity, the music begins to empty itself. The sustained notes become increasingly important. The rapid material remains present, but it no longer possesses the same inevitability. Dynamic contrasts become more spacious, and the music begins to inhabit a more static harmonic environment.

The final pages are especially revealing. From bar 63 the sustained sonorities increasingly dominate. The notation consists of isolated notes and rests, with dynamics falling from *f* through *mf*

to p. At bar 84 the quartet finally arrives at pp, *senza vibrato*. This is a particularly telling ending. The movement began with *sul ponticello*, a technique that intensifies the physical grain of the string sound. It ends *senza vibrato*, a technique that removes one of the normal expressive fluctuations of that sound. The trajectory is therefore not merely from loud to quiet. It is from maximum physical articulation to minimum physical articulation. The quartet has not simply become softer. It has become less corporeal.

Viewed across all four movements, *Fachwen* reveals an unusually coherent conception of musical development. The first movement allows melodic and harmonic material to expand and contract; the second uses rhythmic persistence to create a continuous temporal field; the third allows small gestures to expand into sustained lyricism and then contract again; and the fourth accumulates kinetic energy until it is finally exhausted. These are not four unrelated formal strategies. They are variations upon a single compositional idea: a musical idea can be developed by changing the conditions in which it is heard. This explains why the quartet possesses unity despite its considerable diversity. Bullock does not need to make every movement sound alike. Instead, he carries a deeper structural principle from one movement into the next.

The quartet is also revealing in its treatment of tonality. The music does not behave as though harmonic function has disappeared, but at the same time it does not depend upon conventional tonal progression as its principal means of organisation. Instead, harmony frequently arises from the simultaneous presence of individual melodic lines. A sustained note can establish one region of tonal space; a melodic inflection can disturb it; another instrument can reinforce or redirect the resulting field. This is particularly evident in the slow passages, where sustained notes allow the listener to perceive the harmonic implications of relatively small melodic changes. Bullock's harmony is therefore best understood not as a sequence of chords but as a field continuously modified by melodic movement. That conception helps explain why the music can sound both tonal and exploratory without belonging comfortably to either traditional tonality or an explicitly post-tonal system.

There is also an important aspect of *Fachwen* that is easy to miss when listening only for themes: the equality of the four instruments. The quartet frequently divides into temporary pairs, particularly violin I/II or viola/cello, but these groupings are fluid. Melodic responsibility migrates between instruments, while accompanying figures can acquire independent expressive significance. This is especially apparent in the third movement, where short upper-string figures are repeatedly set against sustained lower sonorities and then redistributed. The writing therefore avoids a simple hierarchy between melody and accompaniment. Each instrument can become structural at a different moment. That is particularly important in the finale, where the rapid figures circulate among the instruments while the sustained notes create a changing harmonic framework. The quartet is consequently conceived as a single four-part organism rather than as four independent lines.

Another striking feature is the extent to which expressive markings are structural. Words such as *espressivo*, *molto cantabile*, *crescendo*, *molto crescendo*, *sul ponticello*, *arco* and *senza vibrato* are not merely performance instructions added to an otherwise complete musical structure. They help define the structure itself. The *molto cantabile* passages, for example, are points at which the musical material changes its temporal scale. The *sul ponticello* passages alter not merely timbre but the physical sensation of the music. The *molto crescendo* passages are mechanisms of formal accumulation. The final *senza vibrato* changes the character of the concluding sonority itself. In this sense, expression and form are inseparable.

Fachwen is a work of considerable formal economy. Its musical world is not built by continually introducing new material, but by allowing existing material to reveal increasingly different possibilities. Rhythmic figures can become textures; textures can become harmonic fields; compact gestures can become lyrical phrases; and accumulated movement can finally become silence.

The quartet's four movements consequently trace a broad expressive trajectory from statement through persistence and expansion to agitation and exhaustion. Yet the most striking aspect of the work is that this trajectory is achieved without abandoning the fundamental musical language established at the beginning.

The quartet trusts its material. That trust is perhaps the most characteristic feature of *Fachwen*. The opening does not announce a theme which must subsequently be subjected to increasingly elaborate manipulation. Instead, it establishes a musical environment and begins to explore it. What follows is a continual change of perspective: the same fundamental musical impulses are heard at different speeds, in different densities, at different dynamic levels and in different instrumental colours.

The result is a work in which form emerges from transformation rather than from replacement. And this is why the final *senza vibrato* is so effective. After all the rhythmic persistence, the cantabile expansion, the colouristic disturbance, the accelerations, the *sul ponticello* agitation and the climactic accumulation of the finale, the music does not require a grand concluding statement. It has already said what it needed to say. The final sonority simply removes the last trace of agitation. What remains is sound reduced almost to its physical essence: quiet, sustained, unforced, without *vibrato*.

In that sense, the ending is not an ending imposed upon the quartet. It is the logical consequence of the quartet's entire conception of musical time. And that, I think, is the strongest critical reading of *Fachwen*: a work in which musical development is understood not primarily as the invention of new things, but as the discovery of what the things already present are capable of becoming.

String Quartet No. 4 Op. 114

Faust

Programme Note

The Fourth String Quartet, *Faust*, Op. 114, is a four-movement musical engagement with Goethe's *Faust*. Rather than attempting to retell the drama, particular moments and characters from it are selected, allowing their contrasting personalities to generate contrasting musical worlds.

The quartet **opens** with Faust himself:

*Daß ich erkenne, was die Welt
Im innersten zusammenhält.*

“I want to know what holds the world together at its innermost core.”

The marking is *molto cantabile*. The music begins quietly and reflectively, with a long-breathed violin melody gradually joined by the other instruments. The opening establishes the fundamental psychological condition of Faust: an intense desire for knowledge, expressed not through agitation but through searching, lyrical concentration.

The **second movement** turns abruptly towards Mephistopheles:

Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint.

“I am the spirit who always denies.”

The musical character is immediately more pointed. Bullock explicitly marks the upper strings *sereno marcato* while viola and cello are *sardonico*. The contrast is wonderfully precise: Mephistopheles is not simply “evil”; he is ironic, sardonic, disruptive and intellectually sceptical. The movement's changing metres and sharply articulated repeated figures make denial into a musical principle.

The **third movement** takes us to Auerbach's Keller, with the question:

Will keiner saufen, keiner lachen?

“Will nobody drink, nobody laugh?”

The tempo accelerates and the movement begins with rapid, repeated triplet figures and a constantly shifting metric framework involving 3/4, 2/4 and 4/4. This is the world of the tavern: physical, comic, restless and deliberately earthy.

But then a remarkable transformation takes place. The music turns towards Gretchen, with the words:

Doch – alles, was mich dazu trieb - Gott! war so gut! ach war so lieb!

“And yet—everything that drove me to it - God! was so good! Ah, was so sweet!”

The character changes completely. *Molto cantabile* replaces the frenetic tavern music, and the quartet becomes lyrical, intimate and vulnerable. Gretchen's music subsequently unfolds at considerable length, reaching a *dolcissimo* passage before gradually building again.

The **fourth movement** returns to Faust: The movement begins *ff* with the four instruments in a strongly declamatory texture. From this point the music alternates between forceful, rhythmically articulated passages and more lyrical material. The final movement ultimately brings back the tempo and characteristic material of the opening movement. Thus the quartet closes not by escaping Faust's problem but by returning to its beginning. The drama has moved forward and the music has remembered where it began. Faust remains Faust.

Discussion

Drama Without Theatre! Bullock's **String Quartet No. 4, *Faust*, Op. 114**, is one of his most explicitly literary chamber works. Yet its relationship with Goethe is not illustrative in the conventional sense. There is no attempt to compress the entire drama into thirty minutes of instrumental music. Instead, Bullock extracts a sequence of psychological states and allows the quartet itself to become the stage. The score names four principal dramatic perspectives: Faust, Mephistopheles, the world of Auerbach's Keller and Gretchen, and Faust again. The architecture is consequently almost theatrical. But there are no singers. The words exist only as inscriptions. The instruments must supply the characters. That is the central achievement of the work.

The **opening** quotation is one of the essential statements of Goethe's Faust: "*Daß ich erkenne, was die Welt / Im innersten zusammenhält.*" Bullock sets it beside a movement marked *molto cantabile*. The choice is revealing. Faust's desire for ultimate knowledge could easily have produced an agitated, monumental opening. Bullock chooses instead a long lyrical line. The first violin begins alone, quietly, and the other instruments enter progressively, creating a sense of thought gradually becoming articulated. The musical argument begins as an interior monologue.

The quartet's opening texture is therefore not dramatic in the theatrical sense. It is psychological. The instruments seem to be thinking. The long sustained notes beneath the first violin are particularly important. They establish a harmonic field within which the melody can search. The melody does not simply sit upon accompaniment; it seems to test the space around it, moving away and returning, finding temporary points of stability. This is an unusually apt musical response to Faust's question. He wants to know what holds the world together. Bullock gives him a musical world whose relationships must themselves be discovered.

The opening movement subsequently develops through increasingly forceful passages before returning to quieter, more contemplative writing. The trajectory is not simply from calm to climax; it repeatedly moves between certainty and uncertainty. The music searches. That searching quality is more important than any particular moment of arrival, because the movement establishes Faust not as a conventional heroic figure but as a consciousness unable to accept an incomplete answer.

The **second movement** provides the first great structural shock. The inscription is "*Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint.*" Bullock's response is quite economical. The strings do not all behave in the same way. The upper parts are marked *sereno marcato*, while viola and cello receive the much more revealing instruction *sardonico*. That is characterisation. Mephistopheles does not need a melody labelled "evil". He needs an attitude. The movement's repeated short-note gestures, rests and sharply articulated attacks produce precisely this sense of interruption. Musical continuity is continually challenged. The regularity of the opening 4/4 is itself destabilised as the music begins to employ 5/4 and other changing metres. The effect is almost conversational. A phrase begins; something interrupts it; a gesture is repeated; the listener expects continuation; instead, the music turns sideways. This is the '*Geist der stets verneint*' translated into compositional behaviour.

The movement also contains a striking opposition between sustained, relatively serene upper-string writing and the more grotesque activity beneath it. The contrast prevents Mephistopheles from becoming merely comic. There is an unsettling intelligence behind the sarcasm. He is not simply the devil. He is contradiction made audible.

The **third movement** is perhaps the most fascinating formally because Bullock juxtaposes two radically different dramatic environments within it. The opening is Auerbach's Keller. The

quotation, “*Will keiner saufen, keiner lachen?*”, is answered by almost skipping music. The difference from the opening of the quartet could hardly be greater. The first movement asks. The second denies. The third laughs.

The writing is driven by rapid triplets, repeated rhythmic cells and abrupt changes between 3/4, 2/4 and 4/4. The violin writing in particular has a breathless, almost physical quality. It is music that seems incapable of standing still. The texture initially leaves viola and cello relatively inactive, allowing the upper strings to establish the nervous energy of the tavern. As the movement progresses, however, the lower instruments become increasingly involved, and the texture thickens. What is particularly effective is the refusal to make the tavern music merely “German folk music”. Bullock does not need obvious quotation. The atmosphere comes from metric instability, articulation and speed.

Then, at bar 71, everything changes. The score actually marks *Fine* at this point, before the music turns towards Gretchen. The formal device is significant because the movement eventually sends the listener back to this point: at bar 145 Bullock writes *D.C. al Fine*. The consequence is subtle. Gretchen's music becomes a kind of episode inserted into, and then retrospectively enclosed by, the Auerbach world. And what an episode it is. At bar 71 Bullock writes *molto cantabile*. The frenetic rhythmic world disappears and is replaced by sustained melodic writing, long phrases and a remarkably warm harmonic texture. The character has changed completely. The musical Gretchen is not presented as a caricature of innocence. She is lyrical, emotionally exposed and inward-looking. At bar 96 the instruction *dolcissimo* makes the delicate emotional register explicit.

There is an important compositional implication here. Faust's world is intellectual; Mephistopheles' world is negative; Auerbach's world is physical; Gretchen's world is emotional. The third movement therefore contains the quartet's most profound contrast: the transition from the noisy public world of the tavern to the private world of feeling. And then Bullock refuses to leave us there. The music eventually grows again, reaches greater intensity and returns to the opening material. The Gretchen episode is absorbed back into the larger dramatic mechanism. It is almost as though the world cannot allow Gretchen's lyricism to remain undisturbed.

The **final movement** returns to Faust with the words “*Du mußt! du mußt! / Und kostet es mein Leben!*” The transformation is immediate. The movement begins *ff*, with sustained, strongly accented sonorities distributed across all four instruments. This is no longer the contemplative Faust of the opening. Something has happened. The searching intellectual has become a man compelled to act. The music is correspondingly more physical. Accents become prominent; the four instruments frequently speak together rather than as independent lyrical voices. At bar 18 the marking *piu mosso* intensifies the sense of forward movement. Yet Bullock does not simply drive towards a conventional final climax. The movement repeatedly slows, returns to *Tempo primo*, introduces more lyrical passages, and changes metre. The dramatic tension is therefore continually regenerated rather than discharged once and for all.

Then comes one of the quartet's most important structural gestures. At bar 115: *Tempo of 1st Movement*. The opening world returns. This is not merely a reminiscence. It changes our understanding of the entire quartet. Faust's original question has not disappeared: what holds the world together? After Mephistopheles, Auerbach's Keller, Gretchen, temptation, desire and determination, the question remains. The quartet therefore refuses a simplistic dramatic solution. Instead, it ends by bringing the listener back to the beginning.

The final pages move through *pp*, acceleration and a renewed *Tempo primo*, ending with another intensification rather than a neat theatrical resolution. The return is therefore not an answer but a

recognition that the fundamental problem remains unresolved. Faust has acted, but action has not abolished the question with which he began.

The most striking feature of Faust is therefore the way Bullock converts Goethe's characters into musical behaviours. Faust searches. Mephistopheles interrupts. Auerbach's Keller dances and laughs. Gretchen sings. Faust finally insists. The four movements are consequently not simply episodes from Goethe's plot. They represent four different kinds of musical consciousness.

The quartet also has an unusually strong sense of theatrical pacing. The quotations function rather like stage directions, but the actual drama occurs entirely in the instrumental writing. A listener who knows the text gains another layer of meaning; a listener who does not can nevertheless perceive the changing characters through tempo, articulation, register, texture and melodic behaviour. That is why the work succeeds as a string quartet rather than merely as a literary programme. The Goethe quotations provide the dramatic skeleton. The music provides the flesh.

The return of the first movement's tempo near the end is perhaps the most telling gesture of all. Faust has encountered Mephistopheles, the tavern, Gretchen and the consequences of his own determination - but the fundamental question with which he began remains alive. The quartet does not answer Faust. It makes us hear why he cannot stop asking. Looking at the score as a whole, I think that is the key to this early quartet: it is already much more concerned with psychological transformation through musical character than with merely illustrating a literary subject. That is a remarkably mature conception for Op. 114. The quartet may take its dramatic skeleton from Goethe, but its real achievement lies in discovering that character can be created without words, theatre without a stage, and drama through the behaviour of sound itself.

String Quartet No. 5 Op. 115

Prague

Programme Note

Prague was written following a visit to Prague in 1998 during which String Quartets 3 and 4, *Fachwen* and *Faust*, were premiered in the Klementinum and recorded by the Jan Becher Quartet at the State Opera House. The new quartet is dedicated to the Becher Quartet. The title is deliberately simple. *Prague* is not an attempt to portray the city, to reproduce its sounds, or to evoke its architecture through musical quotation. Rather, the quartet grew from the experience of having been there: of hearing one's own music performed, of encountering a different musical environment, and of returning home with the experience still vividly present.

The four movements follow contrasting psychological states. The **opening** is immediate and energetic, establishing a strongly articulated musical world from the outset. The **second movement** turns inward, slowing the pace and allowing sustained, expressive lines to predominate. The **third** is the most overtly active, its very rapid tempo and sharply articulated rhythms creating an extraordinary sense of physical momentum. The **final movement** returns to the tempo of the opening, but gradually moves towards greater spaciousness and repose.

The quartet may therefore be understood less as a musical portrait of Prague than as a memory of Prague. The city is encountered, absorbed, recalled and finally allowed to recede into memory.

There is also a personal continuity between this quartet and its two immediate predecessors. *Fachwen* takes its title from the place of home; *Faust* confronts questions of knowledge and existence; *Prague* arises from an actual encounter with the wider musical world. Together they trace a movement from the intimate and familiar towards the external world and back again, transformed by experience.

The final quietness of *Prague* is perhaps its most eloquent gesture. After the energy of the preceding music, what remains is not a triumphant conclusion but the residue of an experience that has become part of memory.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 5 'Prague' occupies a particularly revealing position in Dafydd Bullock's early sequence of quartets. Its immediate predecessors, *Fachwen* and *Faust*, appear at first to belong to quite different worlds. *Fachwen* is grounded in a personal geography; *Faust* in the philosophical and literary universe of Goethe. Yet *Prague* brings these apparently separate concerns into a single experiential continuum.

The significance of the quartet lies partly in the circumstances of its composition. *Fachwen* and *Faust* were not merely works associated retrospectively with Prague: they were performed there, and subsequently recorded by the Jan Becher Quartet. *Prague* therefore emerges directly from the experience of musical contact - the unusual experience of encountering one's own work in a foreign city and through the playing of musicians with whom a relationship has been established. This circumstance helps explain the quartet's distinctive character. It is not descriptive music. There are no obvious attempts to imitate the sounds of the city, and no reliance upon recognisable Czech material. Instead, Prague becomes a state of musical consciousness.

The **opening** is crucial. The work begins forte, immediately establishing a firm, articulated texture. This is music that begins already in motion. There is no need to discover the city gradually: the experience has already happened, and the composer is writing from inside its memory. The contrast with *Faust* is telling. The latter begins much slower and molto cantabile, beneath an epigraph asking what holds the world together at its innermost level. *Faust* begins with contemplation; *Prague* begins with encounter. This is perhaps the most important distinction between the two works. *Faust* asks a question about reality. *Prague* records what reality has felt like.

The **second movement** of *Prague* provides the necessary inward turn. The external energy of the opening movement is suspended and replaced by slower, more sustained writing. The effect is not simply contrast for its own sake: it establishes the mechanism by which experience becomes memory. The city encountered externally is transformed into something internal. The movement therefore functions less as a conventional slow interlude than as the moment in which perception is absorbed and reconsidered.

The **third movement** reverses this process. It is extraordinarily fast, rhythmically insistent and physically charged. The writing is collective rather than virtuosic in the conventional solistic sense: the four instruments participate in a shared mechanism. Later passages reinforce this through repeated accented patterns and rapid exchanges. It would be tempting to interpret this as a literal depiction of Prague's streets and crowds. The score does not require such an interpretation. What can be said more securely is that the movement embodies motion as experience. The city has ceased to be an object of contemplation and has become something through which the listener seems to move.

The **fourth movement** then returns to the tempo of the opening. But this is not a simple restoration of the opening state. The preceding movements have altered the listener's perception of the musical world. The final pages gradually relinquish the accumulated energy, arriving at sustained sonorities in the final bars. The effect is remarkably understated. The quartet does not need to announce what has been learned; the return itself has become changed by everything that preceded it.

One might almost describe the quartet's formal trajectory as encounter, reflection, re-experiencing, remembrance. That trajectory also illuminates the relationship between the three quartets. *Fachwen* begins with a world of intimate belonging. Its dedication to Kate and Amelia places the work within

the sphere of family and home. *Faust* turns outward from the personal towards the universal, framing the quartet through Goethe's question concerning the deepest coherence of the world. *Prague*, meanwhile, takes the composer beyond both home and philosophical abstraction and confronts him with lived artistic experience.

The sequence consequently possesses an almost novelistic quality: home, the world, the world experienced, and, perhaps most importantly, the world remembered. This is why *Prague* deserves to be regarded as more than a topical or occasional work. Its subject is not really a city. Its subject is the transformation of experience into musical memory. The dedication to the Becher Quartet deepens that meaning. The quartet is dedicated to musicians who had already helped make the preceding works real. Thus the work's title names a place, while its dedication names the people through whom that place entered the composer's musical life. There is something almost circular about this. The composer goes to Prague with his music. The music is performed there. He returns home and the experience of Prague becomes music.

That is the paradox at the heart of *Prague*: the city disappears in order to become the quartet. The final quietness is therefore exactly right. The music does not need to finish by proclaiming Prague. By the end, Prague has become part of the composer's own musical memory - and once that has happened, the city no longer needs to be named. It has already been absorbed.

The biography genuinely illuminates the music here without needing to be imposed upon it. The scores themselves give us the evidence: the progression of expressive worlds, the striking tempo relationships, the changing physicality of the writing, and finally the withdrawal into sustained sonority. The Prague history then makes that progression suddenly click. And the title is almost wonderfully understated. After all that had happened there, the composer simply wrote: *Prague*.

String Quartet No. 6 Op. 129

Programme Note

This **Quartet** was composed in Fachwen in 2000 and is dedicated *for my Mother*. The manuscript is dated Sŵn y Llyn, 1st November 2000. It is built around a striking tension between lyricism and movement. Its musical world is introduced quietly and intimately: the first violin begins alone, *cantabile*, at a moderate tempo, before the other instruments gradually enter and transform the solitary line into chamber music.

The **first movement** develops this principle through a succession of sharply contrasted states. A spacious, predominantly melodic opening gives way to an extraordinary acceleration in which repeated rhythmic figures propel the quartet towards increasingly powerful climaxes. The music repeatedly alternates between such energetic passages and moments of suspended stillness. Rather than presenting a conventional thematic development, the movement seems to ask what happens when essentially lyrical material is placed under radically different rhythmic and harmonic pressures.

The **second movement** is more fragmented. Changes of metre, register, dynamics and harmonic colour continually disturb the continuity of the musical argument. Individual voices emerge from and retreat into the ensemble, while passages of considerable intensity are repeatedly followed by silence or sustained sonorities. Its conclusion, marked by increasingly quiet dynamics and *fermatas*, leaves the music suspended rather than conventionally resolved.

The **third movement** releases the accumulated energy. It is more immediately conversational, with the four instruments sharing rhythmic and melodic activity. The music repeatedly accelerates, fragments and regroups, until the momentum eventually subsides. Near the end, the tempo returns to the movement's opening speed; after further contrast between forceful and lyrical writing, the quartet reaches its final bars where brief energetic gestures give way to sustained, quiet notes and *fermatas*.

The result is a work in which motion and stillness, individual voice and collective utterance, are not opposites but different manifestations of the same musical identity. The quartet begins with a single voice and ends with all four instruments sharing the final sonority. Its journey is therefore less a narrative than a process of transformation: the solitary becomes collective, lyricism becomes movement, and movement eventually returns to silence.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 6 occupies an intriguing position in Dafydd Bullock's early quartet output. Composed in 2000 as Op. 129, and dedicated *for my Mother*, it is a substantial three-movement work whose 33-page score reveals a composer already less concerned with conventional thematic development than with the transformation of musical states.

The most revealing feature of the quartet is the extraordinary discrepancy between its **opening** and its subsequent behaviour. The first violin begins alone, mp *cantabile*, and slowly. The musical gesture is sustained, unhurried and exposed, while the remaining instruments enter only gradually. This is more than an attractive opening texture. It establishes a fundamental compositional proposition: musical identity exists before musical community. The first violin does not present a conventional theme which the other instruments immediately imitate. Instead, a voice is heard, and the quartet progressively discovers how to inhabit it.

The sudden acceleration at bar 58 is one of the most conspicuous events in the work. The music moves into 9/8 and becomes intensely repetitive and motoric. What is remarkable is not merely the speed, but the fact that Bullock does not prepare the transformation through conventional transition. The music simply changes state.

The lyrical world of the opening has not been discarded. It has been subjected to pressure. Repeated rhythmic figures, accentual patterns and rapidly circulating material create a collective physical energy quite unlike the opening's spaciousness. The resulting form is therefore not adequately described as theme followed by development. It is closer to a sequence of transformations of musical condition: lyricism becomes energy, energy gives way to suspension, the energetic material returns, and the process eventually moves towards dissolution.

This is already a sophisticated formal strategy. The score repeatedly demonstrates that musical continuity does not require continuous texture. Indeed, some of the most important moments occur precisely when the continuity is broken. The passages following the great rhythmic episodes are particularly important. At bar 78 the music falls away into sustained sonorities; at bar 84 the kinetic material returns. This creates a structural opposition, but not a binary one. The stillness is not simply relaxation after excitement. It functions as memory. Something has happened, and the subsequent silence allows its harmonic and rhythmic consequences to remain audible in the listener's imagination. This is one of the quartet's most compelling formal characteristics: silence and sustained sound are active agents in the form. Bullock's music repeatedly allows a gesture to disappear without thereby declaring it finished.

The **second movement** takes this principle further. Where the first movement is dominated by the spectacular opposition between spacious lyricism and extreme rhythmic velocity, the second operates through smaller disruptions: changes of metre, register, dynamic and harmonic region. The music is less dramatically polarised but more continuously unstable. The movement frequently places individual instrumental activity against relatively static surroundings. A voice emerges, makes its gesture, and disappears again. This gives the movement a different psychological quality. The first movement asks how far lyricism can be transformed; the second asks how much fragmentation musical identity can withstand. Its answer is surprisingly optimistic. Despite the interruptions, the music continually reforms itself. The conclusion is particularly telling. At bar 104 the movement reaches a quiet, sustained state, eventually marked by very soft dynamics and *fermatas*. There is no emphatic conclusion. The music simply reaches a point at which further movement is unnecessary.

The **third movement** immediately presents a more integrated quartet texture. This is where the architecture of the entire work begins to reveal itself. The energetic principle that appeared almost violently in the first movement is now internalised. Rhythmic activity is no longer an interruption of lyricism. It becomes the medium through which lyricism operates. The instruments exchange material rapidly, and the quartet behaves increasingly as a single organism without sacrificing the independence of its individual voices. This is particularly apparent in the extended central passages, where rhythmic figures circulate between the instruments rather than belonging permanently to any one part. The result is not merely contrapuntal density. It is shared musical agency. The opening of the quartet gave the first violin the responsibility of initiating the musical world. By the third movement, that responsibility has been distributed among all four players.

At bar 109 the third movement returns to the tempo with which it began. This might initially suggest recapitulation, but it is not a conventional return. The music has changed. The opening tempo has acquired the memory of everything that has occurred within it. What returns is therefore not the original state but a transformed version of it. That distinction seems central to the quartet as a whole. Bullock's formal thinking here is less about returning to a theme than about returning to a condition of consciousness after that condition has been altered.

The ending is among the most eloquent passages in the score. At bar 112 and bar 113 the metre changes between 6/4 and 4/4, and the music rises to *ff* at bar 117. Yet this climax does not become the end. The music retreats. By bar 128 the dynamic has fallen to *pp*, followed by *mf*. Then, at bar 135, the tempo suddenly increases. The quartet produces one last burst of animated material before arriving together on sustained notes, each held by *fermata*. The final dynamic is only *mp*. This is crucial. The quartet does not end in triumph, nor does it end in tragedy. It ends in suspension. And the date beneath the final bar - Sŵn y Llyn, 1st November, 2000 - gives the work its final, concrete point of reference.

The dedication *for my Mother* inevitably invites an autobiographical reading. But the score itself does not provide a programme or explicit narrative, and it would therefore be too easy to impose one retrospectively. What can be said with confidence is that the quartet is intensely concerned with voice, disappearance, persistence and return. Those qualities make the dedication resonate without requiring the music to be treated as a literal musical biography. The work's emotional force comes instead from its formal behaviour. A voice appears. It is absorbed into the quartet. The quartet becomes agitated. The music fractures. It gathers itself again. And finally the four instruments arrive together at a sound that is almost already silence.

Seen in isolation, No. 6 is a compelling work of 2000. Seen retrospectively, it becomes more revealing. The quartet shows a composer increasingly interested in musical coherence without conventional developmental rhetoric. Material acquires identity not simply because it is repeated, but because it persists through transformation. This is a crucial distinction. A theme can be recognised because it comes back unchanged. Here, something more subtle happens: a musical character survives while its circumstances change.

That principle has considerable implications for the later quartets. It suggests a conception of form in which melody is not merely thematic material and harmony is not merely accompaniment or functional progression. Instead, melody, rhythm, register, texture and harmony continuously reshape the same underlying musical field.

No. 6 does not yet possess the extraordinary compression and structural inevitability of some of the much later quartets. There are passages in which the material is allowed to continue through

accumulation rather than being subjected to the ruthless economy one finds in mature works. But that is precisely what makes the quartet historically interesting. One can hear the composer discovering the possibilities of transformation in real time. But perhaps the most telling thing is that the quartet's deepest structural idea is already remarkably clear: movement does not destroy stillness; stillness does not cancel movement. Each contains the memory of the other. That is what gives *String Quartet No. 6* its unusual coherence — and why, despite its very evident contrasts, the work ultimately feels like one continuous musical thought.

String Quartet No. 7 Op. 151

Winds of Change

Programme Note

Winds of Change is a three-movement string quartet whose three titles suggest three different states of musical experience: movement and transformation, remembrance and song, and finally the elusive territory between identity and imagination.

The **first movement**, *Winds of Change*, is characterised above all by continual transformation. Its musical material is rarely allowed to remain in one condition for long. Short, sharply defined gestures give way to sustained sonorities; rhythmic activity alternates with suspension; individual instruments emerge from and retreat into the quartet texture. The formal divisions marked A - G do not simply introduce contrasting themes. Rather, they mark successive transformations of a relatively continuous musical language. Towards the end an initially restrained texture gathers momentum through a *poco a poco molto crescendo*, arriving at intense, *appassionato* writing.

The **second movement**, *Ar Lan y Môr*, moves into a very different world. The opening is spacious and predominantly sustained, with the first violin initially silent while the lower instruments establish the harmonic environment. The title invokes the traditional Welsh song, but the movement is not a straightforward quotation or arrangement of the folk melody. Instead, something more personal takes place: the qualities of song - its simplicity of contour, repeated notes, conjunct movement and sense of sustained melodic breath - are absorbed into an individual harmonic language. The result is neither folk-song pastiche nor conventional tonal accompaniment. Melody seems to inhabit a slowly changing tonal landscape. The use of *con sordino* deepens the sense of distance and intimacy; a continuous triplet movement develops beneath the longer melodic lines, creating several simultaneous temporal layers. The return to *senza sordino* brings a new openness and greater melodic projection. The movement finally withdraws towards pp and *a niente*.

The **finale**, *Portraits and Dreams*, begins with the cello alone initiating the musical process; the first violin is initially silent. The quartet is thus gradually constituted rather than presented as an already completed ensemble. Throughout the movement the balance between individual voice and collective sonority continually changes. Full-quartet climaxes alternate with passages in which the lower strings establish the musical space, while suspensions and silences repeatedly interrupt the continuity. The final bars bring this process to its most concentrated form. The four instruments make a collective sfz attack, sustaining the resulting sonority before allowing it to diminish. The quartet that began the movement in a state of incompleteness ends as a fully unified sonority - and then disappears.

Taken as a whole, *Winds of Change* might therefore be heard as a study in changing musical identity: change as motion, song as memory, and individuality becoming - and ceasing to be - collective sound.

Written in the Czech Republic, Aberffraw and Fachwen, Wales, July 2003

Discussion

String Quartet 7, *Winds of Change*, Op. 151. There is a danger in approaching a work called *Winds of Change* of assuming that its subject is change in the most obvious sense: contrasting themes, shifting tempi, altered textures, or a succession of dramatic episodes. All of these things occur in Dafydd Bullock's *Seventh String Quartet*, but they do not adequately describe its deeper formal principle. What changes in this quartet is not merely the musical material but more fundamentally the state of the music. The distinction is important. A theme may remain recognisable while its register, harmonic environment, articulation, rhythmic density, dynamic force or instrumental ownership changes. A texture may dissolve and subsequently reappear without being literally repeated. A melody may retain its identity while the tonal space beneath it changes. Across the three movements, Bullock repeatedly exploits precisely this distinction between material and state. The result is a quartet whose unity lies less in the recurrence of conventional themes than in a remarkably consistent preoccupation with transformation.

The **opening movement, *Winds of Change***, establishes this principle immediately. The quartet begins with all four instruments engaged, but already they occupy markedly different rhythmic and registral roles. The first violin introduces relatively prominent melodic material while viola and cello supply sharply articulated support; the writing continually alternates between short gestures, rests and sustained notes. The sectional markings A and B at bars 22 and 32 do not introduce wholly unrelated worlds. Instead, they organise transformations of an existing language. At A the texture contracts into more spacious sonorities; at B the music again becomes more rhythmically articulated before accumulating energy. The most revealing passage is perhaps D, beginning at bar 77. Here the music initially retreats to *p*, then all four instruments participate in a *poco a poco molto crescendo* which culminates in the forceful writing at bars 85 - 88. The score subsequently marks the music *appassionato*. The significance of this passage is not simply that the music becomes louder. The same musical organism has changed state. A relatively fragmented texture becomes rhythmically unified; the quartet becomes more homogeneous; register expands; dynamic energy increases; and the musical gesture acquires emotional intensity without requiring a completely new thematic vocabulary. This is characteristic of Bullock's formal thinking throughout the quartet.

***Ar Lan y Môr*.** The **second movement** changes the terms of the argument. The music opens with sustained notes. The first violin initially remains silent while violin II, viola and cello establish a slowly changing harmonic environment. This opening is crucial to understanding the movement's relationship with its title. *Ar Lan y Môr* does not appear to be a literal transcription of the traditional Welsh melody. Instead, Bullock seems to engage with something more fundamental: the conception of melody as song. The melodic material is economical. Repeated notes, predominantly conjunct movement, small turns and gently shaped phrases produce lines that possess an immediately vocal quality. Their identity depends less upon large intervallic constructions than upon contour and inflection.

This is where the Welsh dimension becomes especially interesting. It would be too crude to call such writing intrinsically "Welsh"; these melodic characteristics occur in many traditions. What makes the connection persuasive here is the conjunction of the title, the song-like writing, and the way melody is treated within the harmony. The melody does not dictate a sequence of functional chords. Instead, it inhabits a tonal field. The lower instruments sustain or slowly alter the harmonic environment while the melodic voice retains its continuity. The result is a striking separation between melodic identity and harmonic change. That relationship becomes especially clear when *con sordino* is introduced from bar 21 onwards. The sound becomes more distant, and the melody seems less like a public declaration than something recalled. The word memory is therefore more

useful here than "quotation". The traditional song seems to have been transformed from an object into an atmosphere.

Then, at bar 34, continuous triplet semiquavers enter beneath the longer melodic lines. This is one of the movement's most characteristic compositional devices. The musical surface now possesses at least three temporal layers: melody, relatively long and vocal; inner movement continuous triplets; harmonic foundation, sustained or slowly changing. The traditional notion of song has therefore been placed inside a fully independent chamber texture. This is not an arrangement of folk material but a transformation of folk-song thinking. At bar 54, the transition from *con sordino* to *senza sordino* changes the acoustic character of the quartet again. The melodic writing becomes more expansive, while *pizzicato* and *arco* begin to differentiate the instrumental layers. The tonal environment also becomes increasingly mobile. At this point one can see particularly clearly that Bullock's harmonic language does not simply accompany the melody. It actively changes the space through which the melody travels. This is the point at which the movement connects with a larger principle visible elsewhere in the composer's work: melody retains its identity while tonal space curves around it. I use that sentence here deliberately as a description of the score's behaviour, rather than as a claim about compositional intention.

There is an important distinction between using Welsh material and writing from a Welsh conception of melody. The former requires quotation, transformation or explicit melodic reference. The latter can operate much more deeply. In *Ar Lan y Môr*, the Welsh element appears to reside principally in the treatment of melodic line: its singability, its patience, its reliance upon contour, and its ability to retain expressive identity while the harmonic environment changes. That is why the movement avoids pastiche. Bullock does not reproduce a folk idiom on the surface. He subjects a song-like conception of melody to his own harmonic imagination. The traditional song becomes almost a memory of itself. This may also explain why the movement's ending is so effective. At bars 109–112 the quartet becomes increasingly static, falls to *pp*, and finally reaches *a niente*. A song has been remembered, transformed, and finally allowed to disappear.

The **third movement, *Portraits and Dreams***, takes the problem further. It begins with the cello initiating the musical process. Violin I is silent. This is one of the most revealing formal decisions in the entire quartet. The quartet is not presented as a ready-made four-part entity. It comes into being. The cello establishes the first strand; viola and violin II join; the upper register subsequently opens as violin I enters. This procedure becomes structurally significant because it is repeatedly reversed and renewed later in the movement. Sections begin with reduced forces; instruments disappear and return; collective textures form and dissolve. At bar 23 the first major full-quartet concentration arrives. At bar 35 the writing becomes increasingly integrated; later, the extended passage beginning at bar 48 subjects the complete quartet to a collective *crescendo*. The quartet has become a flexible organism and no instrument possesses permanent ownership of the foreground.

This may be the most important structural characteristic of the whole work. Bullock repeatedly refuses to allow the first violin to become the unquestioned protagonist. In the first movement, foreground and accompaniment continually exchange roles. In the second, melody emerges gradually from an already established harmonic field. In the third, the cello begins the movement. The instrumental hierarchy is therefore continually renegotiated. This is especially clear in the later sections of the finale, where lower-string-led passages alternate with fully integrated quartet textures. The music repeatedly asks the same underlying question: When are four voices four, and when are they one? The answer is never permanent. That is why the title *Portraits and Dreams* is apt without requiring a programme. A "portrait" might be understood as a particular state of the quartet: cello-led, violin-led, fragmented, suspended, collective. A "dream" might suggest the less determinate passages in which continuity itself becomes unstable. But these remain interpretations.

The score establishes something more precise: the identity of the ensemble is continually being reformulated.

The most radical example occurs around bars 152–155, where the quartet becomes exceptionally sparse and suspended. What follows at bar 156 is not merely a continuation but a reconstitution. The quartet returns with much greater collective force, and the material accumulates through the succeeding sections towards the final climax. The structural relationship is therefore: absence → reappearance → intensification. This is the largest-scale version of a procedure that has been present since bar 1. The movement has been teaching us how to hear disappearance as a potential preparation for renewed identity. At bar 203, all four instruments make a final sfz attack before sustaining the resulting sonority. This ending is extraordinarily economical. There is no need for an elaborate epilogue. The quartet simply reaches a state in which the four instruments are completely united, and then that unity disappears. Seen from the beginning of the movement, the structural implication is powerful: the cello begins alone; the quartet ends together. It would be excessive to turn that into a narrative about four characters or some predetermined programme. The notation does not support such a claim, but as a formal fact, it is unmistakable. The movement has progressively explored the relationship between individual musical identity and collective sonority, and its final gesture gives us the most concentrated possible answer: four instruments, one attack, one sonority, silence.

The most satisfying interpretation of the quartet may therefore be found not within any single movement but in their succession.

I - *Winds of Change*: Change through movement and transformation.

The material is continually redistributed, intensified, fragmented and recombined.

II - *Ar Lan y Môr*: Continuity through song and memory.

The musical surface slows sufficiently for melody and tonal space to become distinct entities. The Welsh song tradition is not quoted so much as inwardly absorbed.

III - *Portraits and Dreams*: Change through transformation of musical identity.

The quartet itself becomes the object of transformation: individual voices emerge, disappear, combine and separate before finally becoming one collective sonority. This produces a remarkably coherent trajectory: movement → memory → identity or, in more musical terms: transformation of material → persistence of melody → transformation of the ensemble itself.

What seems most distinctive about *Winds of Change* is that its unity does not depend upon a single theme being constantly recalled. Its unity comes from a way of thinking. Melody is allowed to persist while harmony changes, a texture can disappear and return in another state, an instrumental role can migrate, a gesture can become a climax without becoming a new theme, a traditional song can be absorbed without being quoted and a quartet can repeatedly cease to behave as four independent voices and become, temporarily, one musical body. The title *Winds of Change* consequently acquires a meaning more structural than pictorial. The "wind" is whatever prevents the music from remaining fixed. *Ar Lan y Môr* provides the contrasting possibility of memory: a melody that can persist while everything around it changes. *Portraits and Dreams* takes the final step, making the changing identity of the quartet itself the principal formal subject. The work thus ends not with stability but with a final transformation. Four voices become one and one sonority becomes silence. The process of change, which began with the very first gesture of the quartet, is complete.

String Quartet No. 8 Op. 152

American

Programme Note

The Eighth String Quartet, *American*, Op. 152, grew out of an experience of travelling in the United States. Written in Monument Valley, USA, Aberffraw and Fachwen Wales in the summer of 2003, it presents three sharply contrasting impressions: the vast landscape of *Monument Valley*, the more reflective and deliberately allusive *From the New World*, and the exuberant theatricality of *Diamond Belle Saloon*.

The **first movement, *Monument Valley***, begins with a solitary first-violin melody - in fact a Navajo melody. The other instruments gradually enter, initially marked *senza vibrato*, creating a spare and spacious sonority. The music develops from this stillness into increasingly animated passages, with changes of tempo, articulation and instrumental texture suggesting not simply a static landscape but the changing experience of looking at it. Moments of considerable energy are repeatedly followed by returns to spaciousness and quiet.

The **second movement, *From the New World***, contains an affectionate composer's joke. Its title inevitably recalls Dvořák's *New World Symphony*, itself the work of a European composer responding to his experience of America. Bullock, having made his own journey to the New World, could hardly resist the opportunity to give his quartet movement the same grandly suggestive title. The reference is not a parody, nor does the movement depend upon direct quotation. Rather, the title itself provides the wink. The music explores the idea of encountering America from a European perspective, moving between broad lyrical statements, more animated passages and moments of quiet reflection. The allusion to Dvořák gives the movement an additional layer of humour: the composer knows perfectly well that he is standing in a musical landscape already occupied by the most famous European visitor to the New World.

The **final movement, *Diamond Belle Saloon***, abandons contemplation for outright exuberance. It is characterised by sharply articulated rhythms, changing metres, accented gestures, *pizzicato* and rapid exchanges between the instruments. The writing has a deliberately theatrical and physical quality, evoking the atmosphere of a Western saloon without requiring the quotation of a particular cowboy tune. The alternation between *arco* and *pizzicato* becomes increasingly prominent, contributing to the movement's rough-edged energy.

The three movements consequently offer three very different Americas. The quartet is affectionate rather than satirical. It records the pleasure of encountering a country whose scale, imagery and cultural mythology offered three very different kinds of musical stimulus. Beneath the humour is a genuine sense of wonder; beneath the exuberance is a composer's delight in discovering how much musical character can be extracted from a journey.

Discussion

Dafydd Bullock's **String Quartet No. 8, *American*, Op. 152**, belongs to a very different emotional world from the memorial quartet that follows it chronologically. Its inspiration is travel rather than bereavement, and its three movements reveal a composer enjoying the possibilities of musical observation, cultural reference and humour. The score gives the title *American* and gives the movements as *Monument Valley*, *From the New World* and *Diamond Belle Saloon*. The title *American* is deliberately broad. Bullock does not attempt to define America musically. Instead, he selects three highly individual experiences and allows each to generate its own musical language. The result is not a musical travelogue in the literal sense. The locations become compositional characters.

The **first movement, *Monument Valley***, is concerned above all with space. Its opening is strikingly economical. The first violin begins alone while the remaining instruments initially leave the musical landscape almost empty. The effect is one of distance and observation. When the other instruments enter at A, they are marked *senza vibrato* and remain quiet. This is an important sonority. The absence of *vibrato* removes some of the warmth associated with conventional Romantic string playing and leaves the quartet relatively exposed. The sound is therefore spacious without being lush.

Gradually, however, the landscape begins to move. The music passes from long melodic lines into more active figures, with increasing interaction between the four instruments. The contrast between sustained melody and repeated rhythmic activity becomes one of the movement's principal devices. Rather than simply depicting a static panorama, Bullock allows the listener to experience movement within immensity. The landscape is seen, but it is also inhabited. The movement's larger dynamic design reinforces this. Passages of activity grow in intensity before retreating into quieter textures. The return of spacious sonorities consequently feels less like a formal reset than a return to the act of looking.

There is something cinematic here, but not in the Hollywood sense. The music does not tell us what to see. It gives us the musical equivalent of time spent looking. That distinction is important because the movement's real subject is not the visual image of Monument Valley alone, but the experience of encountering an immense landscape and allowing perception itself to become the musical process.

The **second movement *From the New World*** introduces a different kind of American experience: not a particular landscape but the idea of the New World itself. And here Bullock allows himself a joke. The title is an unmistakable nod towards Dvořák's *New World Symphony*. That allusion is particularly appropriate because Dvořák's work represents a European composer's encounter with America. Bullock's quartet quietly places itself in the same tradition: another European composer has travelled to America and returned with music. The difference is that Bullock knows exactly how ridiculous - and therefore how irresistible - the comparison is. The title thus becomes a compositional wink. The music itself does not need to parody Dvořák. Indeed, its almost-independence from direct quotation makes the joke more effective. The listener who knows Dvořák hears the reference immediately; everyone else can simply experience a spacious and lyrical quartet movement. The opening establishes a broad melodic world in which the first violin is prominent while the other instruments provide a relatively open harmonic environment. The music repeatedly moves between greater animation and quieter passages. At A, the music withdraws; later sections restore greater energy and ensemble interaction. The music therefore seems less concerned with depicting a physical location than with recording an impression.

This makes the Dvořák reference particularly apt. Dvořák's *New World* is already an act of musical interpretation: a European hearing America and turning that encounter into composition. Bullock's movement performs the same basic act, but with a century of hindsight and a raised eyebrow. It is therefore not Dvořák revisited. It is Dvořák acknowledged. And that distinction is important. The movement is affectionate rather than parodic.

Then the quartet stops looking and starts having fun. The **final movement, *Diamond Belle Saloon*** begins with a strongly rhythmic texture involving all four instruments. The character is immediate: accented gestures, rests, changing rhythmic groupings and rapid exchanges create a sense of physical movement. Bullock does not need to quote a Western tune. Instead, he constructs a musical image of the saloon through rhythm and gesture.

The changing metres are particularly important. The music moves between 3/4, 2/4 and 4/4, continually disrupting any expectation of a regular dance pattern. The effect is deliberately unstable, energetic and slightly unruly. This is where the quartet's humour becomes most obvious. The humour is not based upon musical caricature so much as upon excess. Accents become sharper, dynamics jump suddenly, *pizzicato* interrupts *arco*, and instrumental figures seem to compete for attention. From F onwards, the contrast between *pizzicato* and *arco* becomes particularly prominent. Repeated figures generate an almost mechanical propulsion, while longer melodic lines continue above them. The result is chamber music with theatrical instincts. By the later sections the energy has become almost self-sustaining. The music repeatedly approaches *ff*, retreats, and launches itself forward again. The final pages therefore resist the temptation to turn the journey into a sentimental conclusion. Instead, *Diamond Belle Saloon* simply keeps its energy until the end. And that is exactly right. The three movements have taken us from contemplation to reflection to exuberance.

The deeper unity of *American* lies therefore not in a common thematic motif but in three modes of perception. *Monument Valley* is primarily visual: the experience of enormous physical space. *From the New World* is intellectual and cultural: the experience of recognising oneself as another European composer encountering America - and recognising, with a smile, that Dvořák got there first. *Diamond Belle Saloon* is theatrical and physical: America as performance, myth and exuberant social energy. The three movements consequently create a miniature journey from wonder, through reflection, to enjoyment.

There is a generosity about the work that is worth emphasising. Bullock is not attempting to expose America, explain America or reduce it to a musical stereotype. He is recording the pleasure of encountering it. That makes the humour particularly effective. The composer is sufficiently serious to compose a substantial string quartet about his experience, but sufficiently relaxed to call one movement *Diamond Belle Saloon* and another *From the New World*. And the Dvořák reference gives the whole work its knowing centre. It says, in effect, "Yes, I know exactly what I am doing."

The final inscription, USA and Europe, Summer 2003, reinforces the sense that this is both a work of composition and a record of travel. *American* is therefore best understood not as a portrait of America but as a portrait of a composer encountering America. The landscape astonishes him. Dvořák makes him smile. The saloon makes him laugh. And all three experiences become music.

String Quartet No. 9 Op. 159

Denisa

Programme Note

The Ninth String Quartet, *Denisa*, was written in memory of Denisa Krotlová, following her sudden death in a car accident, leaving young children behind. The work is in three movements: *Vortex*, *Dream* and *Memory*. The score is dated Sŵn y Llyn, 30 July 2005.

The **first movement, *Vortex***, begins at once with great intensity. Sustained lines in the violins are set against persistent rhythmic figures in viola and cello, creating a musical environment of instability and relentless movement. Waves of increasing dynamic intensity are repeatedly followed by sudden retreats into quieter, more spacious textures. Later the music becomes particularly remote, and the marking *lontano* introduces a striking sense of distance.

Dream follows, marked *Serenissimo*. The viola opens alone, gradually joined by the other instruments. The movement is lyrical and inward, alternating between passages of increasing intensity and moments of extreme quiet. Its final pages return to *pp*, allowing the music to disappear almost as gently as a dream itself.

The **final movement, *Memory***, begins with a spacious opening later interrupted by a sudden acceleration and later by further acceleration and intensification. The original tempo returns, after which the music progressively becomes quieter and more spacious. The quartet ends with sustained sonorities, diminishing dynamics and silence. The final page is marked *a niente*, allowing the music to disappear rather than conclude with a conventional cadence.

The three movements form a progression from shock, through dream, to memory. The work does not attempt to portray grief externally. Rather, it traces the changing inner experience of loss: the violent rupture of the first movement, the suspended unreality of the second, and the gradual transformation of absence into memory in the third.

Discussion

Dafydd Bullock's **Ninth String Quartet, *In Memory of Denisa Krotilová*, Op. 159**, is a memorial work of unusual directness. Its three movement titles - *Vortex*, *Dream* and *Memory* - provide a simple trajectory, but the musical substance beneath those titles is considerably more complex. The circumstances surrounding the work's conception give particular weight to its emotional extremes. Denisa Krotilová's death was sudden and violent, and the fact that she left young children behind makes the work's concern with absence especially poignant. Yet Bullock avoids literal musical representation of tragedy. Instead, the quartet embodies the psychological consequences of sudden loss.

The **first movement, *Vortex***, is the most immediately physical expression of this. Its opening is *ff*, with sustained upper voices set against repeated rhythmic figures in viola and cello. The musical opposition is fundamental: the upper instruments appear to seek continuity, while the lower voices continually interrupt it. This creates a musical environment in which stability and instability coexist. The repeated rhythmic figures do not develop in the conventional symphonic sense. Their persistence is more important than their transformation. They function as an obsessive continuity beneath changing harmonic and melodic material.

The movement's dynamic architecture intensifies this effect. Major waves of sound reach *ff* or *fff* before collapsing into *mp*, *p* and eventually *ppp*. The contrast is not decorative. It gives the movement the psychological rhythm of shock itself: outburst, exhaustion, renewed agitation, withdrawal. The passage around bars 88 - 112 is consequently crucial. The rhythmic mechanism falls away and the quartet becomes increasingly sparse. The marking *lontano* at bar 114 is perhaps the most revealing expressive indication in the movement. The musical world has become distant.

The subsequent return of rhythmic activity does not restore the opening. The listener has experienced absence, and therefore the repeated figures now carry the memory of what has disappeared. This is an important distinction. The quartet does not simply alternate between agitation and calm; the later states are altered by what has already occurred. Once absence has entered the musical experience, it remains present even when the sound itself becomes full again.

The **second movement, *Dream***, provides a radical change of scale. It begins with a solo viola. After the collective violence of *Vortex*, this isolated instrumental voice is almost startlingly intimate. The choice of viola is significant musically even without assigning symbolic meaning to the instrument. Its register and colour immediately produce a more inward world. The melody is gently shaped, chromatic and highly vocal. Gradually the other instruments enter, transforming the solitary line into a fragile quartet texture.

The movement repeatedly grows in intensity and then retreats. By bar 29 the dynamic has fallen to *pp*, and later reaches *ppp*. A subsequent rise towards *ff* provides a brief resurgence before the music once again falls to *pp* at the end. The movement's emotional world is therefore neither simply peaceful nor simply sad. It is unstable in a different way from the first movement. Here instability belongs to consciousness itself: images emerge, intensify and disappear. The title *Dream* is therefore apt not because the music imitates dreaming, but because its continuity is governed by the unstable appearance and disappearance of musical states.

The **third movement, *Memory***, brings those two worlds together. It begins with the first violin carrying an expressive melodic line above sustained sonorities in the remaining instruments. The opening is reflective, but the sudden change at bar 25 introduces a different kind of memory: active,

urgent and almost compulsive. The music subsequently accelerates further, with *increasing* power and *poco accelerando* at bar 46. The effect is as though recollection itself has become overwhelming. But at bar 57 the original tempo returns. From this point the movement increasingly withdraws. By bar 66 the dynamics have fallen to *pp*, and the music becomes more spacious. The final pages are especially significant because the music does not seek a final climax. Instead, it allows memory to become quiet. The change of metre at bar 82 to 4/4 contributes to this sense of settling. From bar 86 onward, the quartet is predominantly *pp*, and sustained notes dominate the texture.

The final *a niente* is perhaps the most eloquent gesture in the work. The quartet does not pronounce a conclusion. It allows sound to become absence. The ending gives retrospective meaning to the entire work. *Vortex* was not simply an opening movement of agitation; it was the immediate experience of rupture. *Dream* was not merely a lyrical interlude; it represented a state in which the absent person could still seem present. Memory does not finally resolve the grief. Instead, it discovers a way for the remembered person to remain within consciousness without the music pretending that the loss can be undone. This is why the quartet's emotional power does not depend upon overtly tragic musical gestures. Indeed, its most affecting moments are often the quietest: the solitary viola at the beginning of *Dream*, the *lointano* passage of *Vortex*, and the final *a niente*. The work's deepest subject is therefore not death itself. It is the sudden transformation of presence into absence, and the subsequent transformation of absence into memory. That seems to me the reason the three titles are so exact: *Vortex*, *Dream*, *Memory*. Shock, unreality, and, finally, the difficult persistence of someone who is no longer there.

One thing should particularly be preserved in any discussion of this quartet: the restraint of the final interpretation. The circumstances are heartbreaking, but the score does not ask us to turn it into a piece of musical journalism. It is a serious piece of composition whose emotional truth happens to be inseparable from the event that caused it. The final *a niente*, with Sŵn y Llyn, 30th July 2005 beneath it, is enough. There is really nothing one could add to that which would make it more poignant.

String Quartet No. 10 Op. 173

Emynau - Hymns

Programme Note

The Tenth String Quartet is a work deeply rooted in the musical culture of Wales. Its title, *Emynau - Hymns*, points to the importance of Welsh hymnody, while the three movements - **Rheidol** and **In Memoriam**, **Gwahoddiad**, and **In Memoriam** - explore different aspects of memory, song and loss. The work is dedicated to Arwel a Carys Jones, Cae Eboni.

The first movement begins with a broad, hymn-like melody - *Rheidol* - at a moderate tempo. The four instruments initially create a relatively unified sonority, but the texture gradually becomes more fragmented and inward. Then the music suddenly accelerates, transforming the earlier melodic language into rapid, flowing quaver figures through which parts of *In Memoriam* can be heard. The music becomes increasingly animated before eventually returning to the opening tempo. The original musical world is therefore not simply repeated but recalled after having undergone transformation.

The **second movement**, *Gwahoddiad*, approaches hymnody from a more animated perspective. Rapid triplet figures in the violins provide the opening impulse, while the lower instruments contribute contrasting melodic and rhythmic material. The movement repeatedly alternates between flowing contrapuntal textures, more concentrated rhythmic writing and passages of sustained lyricism. Section C, marked *cantabile*, brings the underlying songfulness of the material particularly clearly to the surface.

The **final movement**, *In Memoriam* (again) is the most rhythmically driven. In 6/8, it develops a persistent pattern of flowing repeated notes before moving into 10/8. Successive sections build, interrupt and transform this rhythmic energy. The sustained melodic writing that appears above the continuing motion creates a striking contrast between recollection and the inexorable passage of time. The music gradually becomes more spacious, and the final *molto meno mosso* brings the quartet to rest.

Throughout, Welsh hymnody is treated not as material to be quoted literally but as a source of melodic identity, rhythmic character and collective memory. Familiar musical gestures are transformed through quartet writing and returned to us in altered forms. The result is a work in which the communal world of the hymn gradually becomes personal: a song remembered, transformed and finally allowed to fall silent.

Discussion

Dafydd Bullock's **String Quartet No. 10, *Emynau – Hymns*, Op. 173**, occupies a distinctive place within his quartet writing because its relationship with Welsh musical culture is unusually explicit. The title itself announces the subject, while the individual movements identify particular strands of the work's hymn-based conception. Yet the quartet is not a collection of hymn arrangements. Its real subject is what happens when inherited musical material becomes personal memory.

The **first movement, *Rheidol*** and ***In Memoriam***, establishes the principle. Its opening is direct and song-like: the first violin presents a broad melodic line while the accompanying instruments establish a stable harmonic and rhythmic environment. The clarity of this opening matters. The melody possesses the qualities of something intended for collective singing. It is not presented as a virtuosic instrumental theme but as something that seems already to belong to a larger musical memory.

The music then begins to withdraw. Voices disappear, textures thin, and sustained pitches acquire increasing prominence. The communal statement has become an individual recollection. At bar 40, however, Bullock transforms the situation completely. The tempo accelerates and the melodic material becomes rapidly flowing. The distinction between rhythmic speed and rhythmic value is important here. The figures are quavers, not semiquavers. Their rapidity arises from the very fast tempo, while their melodic contours remain clearly perceptible. This gives the passage a character quite different from fragmentation. The hymn - now *In Memoriam* - has not been destroyed; it has been energised and redistributed.

The later return at bar 87 therefore carries considerable structural weight. The opening world returns, but the listener has experienced it differently. The return functions as recollection rather than repetition.

The **second movement, *Gwahoddiad***, develops the same principle through rhythm. Its opening triplets immediately create continuous motion, particularly in the two violins. The hymn is thus not introduced as a static melody but as a living rhythmic process.

At section A, bar 22, this process becomes more concentrated, eventually involving rapid activity across the quartet. Yet the music repeatedly returns to sustained and lyrical writing. Section B at bar 53 is particularly revealing because the lower voices continue their rhythmic activity beneath quieter melodic writing above. This texture suggests two kinds of musical time: continuous movement and reflective recollection. The *cantabile* writing of section C makes the contrast explicit. The underlying hymn character is allowed to emerge without the need for a literal presentation of the tune as a chorale.

The **third movement, *In Memoriam***, transforms this relationship between song and movement into its most sustained form. It is immediately energised. The subsequent shift to 10/8 introduces a more irregular metric flow. At section A, the cello's repeated rhythmic figure establishes a continuing pulse around which the other voices can develop. This figure becomes more than accompaniment: it provides the movement's temporal continuity.

Section B, beginning at bar 51, creates the most striking contrast between sustained melody and persistent rhythmic activity. The effect is particularly appropriate to the movement's memorial title because remembrance and time are made to coexist rather than alternate.

Section C introduces yet another character, based on short, accented gestures and rests. The music consequently avoids turning mourning into static solemnity. There remains a physical, even dance-like quality to the act of remembering. The climax of the movement eventually arrives through sections D and E. At section E, bar 94, the previously continuous rhythmic activity begins to dissolve into sustained sonorities.

Section F continues this process, allowing the upper voices to sustain longer lines while quieter activity persists below. The music is not suddenly static; rather, motion is gradually deprived of its urgency. The music is now *pp*, and the final two bars, suddenly *forte*, complete that transformation. This ending is the culmination of the entire work's conception. Finally the movement ceases and the energy just stops.

The Welsh identity of *Emynau* therefore lies deeper than its explicit hymn references. Welsh hymnody provides the work with a conception of melody as something collectively possessed but individually remembered. Bullock takes that inherited material and subjects it to the procedures of the string quartet: redistribution among voices, rhythmic transformation, changes of register and density, and large-scale alternation between activity and suspension.

String Quartet No. 11 Op. 196

Hinterthal

Programme Note

This **Quartet** was written in 2011, shortly after the composer sold his house in Fachwen, Wales, and bought a flat in Hinterthal, Austria. It was the first composition after the move, and is therefore a deeply personal work: an attempt to reconcile two very different places, and two homes, while carrying the memory of one into the other.

The house in Fachwen was called *Sŵn y Llyn - Sound of the Lake*. For a composer, the name seemed particularly appropriate. The new flat in Hinterthal was given almost the same name: *Bergklang - Mountain Sound*. Thus the transition from Wales to Austria was, in a sense, a transition from the sound of the lake to the sound of the mountain.

The Welsh words *Cysoniad â Sŵn y Llyn*, which appear at the head of the score, consequently have a very personal significance. Sŵn y Llyn is not an imagined landscape: it was the name of the home he had just left. Having relocated, physically at least, from Eryri to the Austrian Alps, this Quartet was written in Hinterthal, as an attempt at integration, reconciling a long 'Welsh' melody (written for the 3rd Quartet '*Fachwen*') with various elements of favourite styles and genres in Austria: gentle *Tanzlmusi*, *Alphorns*, *Schnalzen*, an *Einmarsch*, his own '*Seepferdchenpolka*' melody, the *bells of Hinterthal* heard from the Torscharte early one Sunday morning

The **first movement**, *Hinterthal*, is the beginning of the encounter with the new landscape. Its rhythmic movement and contrasting textures establish the musical world of the Alps, but the past is never absent. The score explicitly introduces *Thema: Fachwen (Quartett Nr. 3)*. The first theme of the *Fachwen* Quartet returns as a memory of the place he had left behind. It haunts the new music rather than simply being quoted by it.

The **second movement**, *Wanderung mit Fragezeichen*, is a walk through the new surroundings, but the question marks are intentional. A *Seepferdchen-Polka*, an *Alphornruf*, and the Alpine song *Hoch auf'm Berg, tief im Tal, Grüß ich Dich, viel tausendmal!* bring the sounds of Hinterthal increasingly into the music. Yet the journey remains one of discovery rather than simple arrival.

The **final movement**, *Sonntag in den Bergen*, enters more fully into the life of the new place. It begins with *Die Kirchenglocken von Hinterthal*, followed by the sharply physical *Schnalzen!*, and develops into a lively, sometimes almost theatrical picture of a Sunday in the mountains.

Yet the work finally becomes quiet. The last pages gradually withdraw, and the score ends with the inscription: "Bergklang, the first work, 26th August, 2011." The significance of that final word is central to the work. Bergklang was the name of the new home. Sŵn y Llyn was the name of the old one. The quartet therefore moves from Sŵn y Llyn to Bergklang, from lake to mountain, from Wales to Austria, but not by leaving the first world behind. The Fachwen theme remains within the music throughout the journey.

Hinterthal is consequently not a farewell to one home and a celebration of another. It is an attempt to discover whether two homes can exist together in memory — and whether, through music, the sound of one can become part of the sound of the other.

Discussion

Dafydd Bullock's **String Quartet No. 11, *Hinterthal*, Op. 196**, was written in 2011, immediately after the composer sold his house in Fachwen, Wales, and bought a flat in Hinterthal, Austria. It was the first composition to emerge from that change of home. The circumstance is therefore not incidental biography but an important key to the work's conception. The quartet is an attempt to reconcile two worlds. The old house was called *Sŵn y Llyn - Sound of the Lake*. The new home was called *Bergklang - Mountain Sound*. The names themselves establish an almost perfect musical transformation: lake becomes mountain, Wales becomes Austria, but sound remains the constant. This is the significance of the Welsh inscription at the head of the score: *Cysoniad â Sŵn y Llyn*. The phrase is not an atmospheric subtitle invented for an Alpine work. *Sŵn y Llyn* was the name of the home that had just been left. The quartet therefore begins with the old home and ends with the new one. Between those two names lies the entire psychological and musical journey of Hinterthal.

The memory that enters the new landscape. The **first movement** is headed simply *Hinterthal*. Its opening tempo and its immediate rhythmic activity give the music a sense of movement rather than contemplation. This is important. The quartet does not begin by mourning what has been lost. It begins by entering the new place. The four instruments establish differentiated but closely interdependent rhythmic activity. *Pizzicato* and short articulated figures contribute to a mobile surface, while longer melodic gestures emerge above it. The music is already inhabiting a landscape in motion. Yet this new world is interrupted by memory. At bar 61, the score explicitly marks: ***Thema: Fachwen (Quartett Nr. 3)***. This is the central autobiographical gesture of the quartet. The first theme of the earlier *Fachwen* Quartet does not return because the composer is revisiting an old compositional technique. It returns because Fachwen itself remains present. The distinction is crucial. A quotation normally refers backwards, but here, the theme haunts the present.

It enters the musical world of *Hinterthal* as the memory of the home that has been left behind. The past therefore becomes not merely subject matter but a component of the quartet's musical fabric. The effect is especially powerful because the *Fachwen* material is not isolated from the new music. It is placed within the ongoing activity of the quartet. The old world is not presented in quotation marks; it has entered the new world and must coexist with it. This is the first musical act of reconciliation.

Movement as memory. **The first movement** repeatedly alternates between energetic continuity and moments in which the musical surface becomes more spacious. At bar 87, for example, the texture becomes markedly reduced, leaving the first violin exposed against the diminished activity of the other instruments. Such moments can be understood formally and texturally without invoking biography. But in the context of the work's origin they acquire a striking additional resonance: movement through the new landscape is repeatedly interrupted by inwardness. The same principle becomes still more evident later. At bar 158, the strings are marked *senza vibrato*, with the dynamics reduced to *p*. The resulting sound is deliberately restrained and distanced. At bar 173, *con vibrato* returns. The distinction is technically a change of string colour, but within the larger structure it contributes to a recurrent pattern: proximity and distance, animation and suspension, presence and recollection. The quartet does not simply describe a landscape, It moves between states of inhabiting it and remembering elsewhere.

The **second movement** makes the idea of movement explicit in its title: *Wanderung mit Fragezeichen — Walk with Question Marks*. The question marks are significant. This is not simply a walk through beautiful Alpine scenery. It is a journey through a newly acquired environment by

someone whose previous home remains emotionally present. The opening is marked *Seepferdchen-Polka*. The music immediately acquires a different physical character. Its repeated rhythmic figures and dance-derived articulation give it a social and almost comic energy. The new environment is no longer merely a landscape; it is becoming a place with its own human sounds. Then, at bar 25, comes the *Alphornruf*. The change is fundamental. The polka is local, immediate and bodily. The alphorn call is spacious and distant. It establishes the mountain as a place in which sound travels across space. The movement then introduces the Alpine song: *Hoch auf'm Berg, tief im Tal, Grüß ich Dich, viel tausendmal!* The song is particularly appropriate to the quartet's underlying situation. Its mountain-and-valley imagery is already concerned with separation and greeting, with distance bridged by song. Bullock does not need to force a literal autobiographical interpretation upon it. The musical placement is sufficient. A composer who has just crossed from one landscape into another is hearing the new place through its own songs while still carrying the sound of the old one. The question marks remain.

The old and new worlds are not opposites. It would be tempting to describe the quartet as a conflict between Wales and Austria, but that would oversimplify what the music actually achieves. There is remarkably little sense of antagonism. The *Fachwen* theme is not presented as something that must be overcome. Nor are the Alpine materials presented as a replacement for it. Instead, the quartet creates a shared musical space in which different memories and sounds can coexist. This is why reconciliation is a more accurate concept than departure. The composer is not asking: Which place is now home? The question is rather something more subtle: can the new place become home without the old place ceasing to be part of me? The answer offered by the quartet is yes, but it is not an uncomplicated yes. The question marks remain.

The **third movement** is more extrovert and theatrical: *Sonntag in den Bergen*. The movement opens with the explicit programme: *Die Kirchenglocken von Hinterthal*. This is an important development. In the first movement, Hinterthal is principally encountered as landscape. In the second, it is encountered through movement, dance, calls and song. In the third, it has become community. The bells belong to a village, not simply to a mountain. They announce a shared time and place. Then comes the wonderfully abrupt *Schnalzen!*, marked *pizzicato*. The gesture is almost theatrical in its physicality. Later, at bar 29, the marking *Einmarsch* appears and the movement now possesses something like a communal procession. Throughout the *Fachwen* Quartet theme is also part of the texture. This is a very different relationship with place from that of the opening movement. The new environment is no longer merely being observed. The music is participating in it.

The deeper continuity lies in the connection between motion and stillness. Despite this change of character, the third movement retains one of the quartet's fundamental structural principles. Rapid, repeated figuration repeatedly coexists with sustained notes and longer melodic gestures. The music can be intensely active at the surface while remaining harmonically or sonically suspended underneath. This creates a particularly interesting temporal ambiguity in that one layer moves but another remains. The effect has an obvious pictorial correspondence with landscape: a person walks while the mountain remains; figures move while the surrounding space appears permanent. But it is also a powerful metaphor for memory: the present moves forward and the past remains. That relationship has been latent since the first appearance of the *Fachwen* theme, and it becomes increasingly fundamental to the quartet's structure.

The final silence. The most important evidence for the quartet's meaning may be found not in its most explicit Alpine passages but in its ending. After the activity of the third movement, the final section gradually withdraws. Dynamics fall through pp, mp and p, while the texture becomes increasingly spacious. There is no triumphant Alpine conclusion and there is no dramatic assertion

that the new home has displaced the old. Instead, the quartet becomes quiet and then the score gives us the words: *Bergklang*, the first work, 26th August, 2011. This transforms the ending. *Bergklang* is not merely the title of a final musical image. It is the name of the new home. The quartet has therefore travelled from *Sŵn y Llyn* to *Bergklang*. The two names form a translation across geography: Sound of the Lake - Sound of the Mountain. The significance is profound because the translation does not discard the original. The new name is born from the same fundamental idea. The composer has carried sound from one home to the other.

The *Fachwen* theme therefore occupies a unique position within the quartet. It is neither simply a quotation nor simply a reminiscence. It is the musical continuity between two homes. When it appears in *Hinterthal*, *Fachwen* has ceased to be a physical home but remains an interior one. This explains why the theme can be described as haunting the music. A ghost is not a complete presence; it is a presence that belongs simultaneously to the past and the present. The *Fachwen* theme behaves in precisely this way. It does not dominate the quartet or demand that the music return to Wales. It simply refuses to disappear and this makes the quotation structurally more important than its literal duration might suggest. It changes how everything surrounding it is heard. After the *Fachwen* theme has appeared, the Alpine material is no longer merely Alpine material - It is Alpine material heard by someone who remembers *Fachwen*. That distinction is the heart of the quartet.

The Welsh word *Cysoniad* (reconciliation) consequently describes more than an emotional state. It describes the compositional method. Bullock does not reconcile the two worlds by blending them into an undifferentiated style. Instead, he allows them to retain their identities. Welsh memory remains Welsh, Alpine sound remains Alpine and the *Fachwen* theme remains recognisable. The *Seepferdchen-Polka*, *Alphornruf*, mountain song and *Hinterthal bells* retain their distinct identities. Reconciliation occurs because these things are allowed to exist together. This is a subtle but important distinction. Reconciliation does not mean erasure of difference. It means discovering a form in which difference can be inhabited and that is exactly what the quartet itself does. Seen in this light, *Hinterthal* can almost be understood as a musical house-moving. The first movement enters the new place while the old home remains present. The second walks through the new landscape, encountering its dances, calls and songs, but with "question marks". The third participates in the communal life of the mountains and finally the music becomes still enough for the new home to be named: *Bergklang*. The work has not forgotten *Sŵn y Llyn*. It has transformed it. The lake has become a mountain. The Welsh house has become an Austrian home. But the word sound has survived the journey and so has the *Fachwen* theme.

String Quartet No. 11, Hinterthal is therefore best understood neither as an Alpine tone-picture nor simply as a work of autobiographical nostalgia. It is a composition about continuity through change. Its deepest subject is the problem of home: what happens when physical circumstances require one home to be left behind and another to be inhabited. Bullock's answer is neither to cling to the past nor to reject it. Instead, he makes memory itself part of the new musical world. The *Fachwen* theme enters *Hinterthal*. The sounds of *Hinterthal* gradually become part of the composer's musical vocabulary. The two worlds remain distinct, but they are no longer separate. At the beginning stands *Sŵn y Llyn*. At the end stands *Bergklang*. Between them lies a quartet in which the past continually sounds within the present. Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of the work is that the new home is not finally established by silence, but by naming its sound. Sound of the Lake. Sound of the Mountain. Two homes, one musical memory.

String Quartet No. 12 Op. 207

Winterlicht

Programme Note

This **twelfth Quartet** was composed in Luxembourg between 11 and 13 November 2012. The title '*Winterlicht*' - literally '*Winter Light*' - is deliberately suggestive rather than descriptive. The music does not attempt to portray winter, nor does it attach a narrative to particular events. Rather, it explores a particular quality of perception: the clarity, fragility and changing intensity of light during the winter months.

The **first movement** begins quietly, allowing the music to emerge gradually from isolated instrumental voices and sustained notes. Melodic fragments pass between the instruments, alternately appearing and disappearing, while the texture moves between spaciousness and increasing concentration. Moments of greater intensity are followed by withdrawal, as though the light itself were continually changing.

The **second movement** is more fluid and conversational. *Pizzicato* gestures, sustained notes and flowing contrapuntal passages alternate with one another. Its musical world is quieter and more inward than that of the opening movement. Towards its conclusion, the texture becomes increasingly sparse, with long-held notes and silences creating a sense of stillness and suspension.

The **third movement** begins with a dramatic transformation. At a faster tempo and with forceful accents, rapid figures and changing metres, the quartet becomes intensely powerful. Several contrasting sections successively reshape this energy, moving between aggressive rhythmic activity, tightly coordinated ensemble writing and passages of greater melodic freedom. Yet the movement ultimately turns back towards the musical language of the opening movements. The final section gradually restores the spaciousness and lyricism that had characterised the beginning of the quartet. The work closes quietly, leaving the listener once again in a world of sustained sound and fading resonance.

Winterlicht is therefore less a depiction of winter than an exploration of light, movement, stillness and transformation - the changing perception of a landscape when the light itself becomes the principal subject.

Discussion

Winterlicht occupies an intriguing position in the sequence of the string quartets. On the surface, it might appear to be a relatively conventional three-movement quartet: a lyrical opening movement, a more animated second movement, and a fast, forceful finale. But this description misses what is most distinctive about the work. The movements are not simply contrasting pieces placed beside one another. They represent different conditions of the same musical material.

This distinction matters. The opening movement establishes a world in which melody, harmony and texture are allowed to unfold gradually. The notation itself confirms the deliberate restraint of the beginning: all four instruments start at mp. The music is therefore born neither from gesture nor from drama, but from presence. Its first ideas are small. Sustained notes coexist with short melodic movements; one instrument continues while another changes; gestures appear, recede and reappear. This creates a remarkable sense of musical depth without requiring great dynamic intensity.

It is precisely this that makes the title so convincing. *Winter Light* is not absence of light. It is light whose angle and intensity make the world appear differently. The quartet works in much the same way.

One of the most characteristic features of the **opening movement** is the persistence of melodic identity despite considerable changes of texture. The instruments do not simply accompany a principal melody. Rather, melodic shapes migrate among them. The effect is almost conversational, but without the rhetorical quality of a traditional quartet dialogue. A phrase may begin in one instrument, acquire a slightly altered contour elsewhere, and then become absorbed into the larger sonority. This is already a significant compositional principle. The identity of an idea does not depend upon its remaining in the same register, instrument or harmonic context. It depends upon its contour and behaviour. That principle becomes increasingly important later in the work.

The **second movement** introduces a different kind of energy. The opening has *pizzicato* and sharply articulated gestures, and the tempo is slightly slower than the first movement, yet the sense of movement is considerably stronger. This apparent paradox is important. Speed is not the principal determinant of movement in *Winterlicht*. Articulation is. The second movement can therefore become more active without becoming dramatically faster.

The quartet begins to behave almost as a single organism whose limbs are moving independently. Rhythmic patterns circulate through the ensemble. Silence becomes increasingly important. Sustained notes interrupt activity, and activity interrupts sustained notes. The result is a kind of breathing. This is why the eventual quietening of the movement feels prepared rather than imposed. The music has been learning how to stop.

Finally the **third movement**. Its opening is almost brutally direct: ff, irregular metre, with accents everywhere. The notation leaves little doubt about the physical character intended. The repeated accented figures and changing 3/4 and 2/4 metres establish an unstable rhythmic propulsion from the outset. The crucial transformation, however, is harmonic. The rapid figuration introduces increasingly chromatic pitch collections. The music ceases to occupy the relatively open harmonic space of the earlier movements and becomes saturated with neighbouring and altered pitches. This creates a striking separation between rhythmic certainty and harmonic instability.

The rhythm tells us exactly where the music is. The harmony refuses to tell us where it is going. That is an extremely effective form of musical tension. At section A the music reaches fff. But the

remarkable thing is that the climax is not simply a climax of volume. The entire musical vocabulary has changed. Earlier, melody was allowed to float over sustained sonority. Here, melody is embedded within the physical mechanism of the music itself. Rapid scales, chromatic cells, accents and repeated rhythmic figures occupy the same space. The musical surface has become almost overloaded. However, the material remains recognisably related to the earlier quartet. That is the real achievement. The third movement does not introduce a foreign musical language. It subjects the existing language to extreme pressure. This is why the movement feels like a disturbance rather than an intrusion.

After the violence, something remarkable happens. The music begins to recover its melodic identity. Section B introduces clearer rhythmic and melodic gestures, while the texture becomes less continuously saturated. Section C goes further. The music becomes recognisably lyrical again. This is not a conventional recapitulation. The earlier music has not simply returned. Rather, the listener has been returned to it. That distinction seems central to understanding the quartet. The work is not ultimately about conflict between lyricism and violence. It is about the capacity of a musical world to survive violence without becoming the same world it was before. That is a much more interesting proposition. The final pages make this especially clear. At section D the music has become quiet again, with mp dynamics and sustained melodic material. Section E continues the process of reassembly. The instruments again exchange relatively simple melodic gestures, often separated by silence.

The final pages are particularly beautiful in their refusal to dramatise the ending. There is no grand final chord. Instead, the quartet gradually settles into long sonorities and restrained gestures. At bar 152 the music arrives at its final sustained sound, with the manuscript noting *Luxembourg, 11 - 13th November, 2012*.

The ending therefore feels less like resolution than memory. The turbulent episode has happened. It cannot be undone. But the music can once again inhabit silence. This is where *Winterlicht* becomes particularly interesting in retrospect. When encountered on its own, it is an accomplished and coherent quartet. When placed beside the much later quartets, it becomes something more: a document of a compositional consciousness already moving towards the later work.

There is already a strong preoccupation with melody as a structural force rather than decoration; harmonic identity emerging from melodic behaviour; texture as a means of changing musical perspective; sharply differentiated states of energy; the transformation rather than mere repetition of material; and, above all, the idea that apparently opposed musical languages can belong to one coherent world.

That last point seems especially significant in relation to the later music. The furious third movement does not negate the lyrical first movement. It proves that the lyrical world is capable of containing fury. And that seems to me one of the deeper principles that becomes increasingly visible across the later quartets and symphonies. What changes subsequently is not so much the fundamental musical intelligence as the scale, complexity and freedom with which that intelligence is exercised. In *Winterlicht*, the basic question is already there: how can very different musical states remain recognisably part of one musical identity?

The answer is found not through stylistic consistency, but through transformation. That is why the quartet can pass from delicate lyricism to ferocious chromatic activity and back again without sounding like three unrelated pieces. The coherence lies underneath the surface.

There is finally something rather moving about the fact that this work is called *Winterlicht*. Winter light is oblique. It reveals things without necessarily illuminating them fully. It can make familiar objects look strange. It can make colour disappear while making contour more visible. This is rather close to what this quartet does. The music continually changes the conditions under which its own material can be heard. The same musical consciousness appears as lyricism, movement, violence and recollection. The work begins in quiet light. It passes through darkness and brilliance. And it ends not with the assertion of victory, but with the simple persistence of light.

String Quartet No. 13 Op. 210

Die Reise

Programme Note

Die Reise - The Journey - is a two-movement work dedicated to Ulf Schindel. The movements bear the titles I. *Unerwartete Abfahrt - Unexpected Departure* and II. *Langsames Zurückkehren - Slow Return*. The journey of the title is not a geographical one. It concerns the experience of a life whose expected direction is unexpectedly interrupted, and then resumed.

The **first movement** begins with extraordinary momentum. At a fast tempo, the four instruments are immediately caught up in flowing triplet movement, accented gestures and rapidly changing harmonic material. There is no extended preparation for departure: the music seems already to be in motion. This forward impulse is repeatedly interrupted. Passages of rapid collective movement give way to more spacious writing in which individual instrumental voices emerge, sustained notes replace continuous motion, and the music seems temporarily to lose its sense of destination. The momentum then returns, but it is no longer quite the same momentum: the music has acquired the experience of having been interrupted.

The **second movement** begins in a radically slower and more reflective manner. Its title, *Langsames Zurückkehren*, suggests a return, but not a reversal. The material of the first movement remains present, transformed into a slower and more spacious musical language. Gradually, the music begins to move again. At one point the tempo accelerates dramatically, and the flowing figuration of the earlier movement reappears in a new context. Yet the character has changed. What was initially restless and unexpected now has a sense of direction. The journey has resumed.

The quartet's most important idea may therefore be that departure and return are not opposites. The return does not erase the departure, nor does it restore an untouched past. Rather, it continues a trajectory that had been interrupted. The final pages gradually recover a quieter, more sustained musical world. After further passages of intensity, the music settles into long notes and restrained gestures, eventually coming to rest in a quiet final sonority.

Die Reise is therefore not simply a musical journey from one place to another. It is a meditation on continuity after interruption: on what it means to resume a direction that, for a time, could no longer be followed.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 13, *Die Reise*, occupies an unusually clear position in the development of the quartets. Its formal conception is deceptively simple: two movements, one called *Unexpected Departure*, the other *Slow Return*. Yet that simplicity conceals a sophisticated idea about continuity.

The work does not present departure and return as two opposing experiences. Instead, it asks what happens when a trajectory is interrupted. That distinction is fundamental. A journey normally implies continuity: one leaves, travels, arrives. But the experience embodied in this quartet is different. An expected direction in life has been interrupted; subsequently, the direction is resumed.

The return is therefore not a reversal. It is a continuation. That idea is embedded in the musical construction of the work.

The **first movement** begins with almost startling immediacy. All four instruments participate in rapid triplet movement. There is no ceremonial beginning, no musical equivalent of packing a suitcase, saying goodbye or standing at a threshold. The quartet is simply already moving. That is exactly what makes the word *unerwartete* so important. The departure is unexpected because the music has not prepared itself psychologically for departure. The physical impulse comes first.

The rhythmic language reinforces this impression. The persistent triplet movement gives the music an almost continuous forward thrust, while chromatic activity makes the harmonic destination less secure. The result is a striking relationship: the rhythm knows that it must move; the harmony does not yet know where it is going. That is a remarkably effective musical representation of an interrupted life-direction without requiring any literal programme.

The music soon reveals that departure does not mean uninterrupted motion. The first major contrasting region reduces the density and allows individual instrumental lines to emerge. The quartet, previously functioning as a highly coordinated rhythmic body, begins to differentiate into separate voices. This is not merely a lyrical second subject. It changes our perception of the opening. We realise that the rapid movement was not the whole musical world. There was another world underneath it. And once that world has been revealed, the return of the energetic material can no longer sound exactly as it did before. The music has learned that it can stop.

This becomes the first movement's principal structural principle. Kinetic passages repeatedly give way to sustained sonorities, quieter melodic writing and moments in which the forward motion seems temporarily suspended. The energetic material then returns, but it returns with memory. This is one of the most important characteristics of the quartet. Interruption is not treated as erasure. The interrupted material remains available. It can resume, and it can also return in another form. That principle is particularly evident in the later sections of the movement, where the triplet-driven material reappears after more spacious episodes.

The movement consequently feels less like a conventional dramatic arc than like a trajectory repeatedly diverted and recovered. Eventually the music comes to rest without a grand destination being announced. The final sustained sounds and *pizzicato* gestures seem almost to suspend the journey rather than conclude it. That makes the second movement inevitable.

The **second movement** begins with a completely different sense of temporal space. If the first movement was propelled into motion, the second has to learn how to move again. The distinction is

subtle. The music is not simply slow because the return is sad, hesitant or exhausted. Its slowness is structural. It allows the material to be encountered again without the urgency that characterised the departure.

The first movement's rhythmic identity remains recognisable, but its function has changed. What had propelled the music forward can now sustain it. This is the first major transformation of the quartet's central idea: the same material that once represented movement under pressure becomes the material of continuity. This is where the essential observation becomes clear: departure and return are not opposites. The second movement proves it. If return were simply the reverse of departure, the music would have to undo the first movement. It does not. Instead, it remembers it. The material is slowed, redistributed and placed into a new temporal environment. It is recognisable without being identical. And then, unexpectedly, the slow return itself accelerates. The tempo accelerates, and the quartet again becomes highly mobile.

This is one of the revealing moments in the whole work. A literal conception of return would make this seem contradictory. A psychological conception makes it inevitable. Once the direction of life has been recovered, movement can become rapid again. The journey does not merely return to its starting point. It resumes.

The later music develops an especially interesting relationship between fast and slow movement. Rapid figurations can continue in one part while another instrument sustains a much broader melodic line. At one point, the viola is explicitly marked *cantabile* while the surrounding texture remains highly active. This is more than an attractive textural device. It reveals an important aspect of the quartet's mature thinking. The music no longer needs to choose between movement and lyricism. They can coexist. The traveller can be moving while simultaneously reflecting. The outer journey and the inner journey can occupy the same musical space. That seems to me one of the most beautiful developments between *Winterlicht* and *Die Reise*. In *Winterlicht*, contrasting musical states are frequently presented sequentially. In *Die Reise*, they increasingly inhabit one another.

Eventually the second movement returns to the slow tempo with which it began. But by this point the listener has experienced the entire trajectory. The opening of the movement can therefore no longer be heard simply as an introduction. It has become a point of reference. The music has travelled away from it and back towards it. Yet the return is not identical because we are not identical. The musical material has accumulated associations. The return is therefore an act of recognition. The closing pages are particularly eloquent because they resist the temptation to make the return triumphal. There is another increase in intensity, including *ff*, followed by a reduction of energy and the emergence of *cantabile* writing. Eventually the quartet settles into sustained sonorities and quiet dynamics. The work does not announce that it has arrived. It simply allows the journey to become still.

That restraint is important. If the work ended with a grand victorious cadence, the idea of resumed continuity would become a conventional narrative of triumph. Instead, the conclusion is more truthful. Something has happened. The direction has been recovered. But the interruption remains part of the history.

Placed immediately after No. 12, the relationship between the two quartets becomes particularly revealing. *Winterlicht* explores changing states of illumination, while *Die Reise* explores movement between states. The earlier quartet asks how one musical world can contain lyricism, turbulence and repose. The later quartet asks what happens when that world itself is displaced.

In *Winterlicht*, the violent third movement is something that the musical world has to survive. In

Die Reise, the interruption becomes the very subject of the form. This represents a subtle but significant development. The music is becoming increasingly interested not merely in what a musical state is, but in what happens when it changes. There is also a broader principle emerging here which becomes increasingly visible in the later quartets. Musical identity does not reside in fixed material, but in relationships.

A triplet figure can be frantic in one context and calm in another. A melodic line can be interrupted without being destroyed. A fast passage can become the foundation of a slow passage. A return can contain the memory of departure. The material remains identifiable because its underlying character survives transformation. This is precisely why *Die Reise* feels coherent despite its extremes. Its unity is not stylistic uniformity. It is continuity through change.

With the distinction between departure and conventional travel narrative in mind, I would resist interpreting *Die Reise* principally as a journey from one geographical location to another. The journey is instead a journey in direction. An expected direction in life has been interrupted. The interruption produces movement of a different and initially unexpected kind. Eventually the original direction becomes possible again. But the return is not a reset. The traveller returns carrying the interruption with him. That is why departure and return are not opposites. They are stages of a single trajectory. And that, I think, is exactly what the music demonstrates.

Die Reise is a remarkably economical work in conception: two movements, *Unexpected Departure* and *Slow Return*. Yet within that simple architecture lies a profound idea about continuity. The first movement is propelled forward before it has had time to establish where it is going. The second gradually recovers a sense of direction. The material of departure becomes the material of return. Movement becomes continuity, and eventually continuity becomes stillness.

The quartet therefore does not tell the story of a journey that ends where it began. It tells the story of a trajectory that is interrupted and then resumed. That is a much more subtle and perhaps much more truthful conception of return. The music does not undo what happened. It incorporates it.

The significance of that insight extends beyond the formal structure of the quartet. Departure and return are opposites neither formally, musically nor humanly. Formally, the second movement does not reverse the first but resumes and transforms it. Musically, the material of departure survives and acquires a different function. Humanly, an interrupted direction in life can be resumed without pretending that the interruption never happened. It is not a piece about getting back to where one was. It is about continuing from where one finds oneself.

Seen in the context of the later quartets, this becomes part of a larger discovery. The recurring idea of transformation in Bullock's music is not merely a compositional technique. Increasingly, it seems to be a way of thinking about continuity itself. In No. 12, the musical world survives disturbance. In No. 13, the musical trajectory survives interruption. Much later, in No. 32, an inherited musical identity survives violent transformation.

Die Reise therefore occupies an important place in that developing thread. It shows that musical identity need not depend upon the preservation of an unchanged state. What matters is the capacity of the musical trajectory to incorporate interruption without losing its direction. The journey becomes part of the person who returns.

String Quartet No. 14 Op. 214

Schatten

Programme Note

Written in Luxembourg and completed on 3 June 2013, *Schatten* is a quartet concerned less with narrative than with the persistence of musical identity: the way a gesture, a melodic contour or a rhythmic impulse may survive while its original context has disappeared. The title *Schatten - Shadows* may be understood in this sense. A shadow is recognisable without being identical to the thing that casts it. It follows, reflects, distorts and sometimes outlasts our direct perception of the original. The music repeatedly explores a similar relationship between presence and recollection.

The four movements inhabit markedly different musical worlds. The **opening movement** is spacious and searching, establishing small melodic gestures against sustained sonorities and allowing them to recur in altered forms.

The **second movement** introduces increasingly active rhythmic patterns, creating a tension between lyrical lines and persistent underlying motion.

The **third movement** intensifies this process dramatically: rapidly changing metres, repeated-note figures, pizzicato and interlocking instrumental patterns produce a highly kinetic music in which earlier gestures seem to survive as transformed rhythmic shadows.

The **final movement** retreats from this activity into a predominantly lyrical and cantabile world.

Yet the finale is not simply a return to tranquillity. The earlier material has left its traces. Melodic fragments and harmonic relationships reappear within a more spacious contrapuntal texture, as though the music were looking back upon its own preceding journey. The final pages gradually withdraw, leaving sustained sonorities and a sense of continuing resonance rather than emphatic closure. Thus the "shadows" of the title need not be understood literally or psychologically. They are, above all, musical shadows: memories of things that have changed, disappeared or been transformed, but whose presence continues to be felt.

Discussion

There is a particular danger in approaching a work entitled *Schatten*. The title invites interpretation. One may too readily begin to search for literal shadows, psychological states, autobiographical events or programmatic episodes. Yet the score itself offers no explicit programme. Its meaning is therefore better sought in the behaviour of the music.

And what the music does is remarkably consistent with the metaphor of the shadow. Throughout *Schatten*, musical material is rarely simply repeated. It is remembered. A gesture returns with a changed rhythm; a melodic contour reappears in another register or instrumental voice; a rhythmic pattern that initially seems subsidiary becomes the dominant energy of a later section. Material migrates from foreground to background and back again. What has disappeared is not necessarily absent. It survives as implication. This makes *Schatten* a work about musical memory in a particularly structural sense.

The **opening movement** establishes the fundamental condition of the quartet. Its texture is relatively spacious, and its musical gestures are allowed to possess considerable independence. Sustained notes provide a harmonic environment against which smaller melodic shapes can emerge. The writing is predominantly *cantabile*, but it does not behave like conventional lyrical melody accompanied by harmony. Rather, the instruments continually exchange fragments of melodic identity. The result is a music of partial recognition. One hears something and remembers it, but by the time it returns it is no longer quite the same thing. This is crucial. The quartet's coherence does not depend upon literal repetition. It depends upon the listener's ability to recognise relationships between successive manifestations of material. In that respect, the title is almost a description of the compositional process itself. The music casts its own shadows.

The **second movement** changes the balance between melody and rhythm. What had previously been relatively discrete gestures becomes increasingly continuous. Repeated rhythmic figures generate a sense of propulsion, while lyrical material continues to emerge above and within them. Here the relationship between object and shadow becomes more ambiguous. Which is the primary material? Is the melodic line the "object" and the repeated rhythm its shadow? Or has the rhythmic figure itself become the remembered residue of something heard earlier? The score refuses to settle the question. This ambiguity is one of the quartet's strengths. The music does not announce its structural relationships; it allows them to become perceptible through recurrence and transformation. There is also an increasing sense that different temporalities coexist. One layer may be moving rapidly while another remains sustained. One instrument may seem to remember what another has already abandoned. The quartet becomes, in effect, a small musical space in which several moments of memory can exist simultaneously.

The **third movement** represents the greatest departure from the opening world. Rapid repeated-note figures, asymmetrical metres and sharply differentiated instrumental activity produce a music of considerable nervous energy. The score moves through 9/8 and 5/8 patterns, among other changes, and the instrumental writing becomes highly interlocked. What is remarkable is that this intensity does not feel like the introduction of an unrelated musical vocabulary. Rather, it feels like the earlier material has become accelerated. The small gestures of the first movement have acquired energy, and the rhythmic impulses of the second have become almost autonomous. Material that once seemed to hover now races. This is perhaps the most literal musical realisation of the title. The shadow has become larger and more active than the object that produced it.

The effect is not simply dramatic. It alters our understanding of what came before. Once the third

movement has transformed these gestures so completely, we retrospectively hear the earlier movements differently. Their apparent stillness begins to seem provisional. Their quiet figures contained possibilities that had not yet been released. The quartet therefore possesses a form of retrospective development: later music changes the significance of earlier music.

After the energetic pressure of the third movement, **the fourth** begins in 3/4, with a *cantabile* passage. The effect is not merely that of a slow movement following a fast one. It feels like a return to consciousness. The music has passed through its most restless state and now begins to recover melodic identity. Yet the recovery is not a restoration of the opening. The material has been changed by what has happened to it. This is perhaps the most important formal idea in *Schatten*. Return does not mean restoration.

The lyrical material of the finale is more reflective because the listener now knows what it has passed through. Melodic lines are shared among the instruments, sustained sonorities interrupt the flow, and earlier characteristics seem to return in altered proportions. The music has become retrospective without becoming nostalgic. Nostalgia attempts to recover the past. This music accepts that the past cannot be recovered - but insists that it can still be present. The final pages provide a particularly eloquent confirmation of this principle. The music reaches a substantial *f cantabile*, then gradually recedes towards *mp*. The four instruments increasingly occupy sustained sonorities, while fragments of melodic movement remain within the texture. At the very end, long notes dominate the texture. The music does not conclude through a decisive gesture that closes the argument. Instead, it seems to remain in suspension, its final sonorities functioning almost as traces of what has already occurred. The ending therefore completes the metaphor without illustrating it. A shadow does not have to be destroyed. It simply becomes less visible.

Seen retrospectively alongside the neighbouring quartets, *Schatten* seems particularly significant. In *Die Reise*, musical continuity is tested by interruption: the music sets out, is diverted or suspended, and subsequently resumes. In *Schatten*, continuity is tested differently. The music asks what happens when the original form of something has changed or disappeared, but its identity continues to influence what follows. That distinction may seem small, but compositionally it is profound. It shifts the emphasis from trajectory to memory. The quartet is consequently less concerned with where the music goes than with what it carries with it. And this may explain why the work feels so coherent despite the extreme differences between its movements. The coherence is not primarily supplied by a common surface style. The four movements do not sound alike. Nor is it dependent upon a single recurring theme appearing unchanged. Instead, coherence resides in transformation. The listener learns to recognise the music by its shadows.

There is a temptation to describe *Schatten* as an emotional work about memory. That is not wrong, but it is insufficient. The deeper achievement is that memory has become a compositional mechanism. The work does not merely express remembrance. It is constructed through acts of remembering. Material survives, is altered, disappears and returns. When it returns, we hear both what it has become and what it once was. That double perception is the essence of the quartet. It also gives the title its unusual precision. The shadow is neither the object nor its opposite. It is a dependent presence: something whose existence tells us that something else is - or was - there.

So *Schatten* is ultimately not a quartet about darkness. It is a quartet about presence made perceptible through absence. And that, I think, is why its final pages are so affecting. The music does not need to tell us what has been lost. It has taught us, over the course of the quartet, how to hear the traces that loss leaves behind. The music has become its own memory.

String Quartet No. 15 Op. 226

Fragmented Winter - Slow Return

Programme Note

This Quartet was composed in Luxembourg in March 2014 and dedicated for *Dieter, Kate and Amelia*. The work was written during a deeply difficult winter in the composer's personal life. Dieter, a friend, had died, while his daughters, Kate and Amelia, were far away. The winter was therefore fragmented in more than a seasonal sense: the people who formed an important part of his life were separated from one another by death and distance.

The **first movement**, *Fragmented Winter*, begins quietly, with the four instruments entering separately and forming a spacious, fragile texture. The music repeatedly breaks apart into passages of violent, highly chromatic activity before returning to quieter material. These episodes are not intended as literal depictions of particular events. Rather, the fragmentation of the music reflects a state in which continuity itself has become difficult.

The **second movement**, *Slow Return*, is quieter and more spacious, but also more stable. The four instruments gradually recover a shared melodic and harmonic language. The return is deliberately slow. There is no sudden consolation and no attempt to recreate what has been lost. Instead, the music gradually rediscovers the possibility of singing together. Near the end the quartet reaches *f* and *cantabile* before once again withdrawing into *pp*.

Fragmented Winter is therefore a work about separation, but *Slow Return* is not a promise that separation can be undone. It is about something quieter: the gradual recovery of connection in spite of absence.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 15, Op. 226, was written in Luxembourg in March 2014 and dedicated for Dieter, Kate and Amelia, it is a work in which personal circumstance and musical structure stand unusually close to one another. The personal circumstances are stark: Dieter had died, while Bullock's daughters, Kate and Amelia, were far away. The winter was therefore experienced as a condition of fragmentation, not simply because of grief, but because the family itself had become spatially and existentially divided.

The score does not narrate those circumstances. Instead, it constructs a musical world in which separation, rupture and gradual reconnection become formal principles. The two movement titles provide the essential architecture: **Fragmented Winter** followed by **Slow Return**. The second title is crucial. The work does not promise recovery in the sense of restoration. It proposes a process that is both gradual and incomplete.

The **opening movement** begins *pp*, *molto espressivo*. The first violin is alone, followed by the second violin, then the viola and finally the cello. The instruments do not initially present a unified quartet texture. They occupy separate temporal spaces, each sustaining or repeating pitches while the others enter and withdraw. This is a purely musical observation, but it is also the first point at which the personal context becomes illuminating. The quartet is literally assembled from fragments. The individual voices remain identifiable, and the music has not lost coherence altogether, but coherence is no longer given. It must be constructed. At bar 55, that fragile continuity is violently interrupted. The tempo increases, the metre changes to 6/8, and the dynamics rise to *ff*. The writing becomes densely chromatic and sharply articulated. The upper strings move rapidly through jagged figures while the lower instruments supply strongly accented gestures. The contrast is so extreme that the word fragmented becomes almost physically audible.

Yet the music remains controlled. The individual fragments are not arbitrary. They belong to a common vocabulary of chromatic cells, rhythmic attacks and registral gestures. This is significant. The quartet is fragmented without becoming meaningless. The connections remain beneath the fracture. After the first eruption, the music returns at bar 84 to a slower pace and *pp*. But the return is not restoration. The listener now knows that the quiet surface can break. The work subsequently repeats this process. At bar 153, another violent eruption occurs with *pizzicato* and accents. At bar 175 - after four bars of silence - the music retreats again to *pp* and *arco*, and at bar 190 the 6/8 *ff* material returns once more.

The formal process is therefore cyclical rather than teleological. The music does not move neatly from pain to consolation. It returns repeatedly to the rupture. This is perhaps one of the most truthful things about the quartet. The experience implied by **Fragmented Winter** is not a single event followed by recovery. It is a condition that repeatedly reasserts itself. The final return to the slower tempo at bar 217 marks a change in character. The violent material has lost its dominance, and by the closing pages the dynamics have fallen towards *pp*. There is no triumphant conclusion. The first movement simply reaches the point where its fragmentation can no longer sustain itself.

That exhaustion prepares the **second movement**. **Slow Return** begins *cantabile*. This single marking is crucial. After the first movement's fragmented chromaticism, the quartet now has a more stable harmonic field and longer melodic continuity. The voices still remain differentiated, but they are no longer violently separated. The music can sing. This is why the second movement should not be understood merely as a slow epilogue. It is the work's actual answer to the first movement. The answer is not forgetfulness. It is reconnection.

The second movement's quietness is not passive. The instruments repeatedly take up melodic or harmonic functions from one another. Long notes pass between voices; one instrument withdraws while another continues. The texture consequently becomes a model of connection at a distance. This is particularly poignant when read alongside the circumstances of Kate and Amelia being far away. The music does not require physical proximity in order to maintain relationship. Voices can be separated and yet remain part of the same musical field. That is an interpretation rather than a literal programme, but it is strongly supported by the movement's treatment of independent voices within a shared harmonic environment.

From bar 73 onwards, the music gradually opens out. At bars 83 - 90, a *cantabile* passage returns and the melodic writing becomes more expansive. At bars 98–115, the quartet continues to alternate between individual lines and shared sonority, while the dynamics remain restrained. The music is rebuilding its capacity for collective utterance.

By bar 152, the quartet finally reaches *f*, with This is the closest thing the work has to a climax. But even here Bullock refuses triumphalism. The music subsequently falls back to *pp*. The final state is quiet. What has returned? The answer is not the past. Dieter does not return, and physical distance does not disappear. The quartet makes no attempt to pretend otherwise. What returns is something more modest and more credible: the ability to remain connected despite absence.

That is why *Slow Return* is so much more powerful than a simple recovery movement would have been. The work does not heal by undoing the fracture. It learns to live musically with the fracture. The first movement has shown that coherence can break. The second discovers that coherence can nevertheless be rebuilt, not as the same coherence as before, but as something altered by what has happened.

Fragmented Winter / Slow Return is therefore a deeply personal quartet, but its strength lies in the fact that the personal experience has been transformed into musical form rather than merely described. The first movement embodies fragmentation through staggered entrances, suspended sonorities, violent chromatic eruptions and repeated interruptions. The second embodies return through sustained melodic continuity, *cantabile* writing, shared harmonic space and the gradual restoration of collective sonority.

The two movements form a psychological arc without becoming a literal narrative. Separation leads to rupture, rupture to recurrence, recurrence to exhaustion, and exhaustion gradually opens into reconnection, song and quiet acceptance. The final quietness is especially important. The music does not end by declaring that everything is well. It ends by showing that music — and perhaps life — can continue after the world has been broken apart.

String Quartet No. 16 Op. 229

Programme Note

String Quartet 16 marks a striking change in direction within the sequence of the quartets. Unlike several of the works immediately preceding it, it does not invite an external programme or metaphor. Its subject is, quite simply, music itself. The quartet is in four movements, each exploring a different aspect of musical behaviour.

The **opening movement** begins vigorously with the four instruments immediately engaged in clearly profiled melodic material. The upper strings carry flowing figures while viola and cello establish a harmonic and rhythmic foundation. As the movement progresses, this initial material is not merely developed in the conventional sense. It is placed in different conditions. Active melodic writing gives way to sustained sonorities; individual voices emerge and recede; rhythmic energy is removed and then restored. A *poco ritardando* prepares a striking change of tonal environment, and the music moves from the opening three-sharp key signature to three flats. The original musical language survives the change of tonal field and subsequently returns to its initial environment in transformed form.

The **second movement** moves into 3/8. Its character is considerably more physical and rhythmic, with *pizzicato*, *arco*, repeated figures and sharply accented patterns generating an almost dance-like momentum. The material is continually recombined: rhythm becomes texture, texture becomes movement, and small gestures acquire increasingly large structural functions. Later sections alternate forceful rhythmic activity with quieter and more spacious passages.

The character of the **third movement** is more spacious, allowing sustained harmony and clearly defined melodic shapes to come to the foreground. The movement repeatedly explores the relationship between melody and the harmonic environment in which it occurs, demonstrating that the same musical identity can be perceived differently when its surrounding conditions change.

The **fourth movement** turns again towards continuous rhythmic motion. Beginning relatively quietly, it progressively accumulates energy, density and articulation. Repeated patterns become increasingly insistent, eventually leading to passages marked *ff* and *fff*. The final pages drive the quartet towards a concentrated rhythmic climax before the music reaches its final sonority.

The quartet's apparent directness is therefore deceptive. Beneath its melodic immediacy and rhythmic vitality lies an investigation into the basic materials of composition: melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, proportion, repetition, contrast and transformation. The work asks no question about the world outside music, it asks what music can do when it is allowed to be about itself.

Discussion

There is a significant difference between writing abstract music and writing music about music. Abstract music may simply decline to refer to anything outside itself. Music about itself goes further. It makes the processes by which music comes into being - melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, movement and form - part of its subject. **String Quartet No. 16** is such a work. This is why it feels so different from the neighbouring quartets. *Winterlicht* looks outward towards perception. *Die Reise* embodies an interrupted trajectory and its resumption. *Schatten* explores persistence, memory and the traces left by transformation. No. 16 does something more self-conscious. It turns the gaze inward. The material is not principally there to represent something. The material is what the piece is thinking about.

The **opening** is almost startlingly confident. The quartet begins *forte*, with all four instruments immediately active. There is no atmospheric preparation, no descriptive image, no attempt to establish a psychological situation. The music simply presents itself. The upper strings immediately articulate flowing melodic figures, while viola and cello establish sustained and measured harmonic support. The hierarchy is clear enough to be heard at once: melody, harmonic field, rhythmic foundation. And that clarity is important. The quartet is effectively introducing its own vocabulary.

The melodic material of the opening is unusually direct. There are recognisable contours, repeated rhythmic cells and phrases that possess something like conventional melodic breathing. But the melody is not being used to represent a person, a place, a memory or an emotion. It is being examined as melody. This becomes apparent because the surrounding conditions continually change. A melodic gesture can be heard against sustained harmony. Then the rhythmic energy is reduced, individual voices become exposed and the material is intensified again. The melody remains recognisable because its identity lies not in its original accompaniment but in its contour, rhythm and intervallic behaviour. This is a particularly important point. The quartet demonstrates that musical identity can survive a change of context.

At bar 18, marked A, the music suddenly reduces its activity. Dynamics fall to *mp*, and sustained sonorities become much more prominent. The interesting question is not "what does this represent?" There is nothing it needs to represent. The question is: What happens to the music if its rhythmic energy is removed? The answer is audible. Harmony becomes more perceptible and duration becomes structurally important. The listener begins to hear intervals and sonorities that had previously been concealed by movement. This is compositional investigation in its purest form.

The most striking experiment in the first movement comes at bar 38. Following a *poco ritardando*, the music returns to tempo and the key signature changes from three sharps to one flat. The tonal environment has been radically displaced. Yet the melodic language does not have to be reinvented. The music demonstrates something quite remarkable: the melodic idea does not belong exclusively to its original key. It can be relocated. The tonal field changes, but the musical identity remains. This is where the quartet becomes almost theoretical — though it never sounds theoretical. It is asking a genuinely compositional question: How much can the environment change while the identity of the music remains recognisable? The answer is: quite a lot.

The significance of this becomes clearer if we consider what the movement does not do. It does not use the change of tonal environment to represent distance or turn the change into a psychological crisis. It does not require an extra-musical explanation. The harmonic displacement is simply a musical possibility being tested. And because the music subsequently returns to the original tonal

environment, the listener is able to hear the difference between: material itself and the conditions in which that material is placed. This distinction is one of the quartet's most sophisticated ideas.

When the original tonal environment returns later in the movement, the music does not simply reproduce the opening. The internal texture has changed. In the later A major material, the viola participates much more actively in continuous motion, while the upper strings recover the earlier melodic language. This is significant because the tonal world and the material have returned, but the relationship between the parts has changed. The music has therefore demonstrated its central principle: repetition is never merely repetition if the conditions surrounding the material have changed. That is precisely the kind of thought that a composition about itself can embody.

The **second movement** turns the same investigative attitude towards rhythm. It moves into 3/8 at a dotted-quarter pulse of 116, and the texture immediately becomes more energetic. *Pizzicato* and *arco* are juxtaposed, accents proliferate, and short repeated figures establish a strong motor character. The music seems almost to discover that rhythm has physicality. The first movement asked what melody and harmony can do. The second asks what happens when rhythm takes control. Small figures become larger structures. Repeated patterns acquire momentum. Articulation becomes a formal parameter. The distinction between *pizzicato* and *arco* is not merely timbral; it changes the physical behaviour of the music.

This movement also reveals another characteristic of the quartet. A rhythmic figure does not remain confined to its original function. It can migrate and can become accompaniment or even foreground. It can be passed between instruments. It can be accelerated or interrupted. The music is therefore continually testing the boundaries between rhythm and texture. At more forceful passages, the repeated figures become almost mechanical, while quieter passages strip away the mechanism and expose isolated gestures. The music is effectively examining its own machinery.

The **third movement** makes another change. After the rhythmic insistence of the second movement, the relative spaciousness is immediately perceptible. This is not simply a "slow movement" in expressive terms. It is an investigation of proportion. How much sound is necessary? How long can a sonority remain before it becomes an event in itself? How does melody behave when it is no longer being driven by a motor rhythm? The movement repeatedly places sustained notes beside clearly articulated melodic figures. Again, the quartet is not telling us about anything. It is listening to itself.

This movement also makes particularly clear something that was already present in the first. Melody and harmony are related, but they are not identical. A melody can remain recognisable while the harmonic environment changes. A sustained harmony can remain present while the melodic surface changes. The quartet repeatedly explores the relationship. Melody shapes the curvature of tonal space; harmony is the local manifestation of that curvature.

The **fourth movement** moves into 6/8. The opening is relatively restrained, but the movement gradually becomes more and more rhythmically concentrated. Repeated figures accumulate. Articulations become increasingly emphatic. Layers multiply. The music begins to generate its own momentum. This is important because the movement does not require a new expressive subject. Its drama comes from musical accumulation itself. The question becomes: How much energy can this rhythmic material contain? The answer is explored progressively.

The later sections become increasingly forceful, moving through *f*, *ff* and eventually *fff*. But this is not merely a dynamic crescendo. The rhythmic density increases and the accents become more insistent. *Pizzicato* and contrasting *arco* contribute different kinds of physical resistance. The

individual parts become increasingly locked together and the quartet becomes almost a self-generating mechanism. This is where the opening movement and the finale come together. At the beginning musical material was presented with the question what could be done with it. At the end, the material has acquired enough internal energy to propel the entire quartet. The music has become its own engine.

The final pages continue this process into an extended concentrated passage marked *ff*. The ending does not seek an external resolution. There is no need for one because the work has reached the point at which its own rhythmic and melodic processes have been taken as far as necessary. The final sonority is therefore not the answer to a narrative question. It is the result of a musical process. And that is entirely appropriate.

Looking at the quartet now I think its directness is one of its greatest achievements. Music about music can easily become self-conscious. It can announce its intellectual intentions and potentially become a dry demonstration. No. 16 does none of those things. It remains musically generous. There are melodies that can simply be enjoyed, rhythmic vitality and contrast - harmonic movement and physical energy. The listener can experience the piece without ever knowing what compositional questions are being investigated. That is precisely why the experiment succeeds. The music is about itself without requiring the listener to think about that fact.

This makes its position in the sequence especially interesting. No. 12, *Winterlicht*, asks how contrasting states can inhabit one musical world. No. 13, *Die Reise*, asks how a musical trajectory can survive interruption. No. 14, *Schatten*, asks how musical identity can persist as memory and trace. No. 16 steps outside that chain and asks: What if the music itself is the subject? The result is not a retreat from expression but rather a different conception of expression. Instead of expressing an external experience, the quartet expresses the possibilities of musical thought. The work becomes, in effect, a meditation on what music is capable of being.

String Quartet No. 16 is therefore not simply "a very different quartet". It is a quartet in which the composer deliberately turns away from the need for an external subject and allows the musical material to become its own subject matter. Its apparent simplicity is deceptive. Beneath the direct melodies and energetic rhythms is an unusually clear investigation into musical identity: how it survives displacement, how it changes when its context changes, how rhythm becomes texture, how texture becomes form, and how accumulated musical processes can generate their own momentum.

String Quartet No. 17 Op. 248

Triefen

Programme Note

Triefen is a three-movement string quartet, dedicated to the composer's daughter Kate. Its movements are entitled *Etwas zum Nachdenken (Something to be considered)*, *Auf der Brücke (On the bridge)*, and *Triefen*. The score is dated Hinterthal, 28 May 2015.

The quartet arose from a particular moment in Hinterthal, Austria. Kate was sitting for a considerable time, making decisions that would have a profound effect upon her life. Dafydd Bullock was there, but he was not part of the decision. He was an observer. They were at Triefen, where water emerges through weaknesses in a rock wall and falls as a multitude of separate drops. In the light, the drops seem almost to play with one another, producing something between a waterfall and a curtain of moving points of light.

The quartet does not attempt to describe Kate's thoughts. Nor does it attempt to reproduce the waterfall literally. Instead, the three movements grow from the experience of being present: watching, moving through the landscape, and attending to the extraordinary smallness and persistence of the falling water.

The **first movement**, *Etwas zum Nachdenken*, begins quietly and allows small melodic ideas to appear gradually between the instruments. The music pauses, resumes and changes perspective, sometimes becoming extremely sparse. Later, its energy increases dramatically before returning to a more reflective state. The effect is less that of a narrative than of thought being observed from outside.

The **second movement**, *Auf der Brücke*, is more physical. Its rapid figures pass constantly between the instruments, creating a strong sense of movement and crossing. Periods of intense activity are interrupted by more static, chordal writing, before the movement resumes its forward motion.

The **third movement**, *Triefen*, takes its material from the physical behaviour of the place itself. At its beginning, repeated semiquaver figures flow almost continuously through the quartet. The music subsequently alternates between continuous streams, sharply articulated individual events, sustained sonorities and renewed flows. The individual drops of water can seem to separate and rejoin; light can catch them individually and then dissolve them back into the whole.

But *Triefen* is not simply a musical picture of water. The three movements together preserve an experience of being present without intervening: a person thinking, a landscape through which one moves, and water continuing to fall while decisions are made nearby.

The final pages gradually allow the continuous movement to thin into sustained sounds before the music comes to rest. The quartet ends quietly.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 17 occupies a particularly interesting position after No. 16. No. 16 deliberately turned music inward, seeking to make music about itself by treating melody, harmony, rhythm, texture and form as the subjects of its own investigation. *Triefen* turns outward again, but it does not abandon what No. 16 discovered. Instead, it applies that compositional intelligence to an experience of observation. This distinction is essential. The quartet is not primarily about Kate's decision, nor is it primarily about a waterfall. It is about the peculiar condition of being present while something important is happening to someone else. The composer sees, hears and remembers, but does not intervene. That gives *Triefen* an unusual emotional distance: it is intimate without being possessive.

The **first movement**, entitled *Etwas zum Nachdenken — Something to be considered*, establishes this position with remarkable restraint. The wording itself is revealing. It does not announce a meditation, a decision, a crisis or a revelation; it says simply that there is something to be considered. That is almost exactly the position of the observer. Something is happening and it matters, but the observer cannot know what is taking place inside another person's mind. The music reflects this condition through its treatment of material. Small melodic gestures emerge from considerable silence, and the instruments gradually take up aspects of the material from one another. There is no immediate assertion of a dominant musical personality. The quartet listens before it speaks, which marks a striking change from the confident opening of No. 16.

The first movement repeatedly allows its musical material to remain unresolved. A gesture appears, is repeated, answered by another instrument, absorbed into a fuller texture, and then withdrawn. Sustained sonorities interrupt the melodic flow, so that the music behaves less like a statement being developed than like a thought being contemplated from different angles. This is particularly appropriate given the real circumstance behind the movement, but the music does not tell us what Kate was thinking, nor could it. Instead, it captures something much more defensible and, I think, more moving: the experience of watching someone think. The distinction is important because it places the quartet on the observer's side of the boundary between empathy and appropriation.

Eventually the first movement becomes much more animated. A later section accelerates and changes to *f* and *non legato*, producing a sudden expansion of physical energy. The transformation is remarkable because the opening musical thought, initially quiet and tentative, has acquired movement. Yet it is not necessarily the thought itself that is moving. Rather, the observer has moved. The music has become capable of leaving the static position of contemplation and entering the physical world, before eventually returning towards the quieter material with which the movement began. The movement therefore possesses a kind of breathing: observation becomes reflection, reflection becomes movement, and movement returns to reflection. Nothing has been solved; the music simply continues to observe.

The **second movement**, *Auf der Brücke*, introduces a different form of observation because now there is a physical location. A bridge is a place from which one looks across, but it is also a place of movement: one does not normally remain on a bridge indefinitely; one crosses it. The music behaves accordingly. Rapid semiquaver activity passes between the instruments and the quartet is suddenly in motion. The important thing, however, is that the motion is distributed. A figure passes from one instrument to another, one line begins before another has finished, and rhythmic impulses overlap. The music itself appears to cross from one side to another.

At a later point the movement becomes markedly more static and brings the instruments together in more chordal writing. This interruption is important because the bridge is not merely the act of crossing; it is also the place from which one can stop and look. The second movement therefore continues the observational principle of the first while changing its physical circumstances. In the first movement, observation is psychological and interior. In the second, it becomes spatial.

The **third movement** is entitled *Triefen*. Here the relationship between image and musical process becomes extraordinarily precise. The water at Triefen does not form one smooth, continuous waterfall. It emerges through weaknesses in the rock and falls as many separate drops. The physical phenomenon consequently possesses two apparently contradictory qualities: continuity and individuality. There is a continuous waterfall, but it is composed of countless separate events. The music reproduces precisely this tension. Its opening consists of almost uninterrupted streams of repeated semiquavers. From a distance, the texture is continuous; at closer range, it is composed of individual notes. The analogy is therefore more sophisticated than simply equating semiquavers with drops. A continuous musical surface can be understood as a multitude of individual events, just as the waterfall can be understood as a multitude of separate drops.

The description of Triefen as a waterfall made of drips, playing in the light, is especially important. The water is not merely falling; it is visible. Light catches individual drops, making them momentarily distinct before they disappear back into the larger flow. The music repeatedly does something comparable. A continuous stream suddenly allows a particular voice or gesture to emerge. For a moment, one hears an individual event, and then it is absorbed back into the texture. This happens repeatedly as the instruments move between continuous repeated-note figures, more articulated events, sustained notes and renewed streams. The musical surface therefore behaves almost optically. It is not simply rhythmic; it flickers.

The later writing makes the distinction between continuum and droplet even clearer. At certain points, the repeated-note mechanism becomes sharply articulated, including *pizzicato* passages, so that individual events seem to detach themselves from the continuous stream. Then the stream reforms. The resulting compositional cycle is one of continuum, individual event and continuum, exactly the behaviour of the water. This gives the third movement a quality quite different from conventional musical depiction. The question is not how to make a waterfall sound like a waterfall, but what the waterfall is actually doing. It is falling, separating, joining, catching the light and continuously changing while remaining essentially the same phenomenon. Those behaviours can become musical.

The most poignant aspect of the quartet emerges from the relationship between its human and natural subjects. Kate is sitting there making decisions that will change her life, while the water is simply falling. Neither is under the composer's control, and he is watching both. This creates an extraordinary asymmetry. The human situation is immensely consequential but is musically unrepresented in any literal way, while the water is apparently insignificant yet becomes extraordinarily detailed in the music. That is not a contradiction; it is the very point. The observer cannot enter another person's thoughts, but he can see the light on the water, hear the sound and remember the place. Perhaps precisely because he cannot know what Kate is thinking, the physical world becomes the thing through which the moment can be preserved. The quartet does not tell us what decision was made. It tells us where you were when it was being made. That is much more delicate.

This also explains why the dedication matters. The quartet is for Kate, yet the music does not become a portrait of Kate. There is no attempt to put her thoughts into musical form. The dedication instead identifies the person who gives the remembered moment its human significance. The

composer was the observer; she was the person whose life was being considered; the place was Triefen; and the water continued to fall. The quartet preserves the configuration of those facts without pretending that the observer possessed knowledge he did not have. That, I think, is one of the work's greatest strengths.

The relationship with No. 16 is now clearer. No. 16 asked what happens when music is about music. *Triefen* asks what happens when music observes the world. Yet the second question is answered using the discoveries of the first. The waterfall is not reproduced through conventional musical illustration. Its behaviour is translated into musical behaviour. That is a very important distinction. The music remains structurally itself, but it has found a subject whose physical processes can become musical processes. Thus the progression is not from abstract to programmatic, but from self-reflection to observation. That is much more interesting.

The ending is consequently very affecting. After all the continuous motion of *Triefen*, the music gradually reduces its activity and arrives at sustained sonorities. The final page is dated Hinterthal, 28 May 2015. The water stops—not literally, of course, since the waterfall presumably continues—but the act of listening has ended. This may be the most beautiful way to understand the final silence. The quartet does not conclude the story; it simply stops observing. The place remains, the water remains, and the decision remains unknowable to the observer. What remains for the composer is the memory of having been there.

Triefen is therefore a remarkably delicate work. It is rooted in a real place and a real human circumstance, but it avoids the temptation to turn either into a conventional programme. Kate's experience remains hers; the composer remains the observer; the waterfall remains the physical world; and the music occupies the space between them. The first movement watches thought, the second watches movement through space, and the third watches water and light. Through all three, the quartet explores what it means simply to be present.

The most striking thing is perhaps that the apparently smallest element—the individual drop of water—becomes the key to the whole work. Each drop is separate, yet together the drops form a continuous flow. Each disappears, while the flow remains. This seems an unexpectedly beautiful metaphor for memory itself. The quartet does not preserve the decision. It preserves the moment of being there. And perhaps that is why the dedication to Kate feels so right: not because the music speaks for her, but because it remembers her sitting there.

String Quartet No. 18 Op. 252

Programme Note

String Quartet 18 is another entirely untitled work. Its four movements are identified only by Roman numerals, and there is no dedication or programme attached to the score. That absence is itself important. After the strongly situated *Triefen*, with its particular place, person and remembered circumstance, this music offers no such point of reference. The listener is given no story to follow and no image through which to approach the music. What remains is the music itself: its gestures, rhythms, textures, repetitions, contrasts and transformations.

The **first movement** begins quietly, with the upper strings presenting closely related melodic figures before the lower instruments gradually enter. The material is immediately recognisable as melodic rather than merely gestural, but its identity is constantly redistributed among the four instruments. The movement grows through successive intensifications, including stronger *tutti* passages and increasingly active rhythmic writing, before eventually withdrawing into sustained sonorities. The final page of the movement is almost entirely made of long-held notes, creating a striking suspension after the preceding activity.

The **second movement** is the great contrast. It begins *ff*, *pizzicato*. Its sharply articulated rhythmic figures give the music an almost physical propulsion. Yet the movement repeatedly interrupts that propulsion with more sustained and spacious writing. *Arco* replaces *pizzicato*; homophonic statements alternate with rapid passagework; and the material is continually recast rather than simply repeated.

The **third movement** returns to a slower pace. Its initial melodic writing is more conversational and contrapuntal, with the voices entering at different times and carrying related material. The movement then becomes increasingly agitated, eventually producing dense repeated-note and triplet textures. After a powerful climax, however, the music again makes room for spacious, sustained sonorities. The texture becomes markedly more transparent, and the movement closes through prolonged notes rather than a conventional emphatic conclusion.

The **fourth movement** begins softly. Its principal texture is formed from continuously repeated, rocking figures, shared between the three upper instruments while the cello provides a contrasting foundation. The muted strings give the sound an initially veiled quality. Eventually the mutes are removed and the same basic kinetic world is intensified rather than abandoned.

The movement subsequently passes through slower and more sustained episodes before accelerating again twice. The final pages return to the repeated figuration, but the momentum is gradually dismantled. A new formal stage begins, followed by increasingly spacious writing and very quiet, widely separated sustained notes. The quartet ends *mp*, not with a rhetorical flourish but with sound gradually becoming absence.

Discussion

There is something almost provocative about the absence of a title. By this stage in the quartet sequence, titles have become meaningful points of entry. *Fachwen*, *Hinterthal*, *Die Reise*, *Schatten* and *Tiefen* each give the listener a word, a place, an image or an idea from which to begin thinking about the music. No. 18 refuses that invitation. It says, in effect, listen first. And the more closely one looks at the score, the more convincing that refusal becomes. This is not a work which seems to need an external programme in order to hold together. Its subject is already present in its musical processes.

The **opening movement** begins with extraordinary economy. The first violin presents a compact melodic figure, closely shadowed by the second violin, while the lower instruments subsequently enter and extend the same musical language into the deeper register. What matters immediately is relationship. There is no grand thematic proclamation. Instead, identity emerges through similarity: one instrument says something, another says almost the same thing, and then the material changes hands. This becomes one of the quartet's fundamental procedures. The music is not built around a single protagonist. It is built around interaction. That is especially appropriate to the string quartet, but here the principle becomes unusually explicit: musical identity is something that exists between voices rather than inside one voice.

The opening movement repeatedly subjects its material to changes of register, articulation, density and harmonic environment, yet the underlying melodic behaviour remains recognisable. Bullock does not need to announce a new theme every time the music changes direction. Instead, the material is transformed sufficiently to alter its function while retaining enough of its identity to remain connected to what preceded it. The result is a strong sense of organic continuity. At the beginning, the music is predominantly lyrical; later, it becomes more animated, then fuller, then increasingly rhythmically charged, and eventually it withdraws. The end of the movement is particularly telling. At bar 115 the four instruments are reduced to long-held notes, with silence and duration becoming as important as movement. The movement does not so much finish as cease to require further activity.

In the second movement all four instruments play *pizzicato*. It is almost as though the quartet has suddenly thrown away the reflective atmosphere of the first movement. But the connection is deeper than that. The second movement takes the principle of distributed identity from the first movement and turns it into rhythm. The material is no longer principally something to be sung; it is something to be done. The instruments articulate the same rhythmic world together, often in tightly coordinated gestures. The music has an almost motoric quality, but it is not mechanical in the sterile sense. The articulation is physical: attack, release, rebound. *Pizzicato* is particularly important here because it makes every note an event.

One of the cleverest features of the movement is that the extreme opening does not simply continue. The music repeatedly changes its mode of existence. *Pizzicato* becomes *arco*; short attacks give way to sustained notes; dense rhythmic writing opens into spacious textures; then the rhythmic energy returns. The formal markers A, B, C and D reinforce this sense of successive states rather than a single linear argument. The movement therefore behaves rather like a machine which continually changes gear, but the machine is musical rather than technological. Its components remain recognisable; its behaviour changes.

The **third movement** is perhaps the most revealing of the four. The opening is immediately more spacious and contrapuntal. The four instruments are not simply functioning as a homogeneous

block. They occupy different temporal and registral positions, and the material is passed between them. This is the quartet remembering that its basic medium is four independent voices capable of becoming one musical organism. The writing is considerably more lyrical than that of movement II, but the memory of movement II is not erased. It survives in the later rhythmic intensification.

Around the middle of movement III the music becomes increasingly driven. The repeated-note figures and triplet formations eventually occupy much of the texture. What is fascinating is that this is not simply an unrelated episode. It feels like the latent rhythmic energy of movement II has returned. The second movement exposed the quartet's physical energy directly; the third movement contains it within a more lyrical framework until it can no longer remain contained. That gives the quartet a larger-scale coherence. Movement II is not merely the fast movement. It is a reservoir of energy whose consequences continue into movement III.

After the intensity of the third movement, the music does something characteristic of this quartet: it does not immediately seek a triumphant resolution. Instead, it opens out. The final pages of movement III become increasingly spacious, with sustained notes and separated gestures replacing the earlier density. This is one of the quartet's most consistent formal principles: activity produces its own opposite. The more intensely the music moves, the more powerful the eventual stillness becomes. Stillness here is not the absence of musical content. It is the result of musical activity having reached a point at which further activity would be unnecessary.

The **fourth movement** begins in an entirely different sound world, with muted strings, and repeated, rocking figures forming a constantly turning surface. Here the quartet's interest in repeated motion becomes almost architectural. The individual notes matter, but the larger effect comes from their accumulation. The music is no longer principally about melody against accompaniment but rather about texture generated by repetition. There is something especially striking about the way the figures are distributed. The upper three instruments create a remarkably coherent field of motion while the cello often establishes a slower melodic foundation beneath it. The quartet is simultaneously four voices and one surface.

At bar 32 the mutes are removed. This is a small instruction with a large structural effect. The musical mechanism has not fundamentally changed, but its timbre has. The music therefore demonstrates something that becomes increasingly important in No. 18: material does not need to change in order for its meaning to change. The same gesture, played differently, becomes another experience. That is a very Bullockian compositional principle. The identity of a musical object is not fixed exclusively by its notes; it exists through the interaction of register, rhythm, articulation, timbre, density, harmony and context.

The fourth movement eventually accelerates - and then again. At this point the repeated figures have become almost continuous, and the music seems capable of sustaining itself indefinitely. That is important because the quartet has spent much of its duration alternating between movement and cessation. Here, for a while, it appears to resist cessation. The repetitions become hypnotic, not because they are static, but because change occurs inside continuity. The figures remain recognisable while their harmonic and registral surroundings shift. Again, the music is about process rather than event.

The late fourth movement is particularly interesting in relation to the opening. The repeated figuration returns, now at a very high level of fluency and density. The movement has accumulated its own history. What was initially a simple rocking pattern has become a large-scale musical environment. This is not a literal recapitulation in the classical sense. It is more like return through

experience. The material comes back, but the listener has changed, and the music has changed. Therefore the material is no longer quite the same thing.

And then the composer makes it stop. Not dramatically, and not with a final blaze. The music gradually empties. At bar 387 a new formal stage begins, and the dense activity gives way to increasingly sparse textures. By bar 395 only a handful of sustained notes remain. The final page is almost empty. The last sounds are soft, mp, widely separated, and allowed to resonate. It is a remarkably understated conclusion to a forty-page quartet, and it casts the entire work in a different light.

I would resist saying that the quartet is about abstraction. That would actually impose another programme upon it. Rather, the absence of a title leaves the listener in exactly the position that the music itself establishes. There is no external object to identify, so we begin to notice how things happen. A melody appears, is transferred, becomes denser, accelerates and fragments; it becomes rhythm, rhythm becomes texture, texture becomes silence, and silence allows something else to begin. This is perhaps why No. 18 feels so self-contained. It does not require the listener to know anything outside the score.

Seen beside No. 16 and No. 17, the quartet becomes particularly revealing. No. 16 asked what happens when music turns its attention upon itself. No. 17 looked outward, towards a place, a person, water, light and the position of the observer. No. 18 removes both possibilities. It does not tell us what to look at. It simply exists. And that makes the title *String Quartet No. 18* almost philosophically exact. The work is not called something. It is called what it is: a string quartet, number eighteen, nothing more. And yet, ironically, that lack of designation makes the musical personality of the work more apparent, not less.

I think No. 18 marks an important moment in the sequence. It is not a retreat from the highly personal quartets immediately preceding it, nor is it simply a return to “pure music”. It is more subtle than that. The experiences of the preceding works seem to have left the composer with sufficient confidence to let the music stand without explanation. The quartet's drama is internal. Its characters are musical gestures, its landscape is texture, its movement is rhythm, its memory is recurrence, and its conclusion is silence. Perhaps the most revealing thing of all is that the score gives us no reason to ask what the music represents. It asks us instead to notice what the music does.

That makes No. 18, in retrospect, a rather important companion to No. 16. No. 16 says, in effect, music can be about itself. No. 18 goes one step further: music does not necessarily have to be about anything at all. It can simply be.

String Quartet No. 19 Op. 259

Changing Times

Programme Note

Changing Times was written at Senheim on 11 - 12 January 2017, at a time when many felt a deep unease about the direction in which world affairs were moving. The quartet does not attempt to describe particular events or political circumstances. Rather, it is a response to the unsettling perception that familiar structures of stability could no longer be taken for granted.

The four movements explore this idea in very different musical ways. The **first** begins with a strong sense of rhythmic order, yet change is already taking place within that apparent stability. The **second** creates a more spacious and lyrical world, but its tranquillity remains provisional. The **third** becomes restless and chromatic, its constantly changing gestures refusing to settle. The **final movement**, beginning *ff* and at a much faster tempo, brings together many of the contrasting conditions encountered earlier in the quartet.

Yet the music does not end in catastrophe. After the agitation and confrontation of the final movement, the texture gradually becomes quieter and more sustained, the dynamics retreating towards the closing bars.

The title *Changing Times* therefore has a double meaning. It refers both to the world outside the music and to the changing nature of musical time within it: pulse, metre, texture, articulation and harmonic stability are continually transformed. What remains constant is not a particular theme or musical surface, but the quartet's continuing attempt to find coherence within change.

Discussion

There is a certain risk in approaching a work such as *Changing Times* with knowledge of the circumstances that gave rise to it. Once the composer tells us that the title arose from a deep unease about world affairs, it becomes tempting to search the score for political allegory: conflict here, instability there, perhaps some identifiable musical representation of particular events. The quartet resists that approach. Its achievement is more inward and, in a sense, more disturbing. It does not tell us what is wrong with the world. Instead, it recreates the experience of inhabiting a world in which one's confidence in continuity and stability has been weakened. The work is dated 11–12 January 2017 and emerges with extraordinary immediacy from its emotional stimulus, but its response is not rhetorical. The quartet does not shout its anxiety. Instead, it continually asks how stability can survive change, and that question governs its musical construction.

The **opening movement** establishes an apparently secure world. The four instruments initially operate with a striking degree of rhythmic solidarity. The significance of this opening becomes clearer once the title is known. The quartet does not begin with chaos. It begins with order, and then it changes. Repeated rhythmic patterns remain recognisable while their pitch content shifts, establishing a distinction between continuity of behaviour and instability of substance. This is perhaps the first and most important metaphor of the work. A society may retain its institutions, habits and outward routines while the assumptions beneath them are changing. The music does precisely this: its surface continues to function, while the listener gradually becomes aware that the ground underneath it is moving.

The formal divisions marked A, B and later sections do not simply provide conventional contrasting episodes. They repeatedly interrupt one condition and establish another, so that the result is not chaos but conditional stability. Every equilibrium has become provisional. The music remains coherent, but the listener can no longer take its coherence for granted.

The **second movement** is subtler. The metre changes to 3/4 and the musical environment becomes much more spacious. Sustained sonorities and more lyrical behaviour replace the greater rhythmic solidarity of the opening. In another context, one might simply call this a contrasting slow movement. Here, however, the context changes its meaning. After the instability of the first movement, repose can no longer be heard as entirely secure. This is one of the quartet's most effective expressive devices: peace itself becomes vulnerable.

The music does not need to disturb every quiet passage. Its earlier behaviour has already taught us that permanence cannot be assumed. There is consequently a profound difference between calm and security. The quartet gives us the former without necessarily giving us the latter. The title acquires another dimension here, because although the basic pulse has not radically altered, our experience of time has. Metre, phrase structure, harmonic rhythm and texture transform the psychological duration of the music. Changing times does not merely mean faster times or slower times. It means that time itself is experienced differently.

The **third movement** makes the most dramatic change. The distinction from the preceding movement is immediate. The sustained, spacious world has been replaced by rapid chromatic activity, sharply differentiated attacks and continually changing instrumental figures. The instruction *sempre non legato* is especially revealing because the music is denied the luxury of lingering. Events occur and are immediately replaced, keeping the listener in a state of continual adjustment.

This is not fragmentation in the sense of incoherence. On the contrary, the material remains highly controlled, and the four instruments continue to participate in a recognisable common vocabulary. What has changed is the security of transition. One event no longer seems naturally to lead to the next. The music has become a world in which everything is moving, but nothing quite settles. That is a particularly apt musical embodiment of political and social unease: not the absence of order, but the experience that order is becoming increasingly difficult to trust.

The later mixture of *pizzicato*, *legato* and *non-legato* writing intensifies this sense. The quartet is not merely changing its notes; it is changing how it physically speaks. Articulation becomes a form of psychology. *Legato* and *non-legato* are repeatedly opposed, *pizzicato* is used, accents become increasingly important, and sustained sonorities alternate with sharply attacked figures. The instruments seem continually to ask whether a new event should remain connected to what came before or should separate itself from it. That is almost a miniature version of the work's larger question: how does one maintain continuity when circumstances demand change?

The **fourth movement** begins *ff*. After the nervous mobility of the third movement, this is no longer merely instability. It is confrontation. The opening attacks are emphatic and collective, suggesting a sudden intensification of everything that has gone before. Yet the movement does not remain there. *ff* gives way to *mp*; aggressive attacks are followed by sustained sonorities; rhythmic density alternates with spaces in which the music seems temporarily to withdraw. The movement consequently becomes a meeting-place for the quartet's earlier conditions. The regularity of the first movement is still present, the spaciousness of the second survives, and the nervous articulation of the third returns, but none of these conditions comes back unchanged. The final movement therefore feels cumulative rather than merely climactic. The quartet's earlier experiences have become part of its present condition. The past has not disappeared; it has become part of the instability of the present.

This accumulation is crucial to the meaning of the quartet as a whole. *Changing Times* does not describe a sequence in which one musical state simply replaces another. Each state leaves something behind. The music remembers the conditions through which it has passed, and those memories alter the significance of what follows.

The final pages are therefore particularly important. A conventional dramatic work might answer escalating tension with either triumph or catastrophe. *Changing Times* does neither. From bar 114 onwards, *mf*, *f* and *p* alternate, but the trajectory increasingly moves towards quietness. By bar 122 sustained sonorities predominate. The ending is consequently not a solution to the unease that generated the work. It is something subtler: the achievement of enough stillness to contemplate uncertainty without being overwhelmed by it.

There is no claim that the changing world has become benign, and there is no triumphant restoration of the opening's stability. But neither is there collapse. The music simply becomes capable of being quiet again. That distinction becomes particularly illuminating when *Changing Times* is considered alongside No. 15, *Fragmented Winter*. The earlier quartet arose from a world fractured by personal loss and separation, and its movement towards renewed lyricism could be understood as a return to inner coherence. *Changing Times* is different. Its disturbance comes from outside, from apprehension about the direction of the world. Consequently, its music does not seek quite the same kind of healing. It seeks orientation.

The quartet asks how one can continue to make coherent music when one's confidence in the coherence of the surrounding world has been shaken. Perhaps that is why the final quietness is so convincing. It is not optimism, and it is not pessimism. It is continuity under altered conditions.

That, ultimately, may be the deepest meaning of *Changing Times*. The world changes; musical time changes; the manner of speaking changes; the harmonic and rhythmic environments change, but the quartet continues to search for a way of holding these changes together. The search for coherence, rather than any particular stylistic language, is what gives the work its lasting expressive identity.

String Quartet No. 20 Op. 260

Uncertain Times

Programme Note

Uncertain Times was completed at Senheim on 13 February 2017. The title refers less to a particular event than to a condition: the experience of living in a world whose direction can no longer be taken for granted. As such it may be seen as a partner to **Quartet 20 ‘Changing Times’**.

The music begins quietly, with isolated sustained notes distributed among the four instruments. Nothing is stated with complete certainty; instead, the harmony gradually emerges from the relationships between individual notes. Silence and resonance become as important as the notes themselves. From this uncertain beginning the quartet develops through four contrasting movements. The **first** remains largely concerned with sustained sound, harmonic tension and the gradual accumulation of intensity. The **second** introduces a more clearly articulated rhythmic and melodic world, but without abandoning the sense that musical stability is provisional.

The **third movement** is the great disturbance of the work. Rapid repeated figures spread through the upper three instruments and then through the quartet as a whole, creating an extraordinary contrast with the spaciousness of the opening. What has previously been uncertain in terms of harmonic or melodic orientation now becomes uncertain in terms of movement itself: the music seems unable to remain still.

The **final movement** brings these contrasting states together. Energetic figuration returns alongside sustained notes, before the music gradually withdraws into longer, quieter sounds. The quartet does not end by resolving the uncertainty announced by its title. Instead, it arrives at a quieter state in which uncertainty has simply become part of the musical landscape.

The work therefore offers no programme in the conventional sense. It does not attempt to describe a particular crisis or prescribe a particular response. Rather, it asks what uncertainty might mean as a musical condition - and discovers that it need not sound like chaos. It can exist within order, within beauty, and even within moments of considerable calm.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 20, *Uncertain Times*, is a work whose title might initially suggest that its meaning lies outside the music, in the circumstances of the world that surrounded its composition. Yet the score itself resists anything so straightforward. What it offers is not a musical description of particular events, nor an attempt at political commentary, but a sustained exploration of instability as a musical condition. Uncertainty becomes audible in the way the quartet establishes and withdraws its points of orientation, in the alternation between stillness and agitation, and above all in the repeated transformation of one kind of musical behaviour into another. The work does not so much tell us that the times are uncertain as make uncertainty part of the listener's experience.

The **opening** is strikingly restrained. The four instruments enter separately, with long sustained notes placed against considerable silence. There is no immediately recognisable melody and no conventional harmonic progression that might provide the listener with an obvious point of departure. Instead, the music seems to assemble itself gradually from isolated notes. The effect is not empty, however. The individual notes acquire considerable expressive weight precisely because they are exposed and because the silences between them are so carefully judged. The opening pages establish a musical world in which pitch, duration and register are all significant, but in which none is allowed to settle comfortably into the role of a conventional tonal centre.

This **first movement** proceeds through a series of increasingly active states. At A, the original sparse language is reorganised into more recognisable exchanges between the instruments, but the underlying sense of hesitation remains. At B, the music becomes quieter and more widely spaced; individual lines emerge and disappear rather than combining into a continuous argument. C and D then bring a substantial intensification. The dynamics rise from *mezzo-forte* through *forte* to *fortissimo*, while the long-held sonorities become increasingly assertive. Yet even at its most forceful the music does not sound secure. The intensity is produced by accumulation rather than by arrival at a definitive harmonic destination.

The central dramatic paradox of the movement lies here. What might conventionally be interpreted as a climax does not resolve the uncertainty established at the beginning. Instead, the music passes through it. After the violence of the D section, the texture retreats again. At E and subsequently F and G, the long-note language returns, but it is no longer quite the same music. The listener has been taken through a succession of increasingly charged states and is therefore conscious that apparent calm is not necessarily stability. The return of sustained notes consequently carries a memory of what has happened. The movement closes without the kind of unequivocal cadence that would retrospectively explain the preceding events.

The **second movement** changes the terms of the argument. Its quicker tempo and predominantly triple metre immediately introduce a greater sense of physical motion. Where the first movement frequently seems to wait for events to occur, the second begins with rhythmic activity already in progress. The repeated rhythmic figures in the inner voices create a remarkably persistent pulse, while the cello provides a grounding presence beneath them. The result is more recognisably instrumental and almost deceptively stable.

Yet this stability is again provisional. The movement repeatedly juxtaposes rhythmic regularity with melodic gestures that seem to pull against it. At A and B, the repeated patterns establish an almost mechanical continuity, while the upper strings articulate more lyrical shapes above them. At C the melodic material becomes increasingly expansive, and the dynamic direction begins to produce a

tension between cantabile expression and rhythmic insistence. The music therefore inhabits two different conceptions of time at once: one measured and repetitive, the other expressive and flexible. This conflict becomes particularly clear in the later sections. The movement's rhythmic figures persist with considerable tenacity, but the harmonic and melodic surface continually shifts. There is an impression of movement without straightforward progress, as though the quartet were travelling while the landscape repeatedly changed around it. The music is not static, but neither does it behave like a conventional developmental movement in which themes are progressively transformed towards a predetermined goal. Instead, Bullock seems interested in the experience of continuation itself: the way one musical situation gives rise to another without guaranteeing that the new situation will be more secure than the previous one.

The end of the second movement is especially revealing in this respect. The vigorous rhythmic material gradually gives way to longer values and more widely spaced gestures. What initially appeared to be a movement founded upon rhythmic certainty therefore dissolves into a more uncertain, sustained sonority. The structural relationship with the first movement becomes apparent: both movements begin from one conception of musical time and ultimately arrive somewhere quite different. The quartet's architecture is consequently less about contrast for its own sake than about the instability of musical identity.

The **third movement** is the most overtly energetic part of the work. It begins with a remarkable outpouring of rapid semiquaver figures in the upper three instruments, creating a texture almost entirely unlike the opening of the quartet. The cello initially remains outside this activity, and this absence is important: the apparently frantic surface is not yet supported by the full weight of the ensemble. The rapid figures circulate between the instruments, generating an impression of nervous energy and restless momentum.

Here the title *Uncertain Times* seems particularly pertinent, although again without requiring any literal programme. The music has become physically unsettled. Instead of uncertainty being represented by silence and hesitation, as in the opening movement, it is embodied in excess: too much motion, too many competing impulses, too little opportunity to settle. At A, isolated emphatic gestures interrupt the rapid figuration, and the music begins to behave almost as though different layers of thought were attempting to assert themselves simultaneously.

The third movement then develops this tension with considerable ingenuity. The rapid patterns are not merely decorative figuration; they become the principal substance of the musical argument. They are repeated, displaced and re-voiced, so that continuity is maintained even while the harmonic field continually changes. At B and C the texture becomes increasingly dense, and the listener is drawn into a world in which propulsion itself has become the dominant expressive force. Yet Bullock does not allow the movement simply to accelerate towards a conventional climax. Instead, the texture repeatedly breaks apart and reforms.

In the later part of the movement the rapid figuration eventually gives way to sharply characterised gestures and then to renewed sustained writing. The contrast is almost startling. After so much continuous motion, the return to longer notes feels less like a relaxation than a change in psychological state. The music has exhausted one means of expressing uncertainty and must discover another. The structural parallels with the earlier movements therefore become increasingly apparent: agitation leads back towards stillness, while stillness carries the memory of agitation.

The final section is perhaps the most important of all. After the intensity of the third movement, the music returns to the sustained sonorities with which the quartet began. At F, the instruments once again move through long-held notes, now played *arco*, and the dynamic has settled back into a more

controlled forte. The final pages progressively thin the activity and restore the spaciousness of the opening. Yet this is not a simple return. The listener has heard the entire quartet, and therefore these sonorities have acquired a different meaning. They are no longer innocent signs of musical beginning; they are what remains after the journey through uncertainty.

The final measures are consequently remarkably understated. The quartet does not resolve its tensions through a grand conclusion. Instead, the music settles into a quiet, spacious sonority, with the instruments again separated by rests and sustained notes. The final dynamic is *mezzo-piano*, and the score ends without rhetorical triumph or dramatic collapse. The ending is therefore neither optimistic nor pessimistic in any simple sense. It accepts uncertainty rather than overcoming it.

This is what gives *Uncertain Times* its particular strength. The title could easily have encouraged a more overtly programmatic work, but Bullock's response is subtler. The external world enters the quartet not through quotation, musical symbolism or identifiable narrative episodes, but through the fundamental behaviour of the music itself. The quartet repeatedly creates conditions in which certainty appears and is then destabilised. Sustained notes seem to promise stability, but their harmonic context remains elusive. Rhythmic patterns provide order, but that order is interrupted or placed against conflicting melodic behaviour. Rapid figuration creates momentum, but momentum does not necessarily produce direction. Climaxes generate intensity without necessarily producing resolution.

There is also a deeper formal coherence at work. The three movements might initially appear strongly contrasted: the first is spacious and contemplative, the second rhythmic and comparatively songful, while the third is driven by restless figuration. Yet all three ultimately describe variations of the same underlying process. Each establishes a particular form of order, subjects it to pressure, and then allows it to dissolve into another state. The quartet's large-scale form is therefore not simply fast–slow–fast or slow–rhythmic–agitated. It is a progression through different kinds of uncertainty. In that respect, *Uncertain Times* belongs very naturally within Bullock's continuing exploration of tonal coherence without dependence upon conventional tonal rhetoric. The music does not abandon pitch relationships; on the contrary, the changing pitch relationships are central to its expressive character. But harmony functions less as a sequence of destinations than as a constantly shifting field within which melodic and rhythmic events acquire their significance. The listener is encouraged to hear the curvature of that field rather than to wait for conventional harmonic confirmation.

The quartet is also notable for the way in which its emotional intensity is generated from relatively economical material. Bullock does not need a large vocabulary of radically contrasting ideas. The sustained note, the repeated rhythmic figure, the short melodic cell and the rapidly repeated semiquaver pattern are sufficient because their expressive meanings change according to context. A gesture that initially signifies hesitation can later signify reflection; a repeated figure that first suggests stability can become obsessive; rapid motion that begins as energy can eventually become agitation. The material is therefore psychologically transformed without necessarily requiring wholesale thematic transformation.

The final return to sustained writing brings the entire process into focus. The music has not solved the uncertainty with which it began. It has learned to inhabit it. This distinction is crucial. A conventional dramatic structure might regard uncertainty as a problem to be overcome, leading ultimately to affirmation, reconciliation or tragedy. *Uncertain Times* refuses such an ending. Its final calm is real, but it is not certainty. The quartet has arrived at a state in which uncertainty can coexist with repose.

Seen in retrospect, the work is therefore less a musical portrait of an uncertain world than a meditation on what uncertainty does to musical consciousness. It makes us listen differently to silence, to repetition, to stability and to change. The first movement teaches us to hear stillness as tension; the second teaches us to hear regularity as something potentially unstable; the third transforms uncertainty into almost physical agitation before gradually returning to the spaciousness from which the work began. The final bars do not close the question so much as leave it suspended. That may ultimately be the most convincing response to the title. *Uncertain Times* does not tell us what to think about an uncertain world. It makes uncertainty itself the subject of musical experience. In doing so, it produces a work whose expressive meaning is inseparable from its formal construction. The uncertainty is not imposed upon the music from outside. It is already there, in the spaces between notes, in the refusal of climaxes to become final answers, in the restless transformation of rhythmic and melodic material, and finally in the quiet recognition that the absence of certainty need not mean the absence of meaning.

String Quartet No. 21 Op. 264

Constantine

Programme Note

This was written over three days in September 2017 at Senheim. The title points towards Constantine the Great, but the quartet is not a musical biography or historical reconstruction. There are no attempts to reproduce an ancient musical world, nor is the work constructed as a sequence of identifiable historical episodes. Rather, the figure of Constantine provides a point of departure for a musical exploration of individual identity, collective power, conflict, transformation and memory.

The four movements trace a broad dramatic trajectory. The **first** establishes an essentially individual voice, gradually opening into a more collective musical world. The **second** transforms that world into something intensely physical and driven: repeated rhythmic figures, rapid movement and increasingly forceful ensemble writing create an impression of collective action and pressure. The music repeatedly gathers enormous energy, only to interrupt and reassess it.

The **third movement** provides the essential moment of reflection. After the physical intensity of the preceding music, the texture becomes spacious and conversational. Individual instruments again acquire independence, exchanging fragments and allowing the music to contemplate what has preceded it. The movement is less a conventional slow interlude than a moment of consciousness after action.

The **finale** violently reactivates the energy. Beginning *ff* at a rapid tempo, the four instruments initially act almost as a single body, but this apparent unity repeatedly fragments into competing strands before reassembling. The final stages are particularly significant: instead of ending in an unequivocal triumph, the music gradually withdraws from its extreme intensity. By the closing pages, lyrical voices emerge once again above a quieter rhythmic foundation, and the quartet ends not with a final explosion but with sustained sonorities and a gradual release of tension.

Thus *Constantine* ultimately concerns less the achievement of power than the human consequences of possessing it. The quartet's central tension is between the individual and the collective. A single voice becomes a group; the group becomes a force; the force becomes unstable; and, after conflict and reflection, individual voices re-emerge within a renewed collective order.

The ending therefore offers neither simple victory nor defeat. What survives is memory: the possibility that the individual voice, having passed through the forces of history, may still be heard.

Discussion

With *Constantine*, **String Quartet No. 21** marks a significant development in Dafydd Bullock's continuing exploration of the quartet as a medium for psychological and dramatic thought. The title might initially suggest an historical programme: Constantine, emperor, military leader, political strategist and eventually Christian ruler. Yet the score itself resists literal illustration. There is no attempt to tell Constantine's story chronologically. Instead, history is translated into musical relationships.

The fundamental relationship is that between the individual and the collective. This is already implicit in the **opening movement**. The music begins from a relatively exposed individual presence before progressively establishing a more complex four-part environment. The quartet thereby presents one of the essential problems of its subject before any explicit historical drama has taken place: how does an individual become a participant in - and eventually a representative of - something larger than himself?

The **second movement** begins abruptly at a rapid 6/8, with all four instruments marked *f*, and quickly reaches *ff*. Its rhythmic vocabulary is strikingly different from the more contemplative material surrounding it. Repeated cells, semiquaver figures, accents and rapid exchanges create a sense of continuous propulsion. The important point is that this is not merely energetic writing. It is organised energy. The four instruments increasingly behave as a collective mechanism. Individual gestures are absorbed into larger rhythmic patterns; momentum becomes more important than melodic individuality; and the quartet acquires something approaching a physical presence.

This is where the Constantine idea begins to operate most successfully. The music does not depict a battle. It embodies the conditions of power: coordination, momentum, discipline and resistance. Yet Bullock immediately complicates the idea. The music repeatedly loses the momentum it has generated. At important structural points the dynamic falls back and the texture becomes more spacious. The powerful collective is therefore never presented as an uncomplicated achievement. It is something that must continually be created, maintained and re-created. The result is a conception of power as unstable energy.

The **third movement** is therefore structurally indispensable. Its slower tempo and more transparent textures constitute a radical change of perspective. Rather than presenting another stage in an external drama, the movement seems to turn inward. Sustained notes, isolated gestures, *pizzicato* and conversational exchanges replace the relentless rhythmic propulsion of the second movement. The quartet becomes once again four individuals. But they are not the same individuals as before. This is an important distinction. The third movement can be understood as consciousness after action. The music has experienced collective force, and now it examines the possibility of meaning. The instruments listen to one another rather than simply driving one another forward. This gives the movement an almost ethical function within the quartet. It asks what remains when the excitement of action has passed.

The **finale** provides no easy answer. The quartet launches immediately into sharply articulated, highly coordinated activity. The effect is almost startling after the reflective third movement. But this is not simply a return to the second movement. The quartet has changed. The collective energy now contains the memory of fragmentation and reflection. The music repeatedly alternates between complete rhythmic coordination and moments in which the four instruments acquire distinct, competing trajectories. At A and B especially, the relationship between unanimity and independence becomes increasingly unstable.

This is one of the quartet's most compelling structural ideas: unity creates power, but unity can also suppress individuality; conversely, individuality creates freedom, but it can also destroy coherence. The finale refuses to decide between these alternatives. This is why the ending is so important. A conventional heroic narrative might have led the quartet towards an enormous final affirmation. Instead, Bullock does something much more subtle. After the renewed violence and collective activity, the music begins to retreat. At F, the texture becomes progressively more spacious, and the dynamic level falls. Then, in the final section, melodic material once again becomes prominent in the violins while the lower instruments provide a more restrained rhythmic foundation. The final pages are therefore not a conventional apotheosis. They are a reconstitution. The individual voice has survived the collective experience, but it has not returned to the beginning. That is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the entire quartet.

The *Constantine* reference functions on several levels. At the most immediate level, *Constantine* represents a historical individual whose personal identity became inseparable from enormous political, military and religious transformations. At a deeper level, however, he provides Bullock with a way of considering a universal problem: how does the individual become historical? The quartet answers this question musically rather than verbally. The first movement establishes individuality; the second establishes collective force; the third introduces reflection; and the fourth subjects the relationship between individual and collective to renewed conflict before arriving at a more complex coexistence.

The form can therefore be understood as a progression from individual to collective, through power and reflection, towards conflict, fragmentation, reintegration and memory. This is not a literal biography of Constantine. It is a psychology of historical agency. And that is why the title works. There is another particularly interesting dimension. A string quartet is an inherently democratic medium. There are four players, no conductor and no permanent hierarchy. Musical authority must continually be negotiated. That makes it an extraordinarily appropriate medium for a work concerned with power and collective identity. The first violin may appear dominant at one moment; the cello assumes structural authority at another; the inner voices may suddenly become the carriers of the essential material. The score repeatedly redistributes the centre of gravity. In this sense, the ensemble is itself a miniature society. The music does not merely describe relationships between individuals and collective forces. It enacts them. That is, I think, one reason why the *Constantine* idea has generated such a substantial quartet rather than merely a historical character piece.

Seen after the first twenty quartets, *Constantine* has particular importance. The preceding works had already demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated concern with memory, place, psychological experience, identity and the relationship between personal and external worlds. With No. 21, these concerns are extended into a more explicitly historical and societal dimension. There is no abandonment of the intensely personal character of the earlier quartets. Instead, the personal becomes historical. That is the real progression.

The quartet asks what happens when an individual experience is magnified until it becomes collective experience — and then asks whether the individual can still exist within what he has helped create. The final answer is cautiously affirmative. The last pages do not erase the violence that has preceded them, nor do they celebrate it. They simply allow the music to continue. The final sustained notes therefore acquire considerable expressive weight. After all the movement, conflict and assertion, continuation itself becomes the resolution. Perhaps that is the most convincing way in which *Constantine* escapes becoming a historical portrait. It becomes instead a meditation on power, responsibility, identity and survival.

If No. 21 is placed within the larger retrospective of the quartets, it can be described as a work in which history first becomes an explicit subject, but remains entirely subordinate to musical thought. Its great strength is that the Constantine idea is never imposed upon the music. It emerges from the behaviour of the music itself. The quartet's deepest opposition is not Christian versus pagan, Rome versus Byzantium, or victory versus defeat. It is one versus many. And its eventual discovery is that the two cannot finally be separated. That makes *Constantine* a particularly revealing bridge between the quartets that preceded it and the much broader historical, psychological and structural territory that the later sequence would explore.

String Quartet No. 22 Op. 275

Pompeii

Programme Note

Pompeii is a three-movement quartet whose three titles trace a journey through a vanished world: I *Via dell'Abbondanza* II. *Porta Vesuvio: Destruction* III. *Tempio d'Iside: Frozen Ash* The work was completed at Hinterthal on 5 - 6 July 2018.

The **first movement** evokes the world of Pompeii before its destruction. Its musical language is characterised by sustained lines and an awareness of continuity: music inhabits time as something apparently secure and enduring. Yet the title *Via dell'Abbondanza* carries an irony, for the abundance represented by the street is already a world whose survival is precarious.

The **second movement, *Porta Vesuvio: Destruction***, abruptly overturns this equilibrium. Its sharply articulated, heavily accented rhythmic writing establishes an entirely different conception of musical time. The quartet becomes fragmented and percussive, with rapid repeated figures passing through all four instruments. At moments the music seems almost mechanised: individual voices are caught within an irresistible process rather than participating in a conventional dialogue. Yet the movement is not simply an orchestration of an eruption. Its deeper subject is the destruction of continuity itself. Moments of extreme activity repeatedly give way to sudden spaces of stillness, so that destruction becomes something perceived both as event and as aftermath.

The **final movement, *Tempio d'Iside: Frozen Ash***, reverses the second movement's violence with extraordinary abruptness. With muted strings and carefully differentiated use of *vibrato* and *non-vibrato*, the music becomes almost motionless. Long sustained notes, silences and isolated sonorities gradually replace rhythmic activity. This is not a return to the serenity of the opening, but a memory simply because the world has changed. The gradual thinning of the texture towards the end of the quartet leaves isolated sounds suspended in an increasingly empty musical space. The final sonority, with its delicate distinction between *vibrato* and *non vibrato*, seems less like a conclusion than the last surviving trace of something that once existed.

Thus Pompeii is not ultimately a musical depiction of an historical catastrophe. It is a meditation on what survives catastrophe. Its three movements move from life, through destruction, to remembrance; and the final irony is that Pompeii's survival in historical memory is itself the consequence of its destruction.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 22 occupies a distinctive position within Dafydd Bullock's quartet sequence because its programmatic subject is unusually explicit. *Pompeii* provides the historical and geographical framework, and the titles of the three movements give the listener an apparent narrative: *Via dell'Abbondanza - Porta Vesuvio: Destruction - Tempio d'Iside: Frozen Ash*. Yet the music itself resists straightforward illustration. There is no attempt to reproduce an eruption through conventional musical pictorialism. Instead, Bullock takes the historical fact of Pompeii as a starting point for an investigation into three states of musical existence: continuity, rupture and memory. The quartet is not really “about Vesuvius”. It is about what catastrophe does to time.

The **first movement** establishes the condition which the rest of the quartet will destroy. Its sustained musical writing creates an impression of continuity, as though the quartet inhabits a world in which musical events belong to one another and time seems capable of proceeding indefinitely. That apparent security is essential to the architecture of the work, because for destruction to have meaning there must first be something capable of being destroyed. The first movement therefore acquires retrospective importance. Once the listener has experienced the second movement, its continuity can no longer be regarded as neutral. It becomes the representation of a world that we know will disappear. This is one of Bullock's characteristic strategies: material acquires meaning through later experience. The beginning is changed by the end.

The **second movement** is the quartet's great rupture. The opening, *ff*, immediately establishes a new physical reality. The attacks are abrupt and heavily accented; rests become as important as notes; repeated rhythmic figures accumulate into an almost relentless mechanism. The writing is particularly effective because the violence is not confined to one register or one instrument. The four players participate in different aspects of the same process, and the quartet therefore ceases, temporarily, to function as four individuals in conversation. It becomes a single destructive organism.

This is perhaps the most important formal transformation of the movement. Bullock does not merely increase volume and speed. He changes the very ontology of the ensemble. The string quartet, traditionally one of the most intimate and conversational of musical forms, becomes a mechanism of collective violence. The cello's repeated figures, particularly early in the movement, contribute to the impression of relentless propulsion, while the upper instruments punctuate and fracture the texture above it.

The process is not simply cumulative. At bar 36, the music suddenly opens into a radically different world. Long notes and silences replace the previous density. This is one of the quartet's most significant structural gestures. The eruption has stopped, and that is precisely why the passage is so disturbing. Bullock does not portray destruction continuously. He portrays the moment when destruction becomes aftermath. The return of violent material later in the movement cannot therefore be heard as a simple repetition. We have already heard the silence, and consequently every subsequent attack carries the memory of what lies beyond it. This creates an unusual temporal structure: the movement contains its own before-and-after within itself. The music remembers itself.

The episodes around C, D, E and F progressively intensify this process, with rapid repeated figures, heavy accents and renewed *ff* passages. The violence has become systematic. That produces an important ambiguity: is the music still depicting the catastrophe, or has catastrophe become the condition in which the music now exists? Bullock never answers the question explicitly. He does not need to. The musical process answers it.

The **third movement** is perhaps the most extraordinary part of the quartet. After the extraordinary violent energy of II, its opening seems almost to suspend time. The indications *con sordino*, *non vibrato* and *vibrato* are written into the very sound-production of the instruments. This is not merely a change of tempo or dynamics. It is a change of physical substance. The strings no longer seem to be producing a continuous, expressive human sound in the conventional sense. They produce fragile remnants of sound. Here the title *Frozen Ash* becomes extraordinarily exact. Ash is what remains when something has been consumed. *Frozen Ash* suggests that even the process of dissolution has stopped. The music has reached a condition in which change itself has almost ceased. The most striking technical feature of the movement is the carefully controlled alternation between *vibrato* and *non vibrato*. In ordinary string playing, vibrato is often treated as an expressive colouring; here it becomes structural. A vibrated note and a non vibrated note do not merely sound different. They seem to occupy different states of existence. The vibrated tone retains warmth and human presence, while the non-vibrated tone seems colder, more remote, almost preserved. Bullock therefore creates a remarkable expressive vocabulary without resorting to conventional thematic rhetoric. Life and absence are differentiated by the manner in which the note itself is allowed to live. It is an unusually economical musical idea.

The choice of the *Tempio d'Iside* as the setting for the **final movement** is equally significant. After the street of the first movement and the catastrophe of the second, we arrive at a sacred space. The music accordingly becomes contemplative rather than dramatic. The title gives the listener a place in which to imagine the final state of the quartet, but the music does not illustrate architecture. Instead, the temple becomes a metaphor for memory and preservation. The movement's long pauses and sparse textures create the impression that the listener is no longer witnessing events but examining their remains. The music has become archaeological. That may be the most revealing description of the entire final movement.

The final pages are exceptionally restrained. From bar 44 onwards, the texture progressively thins, with instruments disappearing into silence and isolated sustained notes remaining behind. This is not a conventional slow-movement conclusion. There is no restoration of the opening's world, no reconciliation and no triumphant return. Instead, the quartet gradually approaches silence as the final historical condition. The last page is particularly eloquent. In the last two bars the final violin note is marked *non vibrato* and allowed to remain suspended. The work ends not with a cadential statement but with a vanishing. The distinction is fundamental: the music does not resolve the catastrophe. It preserves its consequences.

Seen as a whole, *Pompeii* possesses a remarkably clear large-scale architecture. *Via dell'Abbondanza* establishes continuity and life; *Porta Vesuvio* represents fragmentation and destruction; and *Tempio d'Iside* embodies suspension and memory. Yet there is a further, subtler relationship. The first and third movements are both characterised by sustained sound, and are therefore superficially similar, but they mean opposite things. In I, sustained sound means continuing existence. In III, sustained sound means what remains after existence has been interrupted. The same basic musical condition has acquired a completely different meaning. This is one of the quartet's most sophisticated formal ideas.

There is finally a striking paradox at the centre of the work. *Pompeii* survived in the historical imagination because it was destroyed. The eruption annihilated the living city but simultaneously preserved it. Bullock's quartet performs something analogous. The first movement creates a musical world; the second destroys its continuity; the third preserves fragments of it. The quartet therefore becomes, in miniature, an act of musical archaeology. It does not reconstruct the lost world. It allows us to hear its absence.

That distinction places No. 22 rather beyond conventional programmatic composition. The historical subject provides the framework, but the deepest subject is something more universal: how does something continue to exist in our consciousness after it has ceased to exist in reality? Bullock's answer is not philosophical prose. It is musical form. A world is created, a world is destroyed, and then, in the extraordinary stillness of *Frozen Ash*, enough of that world remains for us to remember that it was there.

No. 22 should be marked as a significant point in the quartet sequence for one particular reason. With several of the earlier quartets, the external subject - place, person, history or memory - generates musical material. Here the relationship has become more profound: the subject generates a theory of musical time. That is a substantial development.

It makes *Pompeii* a particularly valuable quartet to place beside Nos. 20 and 21. There is a growing sense in these works that the programme is no longer something applied to the music. It is becoming a means of discovering what the music itself is capable of saying about memory, history, destruction and survival.

String Quartet No. 23 Op. 285

Abschied

Programme Note

Abschied – Farewell, written in Senheim, Germany in March 2019, is a quartet about departure, but not about departure as a single dramatic event. Its subject is the gradual realisation of absence: the awareness that something which has been present will no longer be so, and the strangely persistent presence of memory after departure.

The **first movement** begins with an uncompromising unanimity. All four instruments speak together, forcefully and rhythmically, in a succession of sharply articulated gestures. There is initially little that might conventionally be called elegiac. Instead, the music has an almost insistent quality, as though the quartet is attempting to articulate something that cannot yet quite be expressed.

Gradually, however, gesture gives way to melody. The texture relaxes and the upper instruments begin to sing over sustained cello notes. The music repeatedly alternates between activity and stillness, between sharply defined gestures and long-held sonorities. These contrasts are not merely formal: they suggest the changing psychological states accompanying separation - insistence, recollection, resistance and, eventually, acceptance.

The long sustained passages become increasingly important. Rather than simply providing repose, they suspend musical time, allowing the harmonic world to change almost imperceptibly. Movement itself consequently acquires expressive significance. The return of energetic material after these episodes can feel less like conventional development than like the intrusion of memory into the present.

The **second movement** deepens this conception. Its opening, at a slower tempo and dynamic, is markedly more exposed: the first violin initially sings above the cello while the inner voices are silent. The absence of the other instruments is itself part of the musical language. Voices enter, disappear and return; completeness is repeatedly followed by incompleteness. The quartet thus turns absence into texture.

By the later stages of the movement, the music becomes increasingly spare and contemplative. Eventually the first violin remains alone, sustaining a high note while the other three instruments have already fallen silent. The dynamic diminishes to *pp*, a *niente*, and the quartet ends beneath a final fermata.

The quartet does not dramatise farewell; it simply allows the sound of the departing world to disappear. Perhaps the most important characteristic of *Abschied* is therefore its refusal to equate farewell with sadness. Departure may contain grief, but it also contains memory, resistance, acceptance and the possibility of continuation. The work's emotional trajectory is consequently not linear. Things return after they have apparently disappeared; voices reappear after silence; familiar gestures acquire new meanings through repetition. Ultimately, *Abschied* is less about leaving than about what remains when leaving has occurred.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 23 occupies an intriguing position in the sequence of Bullock's quartets. After the historical and monumental perspective of *Constantine* and the archaeological catastrophe of *Pompeii*, *Abschied – Farewell* turns inward. Its scale is modest and its means economical, yet its expressive territory is unusually large. The title might initially suggest an elegy, but the music resists such an interpretation. The opening is vigorous, even confrontational. All four instruments participate in sharply articulated, accented figures, frequently separated by rests. The impression is of collective utterance rather than individual lament: the quartet speaks as a single body.

This is significant because the fundamental dramatic device of the work will eventually be the dissolution of that unity. The **first movement** therefore establishes a condition which the remainder of the quartet will progressively undermine. Its recurring gestures are subjected to changes of register, dynamics, density and duration. At bar 28, the music turns towards more sustained melodic writing; at later structural points, particularly around bars 44, 83, 122 and 187, extended sonorities interrupt or absorb the more active material. The result is a form that behaves less like a conventional narrative than like memory. Memory does not proceed neatly from beginning to end. It returns, interrupts, suddenly becomes vivid and then recedes. Something apparently concluded can reappear with extraordinary force. Bullock's formal method reflects this psychology without needing to describe it programmatically.

The most striking transformation occurs in the **second movement**. Here the quartet begins not as four equal voices but with an exposed first violin and cello, while the inner instruments remain silent. This is a deceptively simple alteration of texture, but its implications are considerable. Absence has become a compositional parameter. The silence of an instrument is no longer merely a rest. The listener has already heard that instrument, and its absence is therefore perceptible as absence. This is one of the quartet's most sophisticated ideas. Bullock does not need to write a musical equivalent of the word farewell. Instead, he constructs a situation in which the listener experiences separation through the changing presence and absence of the four voices. At one point the first violin disappears; elsewhere the full quartet returns; later individual voices retreat again. Presence consequently becomes unstable, and once presence has become unstable, every return carries memory of the preceding absence. This also explains the extraordinary importance of the quartet's sustained passages. The long notes are not simply harmonic prolongations. They create a temporal environment in which the listener becomes conscious of tiny changes: a note moving, a voice entering, a register shifting, a sonority thinning. The music teaches us to listen to disappearance.

That process culminates in the closing bars. From bar 117 the first violin alone sustains its high register while the remaining instruments are silent. The sound diminishes to pp, *a niente*. The final note does not so much conclude the quartet as cease to occupy audible space. The ending is therefore not a conventional resolution. Indeed, there is something almost paradoxical about it. A string quartet normally implies four voices in relationship. Here, at the very end, the quartet has become one voice — and then that voice itself disappears.

The formal journey can consequently be understood as a progression from unity through differentiation, remembrance, resistance and withdrawal towards solitude and, finally, disappearance. That is why the work is more profound than its title might initially suggest. *Abschied* is not simply music about someone going away. It is music about the gradual transformation of presence into memory.

There is also a wider significance when the quartet is considered within the developing sequence of works. *Pompeii* was concerned with the survival of a vanished world: what catastrophe leaves behind and how the past remains embedded in the present. *Abschied* moves one stage closer to the human experience of that process. Here disappearance is no longer an historical fact observed from outside. It becomes an experience enacted within the musical texture itself. That may be the deepest connection between the two works. In *Pompeii*, something is gone but remains. In *Abschied*, something is present but is in the process of becoming gone. The distinction is subtle, but musically profound.

There is consequently no need to assign a specific biographical subject to the farewell. The score itself gives us something more universal. It tells us that departure is not a point in time. It is a process through which presence gradually acquires the character of memory. Perhaps that is why the final *a niente* is so effective. Nothing is resolved, nothing is explained, and nothing is replaced. The sound simply disappears. The farewell is complete not when the music stops, but when the listener becomes aware that there is no longer anyone left to speak.

String Quartet No. 24 Op. 289

St. Petersburg

Programme Note

St. Petersburg is a three-movement quartet completed at Senheim on 20 - 21 June 2019. It contains fundamental contrasts between contemplation and extraordinarily active motion.

The Russian character of the work does not arise from the quotation of Russian folk melodies or from an attempt to imitate an established Russian musical style. Rather, it is present in the behaviour of the thematic material itself. The themes are constructed from relatively small cells which repeatedly return, circle around themselves, and undergo subtle changes of pitch, register, rhythm and context. Rather than following a predominantly linear trajectory, the melodic material often seems to revolve around a centre. A cell may appear, repeat, turn back upon itself and re-emerge in a slightly altered form. This deliberate circularity provides much of the quartet's Russian character.

The **first movement** begins quietly, with the cello introducing the musical material before the other instruments gradually enter. The music consequently seems to establish a place progressively rather than presenting it as a finished object. Small melodic cells pass between the instruments and are repeatedly recalled, creating an impression of movement within a relatively stable musical environment.

The **central movement** transforms this principle into energy. The cellular material is accelerated into continuous semiquaver movement. The effect is highly active, but the music does not necessarily progress in a straight line. Repeated figures generate motion through circulation and recurrence. The quartet can become extraordinarily energetic while remaining anchored to the repeated return of its basic material. This gives the movement a particularly appropriate relationship to St. Petersburg. The city is not represented pictorially; rather, its musical identity is created through the sense of a place continually being revisited from different directions.

The **third movement** returns to the tempo of the opening, but not to its original state. The musical world has been transformed by the experience of the central movement. The recurring cells now appear in a more spacious and reflective environment, often separated by silences and sustained sonorities. In the final pages the music becomes increasingly sparse, the dynamics fall towards pp, and the final melodic figures are played without *vibrato*. The recurrent cells have not disappeared; rather, they have been stripped down to their most characteristic contours.

Thus the quartet may be understood as a musical journey through three related states: place, movement and memory, unified by recurring thematic cells. In effect the music circles back upon itself, just as memory returns repeatedly to a place which has acquired meaning. *St. Petersburg* is therefore not a musical portrait of the city. It is an exploration of how a place may become a pattern of recurrence within musical memory.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 24 marks an important development in Dafydd Bullock's treatment of geographical identity. The title *St. Petersburg* inevitably invites questions about Russian musical influence, yet the most important Russian element in the quartet is not melodic quotation, folk material or stylistic imitation. It is the construction of melody itself. Bullock's themes frequently consist of relatively small cells which repeat and circle back upon themselves. They do not necessarily behave as linear themes whose purpose is to travel from one tonal or emotional destination to another. Instead, they establish a musical centre and repeatedly orbit it. This is a deliberately Russian characteristic, and it is also one of the most important keys to understanding the quartet.

The **opening** provides an immediate example. The cello introduces a compact melodic figure, and the upper strings subsequently adopt related versions of the same small-scale vocabulary. The material is recognisable not because it is repeated mechanically, but because its identity survives transformation. A cell can be repeated, shifted, rhythmically altered, transferred to another instrument, extended, compressed, or placed against a different harmonic environment, yet the listener continues to recognise it. This changes the nature of thematic development. Development does not necessarily mean departure from the original. Here, development can mean returning to the original from another direction. That is the circular principle at the heart of the quartet.

The **first movement** creates sufficient space for these relationships to be heard clearly. The cello's opening figure does not function merely as a theme in the conventional sense; it establishes a vocabulary. When the other instruments subsequently enter, they do not simply accompany the cello. They begin to inhabit the same vocabulary. This creates a fascinating relationship between place and identity. A place is recognisable because certain things recur within it: streets, buildings, rhythms of movement, visual patterns, sounds and associations. Similarly, this musical *St. Petersburg* is recognisable because certain cells continually return. The quartet therefore does not describe the city. It constructs a musical analogue of familiarity, in which one encounters something again and recognises it. The circular behaviour of the themes also explains why the music can sometimes feel simultaneously static and active. The cells generate movement, but because they repeatedly return to themselves, they resist purely linear progression. The result is not stasis. It is circulation. This distinction becomes crucial in the second movement.

The **central movement** appears to create a conventional fast middle movement, but its real function is more profound. The small thematic cells of the first movement are subjected to acceleration. What was previously a contemplative recurrence becomes highly animated recurrence. The music now moves rapidly because the cells move rapidly, but the cells still return. Thus the movement's enormous energy does not derive principally from the introduction of constantly new thematic material. It derives from the repeated cycling and reconfiguration of existing material. This is what gives the movement its distinctive Russian character. It is not "Russian" because it sounds like a quotation from a Russian composer. It is Russian because the melodic thought has become circular. This also explains something which initially seemed paradoxical in the score. The second movement can sound as though it is rushing forward at extraordinary speed while simultaneously possessing a strangely repetitive, almost obsessive quality. The two things are not contradictory; they are the consequence of cellular construction. A small figure repeats. It returns. It is displaced. Another instrument takes it up. It comes back altered. The listener experiences tremendous motion, but the underlying musical identity remains remarkably stable. That is why the movement feels less like a journey from A to B than like movement within a defined environment. And this is precisely where the title *St. Petersburg* becomes musically significant.

The **third movement** returns to the tempo of the opening, but the musical world is no longer the same. The opening is sparse and spacious, with long-held sonorities and an initially absent first violin. Gradually the small melodic cells reappear. This is not recapitulation in the simple sense. It is remembering. And the cellular principle becomes particularly expressive here. Memory itself behaves like a cell. A remembered fragment rarely returns exactly as it was. It returns partially, from another register, in another harmonic setting, perhaps with a changed rhythm, and sometimes incomplete. But one recognises it. That is precisely what happens to the thematic material in the third movement.

This gives the third movement a particular emotional character. The listener is no longer simply hearing a place; the listener is hearing the memory of having heard it. The recurring cells make that possible. A conventional long melody might represent a continuous recollection. A cell that repeatedly circles back represents something different: the mind returning to a particular detail. One remembers the fragment, then the fragment returns, then another fragment, and then the first one again. Memory is circular, and so is the thematic language of the quartet. The closing pages bring this process to an extraordinary degree of concentration. At bar 101, the music still presents recognisable melodic cells, but the texture is increasingly sparse. By bar 121 the dynamic has fallen to pp, and the final exposed material is marked *non vibrato*. The cells have survived almost to the very end. They are no longer generating large-scale motion; they have become traces.

This is an important distinction from *Abschied*. No. 23 ended by allowing the final voice to disappear. No. 24 does something different. It allows the identity of the music to survive even as the music itself becomes sparse. The final pages therefore do not represent the destruction of the thematic material. They represent its reduction to essence. This distinction deserves emphasis because it is central to the work. There is a great difference between using Russian material and thinking musically in a Russian way. The first might involve quotation, folk melody or stylistic imitation. The second can operate at the level of thematic behaviour. In *St. Petersburg*, Russian character resides principally in that behaviour. The cell is repeated, it circles, it returns, and it is transformed without losing its identity. The music therefore has a strong sense of centripetal thematic gravity. It keeps coming home.

String Quartet No. 25 Op. 294

Programme Note

String Quartet No. 25 is a four-movement work whose musical character emerges from the transformation of relatively small gestures and thematic ideas under radically different conditions.

The **first movement** immediately establishes a world of rapid movement and sharply defined exchanges. The upper strings initially carry much of the material before the lower instruments become increasingly involved. The movement develops through successive changes in texture and density, rather than through a simple linear progression. A particularly important transformation occurs when the cello assumes a continuous rapid figure beneath sustained or more slowly moving material in the upper strings. The cello becomes, in effect, a hidden engine within the texture. What begins as a local rhythmic impulse gradually spreads through the quartet until all four instruments participate in increasingly concentrated activity. The movement therefore traces a process of accumulation: fragmented gestures become sustained motion, individual motion becomes collective motion, and collective motion eventually reaches a point of exhaustion. The closing pages withdraw this energy until only sparse, sustained sonorities remain.

The **second movement** occupies a markedly different temporal world. Short, articulated gestures are placed against longer sustained sonorities, producing a continual tension between event and duration. Periods of considerable rhythmic and dynamic activity alternate with passages of extreme spaciousness. The material of the quartet is thus not abandoned but reconsidered. A gesture which in the first movement possessed urgency can, in the second, be slowed down, isolated and heard for its melodic and harmonic character. Silence becomes an active part of the musical structure.

The **third movement** is the most sustained and integrated of the four. Its long melodic lines allow the four instruments to participate in a shared musical discourse without losing their individual identities. The texture moves between collective sonority and more differentiated instrumental voices, while *pizzicato* and sustained notes create contrasting kinds of musical time.

The **fourth movement** returns to a fast tempo and restores the rhythmic energy of the opening movement. But it does not simply repeat it. By this point the quartet has explored the same musical impulses as sustained sound, dialogue and collective melody. The final movement therefore brings the work's various kinds of motion into a single highly concentrated rhythmic environment. Its closing gesture is deliberately un-grand. After the intensity of the preceding music, the quartet contracts to brief, clearly articulated sounds, ending with *pizzicato* rather than a massive concluding sonority.

The four movements may consequently be heard not as four unrelated characters but as four perspectives on a single musical language: motion, reflection, song and renewed motion. The coherence of the quartet lies in the fact that the same musical world can sustain all four.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 25 is, in one sense, conspicuously free of programme. After *Constantine*, *Pompeii*, *Abschied* and *St. Petersburg*, there is no title directing the listener towards a historical figure, a catastrophe, a human experience or a geographical environment. There is simply String Quartet No. 25. That absence is worth respecting. It allows the quartet to be considered on its own musical terms, and what emerges is a remarkably coherent investigation of musical energy and its transformations. The four movements do not represent four unrelated moods. They constitute four different conditions in which essentially the same musical personality is allowed to operate.

The **first movement** begins at speed, so there is no gradual awakening. The music begins already with considerable energy. Yet the opening is not simply a torrent of semiquavers. The instruments initially occupy different degrees of activity, with the upper strings establishing the first gestures before the lower voices progressively enter. This is important because the movement's energy is constructed: it does not arrive fully formed, but accumulates. Small gestures become increasingly interconnected, rhythmic figures migrate between instruments, textures thicken, and the four players gradually cease to behave as separate sources of activity and begin to form a collective mechanism.

The cello's role is particularly revealing. When it takes up the rapid repeated figure beneath the more sustained upper voices, it introduces a second temporal layer. The upper instruments can appear to inhabit one kind of time while the cello inhabits another. The result is not merely accompaniment. The cello becomes the motor of the musical structure. This is one of the quartet's most effective procedures because the listener gradually becomes aware that the apparent stability of the upper texture is dependent upon continuous activity beneath it. As the movement progresses, the rapid figure ceases to belong exclusively to the cello. Similar activity spreads through the ensemble, and individual impulse becomes collective energy. The quartet itself changes character. At first we hear four players with different functions; eventually we hear four players participating in a single process. But Bullock does not allow that collective state to remain permanent. The texture repeatedly contracts, expands, fragments and reassembles. The movement therefore does not simply build towards a climax; it tests the stability of collective energy.

Eventually this energy has nowhere further to go, and the final pages withdraw it. What had become dense becomes sparse, what had been continuous becomes intermittent, and what had been collective becomes isolated. The movement ends not so much with resolution as with cessation.

In the **second movement** the rapidity of the first movement is slowed sufficiently for individual gestures to become objects of attention. Short articulated figures appear against sustained harmonic fields, and the listener can now hear the shape of a gesture rather than simply experiencing its propulsion. This is an important characteristic of the quartet as a whole: Bullock does not necessarily replace material when changing movements. Instead, he changes its behaviour. A gesture can be accelerated, slowed, isolated, repeated, transferred between instruments, placed against sustained harmony, or absorbed into a larger collective texture. Its identity survives the transformation. This is one of the reasons the four movements belong unmistakably to the same work.

The central sections of the second movement make particularly strong use of space. After passages of considerable density and dynamic force, the music can suddenly become almost empty, leaving only one or two instruments active while others sustain or fall silent. Silence therefore acquires structural importance. It is not simply the absence of sound; it determines how the next sound is perceived. A single melodic gesture after a long silence possesses a weight which the same gesture

would not possess inside a continuous texture. This is a recurring characteristic of Bullock's quartet writing, but here it becomes almost the subject of the movement. How little music is necessary for us to hear a great deal?

The **third movement** represents the great change of perspective. The energy which dominated the first movement and repeatedly disturbed the second is no longer the principal concern. Instead, the four instruments can breathe together. Long melodic values predominate, and the voices frequently share rhythmic profiles while retaining independent contours. This produces a particularly interesting kind of unity. It is not unison and it is not simple homophony. It is collective identity without loss of individuality. Each instrument remains recognisable as a voice, yet the four voices appear to belong to the same musical thought. That is perhaps the emotional centre of the quartet - not because it is necessarily the "slow movement", but because it provides the point at which the quartet's four individual identities can coexist without competing for dominance. The *pizzicato* passages here are especially revealing. A sustained upper voice and a *pizzicato* cello do not merely produce different timbres; they occupy different kinds of temporal experience. The sustained note asks us to hear duration, while the *pizzicato* asks us to hear the instant. When the two coexist, the music contains multiple temporal scales simultaneously. This is something that has appeared repeatedly in the quartets we have considered, and it is becoming increasingly clear that it is not incidental. Bullock's musical thinking frequently allows different kinds of time to coexist within the same harmonic field. Here that technique becomes particularly transparent.

The **fourth movement** returns to speed but it is not simply a return to the first. The difference is that we have heard the second and third movements. We have heard the musical material slowed down, stripped of its kinetic function and allowed to become lyrical. Consequently, when the rapid figures return, they carry the memory of those other states. The same musical energy now has greater expressive range.

One of the most striking differences between the first and fourth movements is the distribution of energy. In the first, the cello becomes a particularly important motoric force. In the fourth, rapid activity is much more thoroughly shared among the four instruments. The quartet itself has become the motor. This is a significant formal development: the work has moved from one instrument driving the others to four instruments driving one another. The distinction is subtle, but it gives the finale a sense of collective purpose.

The fourth movement also demonstrates something characteristic of Bullock's rhythmic writing: rests can generate momentum. The repeated attacks are frequently interrupted by rests, accents and changes of articulation. One might expect such interruptions to weaken the forward motion; instead, they sharpen it. The listener becomes conscious of the next attack precisely because the previous one has been cut off. Sound creates expectation, silence intensifies expectation, and sound fulfils it. The rests are therefore not gaps in the rhythmic structure. They are part of its propulsion.

After the considerable rhythmic energy of the fourth movement, the closing pages deliberately refuse the conventional grand conclusion. The texture contracts, the dynamic diminishes, and the quartet ends *pizzicato*. That final gesture is particularly effective because it changes the physical nature of the sound. After sustained notes, rapid figures, powerful attacks and lyrical phrases, the last sound is dry and immediate. It is almost tactile. And then it is gone - the energy has run its course and so the quartet stops.

Seen retrospectively, the work's four-movement architecture can be understood as a continuous process in which energy is generated, slowed and examined, transformed into shared song, and finally released collectively. The important word is transformed. The quartet does not simply

alternate fast and slow movements. Each movement changes our understanding of the previous one. The energy of the first becomes the material of the second; the reflective world of the second prepares the lyricism of the third; and the lyricism of the third alters the meaning of the renewed energy in the fourth. Thus the finale is not a return to the beginning. It is the beginning after everything that has happened in between.

This makes No. 25 particularly interesting in relation to Nos. 21 - 24. The previous four quartets increasingly connected musical material with historical, geographical or experiential ideas: No. 21 with a person, No. 22 with catastrophe and place, No. 23 with departure, and No. 24 with place and Russian musical identity. No. 25 strips those external reference points away. And what remains? Music itself, not as abstraction, but as behaviour. An idea gathers force; force becomes texture; texture becomes dialogue; dialogue becomes shared melody; shared melody becomes renewed energy; and energy finally ceases. That makes the work a valuable reminder that the interpretative richness of the later quartets does not depend upon programmes. The same depth is available when the only subject is what four instruments do to one another.

The achievement of No. 25 lies in the fact that the four movements make musical sense as four different states of the same organism. The quartet is born as differentiated voices, discovers collective energy, learns stillness, learns to sing together, becomes energetic again, and finally reduces itself to four small *pizzicato* sounds. There is no moral, narrative or symbolism required.

String Quartet No. 26 Op. 296

Nadolig - Christmas

Programme Note

String Quartet No. 26 is a Welsh Christmas quartet in the fullest sense: not merely a work written at Christmas, but a work whose musical substance is deeply rooted in Welsh Christmas tradition. The quartet was composed at Senheim on 5 - 6 December 2019. Its subtitle, *From Darkness Light Reborn*, provides the broad trajectory of the work, while *Nadolig* identifies the specifically Welsh cultural world through which that transformation takes place.

The **first movement** begins in darkness. The cello alone introduces the musical world. The opening is spare, low and quiet, with the other three instruments initially absent. The music gradually expands as the viola and violins enter, and the small opening idea acquires increasing harmonic and contrapuntal significance. This opening material becomes the quartet's own thematic identity. It is not simply a theme belonging to the first movement. It will return later, transformed by its encounters with Welsh traditional melodies.

The **second movement** changes the atmosphere completely. Its rapid tempo and highly active rhythmic character introduce the Welsh *plygain* tradition, beginning with the carol *Deffro Ddaear Llawenha*. The *plygain* material provides the first explicitly traditional Welsh voice of the quartet. However the movement does not simply present the carol as a quotation. It is placed in dialogue with the opening theme of the quartet. That theme returns, extensively adapted and altered, and is subsequently brought into relationship with *Suo Gân*. The Welsh lullaby provides a striking contrast to the movement's energetic character, bringing an intimate and tender dimension into the increasingly active musical texture. The opening theme of the quartet then returns at the end of the movement, but now tonally transformed. The thematic material with which the quartet began has therefore passed through a specifically Welsh musical environment and emerged changed.

The **third movement** begins with the Welsh carol *Nos Galan*. Its presence establishes immediately that the Welsh traditional material is not confined to the second movement but forms the thematic substance of the quartet's final stage. Again, however, quotation is only the beginning of the compositional process. *Suo Gân* returns, and later the material of *Nos Galan* is subjected to a retrograde inversion. The familiar melody is therefore made to turn back upon itself, becoming at once recognisable and transformed.

This is characteristic of the quartet's larger conception. The traditional melodies are not decorative additions to an otherwise unrelated musical structure. They become part of the work's own thematic language. Welsh material and original material continually encounter, transform and illuminate one another. The result is a progression which may be understood as: darkness - awakening - transformation - rebirth, and as well :original theme - Welsh tradition - transformation - renewed identity.

The Christmas significance of the work consequently lies not simply in its subject matter. It lies in the musical idea of rebirth itself: material returns, but never exactly as before. The final light is therefore not merely a new sonority replacing the darkness with which the quartet began, it is the old material reborn.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 26 occupies a distinctive position among Bullock's quartets because its cultural identity is unusually explicit while remaining thoroughly integrated into the compositional structure. The title says **Nadolig**, and the music demonstrates why. This is not a quartet which happens to contain references to Christmas, nor is it a conventional setting or arrangement of Welsh carols. Instead, Welsh Christmas tradition becomes one of the principal materials through which the quartet explores a more fundamental musical idea: rebirth through transformation. The subtitle ***From Darkness Light Reborn*** consequently describes not only an emotional or spiritual progression but a precise compositional process. Material disappears, returns, changes and is reborn.

The **first movement** establishes the quartet's own musical identity before the traditional Welsh material enters. The cello begins alone in an unusually exposed texture. This opening has an elemental quality. There is no attempt to create immediate fullness; instead, the quartet begins with one voice. The other instruments gradually enter, and the musical material expands through them. This has a double significance. On the surface, the texture is simply becoming richer. Structurally, however, the opening idea is becoming portable. It is establishing itself strongly enough that it can subsequently survive transformation. That is essential to what follows. The theme of the first movement is not ultimately important because it belongs to that movement; it is important because it can leave it and remain itself.

The **second movement** introduces a completely different musical world. Its opening is based on the Welsh *plygain* tradition, specifically *Deffro Ddaear Llawenha*. This is an important compositional decision. The Welsh carol does not appear as an ornamental quotation placed upon an otherwise neutral musical background. It becomes the first major traditional source through which the quartet's own thematic material is transformed. The movement therefore establishes a dialogue between Bullock's theme and Welsh tradition, but the two are not kept in separate compartments. The opening theme of the first movement returns, highly adapted and altered. That is a crucial distinction. A literal reprise would simply restore the theme; this is something else. The theme is remembered through transformation. Its identity remains perceptible, but its musical circumstances have changed. The appearance of *Suo Gân* deepens this process. The Welsh lullaby introduces an entirely different kind of musical expression from the *plygain* material. The movement has been energetic and rhythmically animated; suddenly the musical world encounters something intimate, inward and tender. This is not merely a contrast of tempo or mood. The lullaby changes the meaning of the surrounding material.

The quartet has moved from communal Welsh Christmas singing towards something private: the voice of the lullaby. That distinction is particularly apt within the larger conception of *Nadolig*. Christmas is simultaneously communal and intimate. It belongs to the gathered community and to the individual memory of childhood, family and home. Bullock's use of *Suo Gân* brings that intimate dimension directly into the musical structure. Perhaps the most important event of the second movement comes at its conclusion. The opening theme of the first movement returns again, but now tonally transformed. This gives the movement an extraordinary formal function. It began with Welsh traditional material, encountered the original thematic material, encountered *Suo Gân*, and ends by returning to the original idea — but the original idea is no longer musically where it began. This is thematic rebirth in miniature. The theme survives, but survival is not restoration. It has been changed by experience. That is a much richer conception of thematic development than simply introducing contrasting material and subsequently returning to the opening.

The **third movement** takes the process further. It begins with *Nos Galan*. This is significant because the Welsh carol is now no longer an episode within the second movement's larger structure. It becomes the foundation upon which the final movement is built. The quartet has moved increasingly deeply into its Welsh Christmas identity. But again, Bullock does not leave the material untouched. *Suo Gân* returns, and the lullaby has itself therefore become part of the quartet's developing memory. The listener has heard it before, so its return possesses a different significance from its first appearance. It is now not merely a Welsh lullaby; it is a remembered element of this quartet. That is the crucial transformation.

Then comes one of the most revealing compositional decisions in the work. At E, *Nos Galan* is subjected to retrograde inversion. By this point the quartet has established the principle that traditional material is not sacred in the sense of being untouchable. It is musical material. It can be quoted, adapted, transformed, turned upside down and backwards, and yet its identity can remain audible. This is exactly what makes the procedure compositionally interesting. A traditional melody enters the work carrying its cultural memory. Bullock then subjects that melody to his own compositional processes. The result is neither simply *Nos Galan* nor something unrelated to it. It is *Nos Galan* remembered through Bullock's musical language.

This is, I think, the central issue in No. 26. There is a temptation to describe such a work simply as a quartet incorporating Welsh carols. That would substantially underestimate what is happening. The traditional melodies function simultaneously as source material, memory, contrast, structural markers, cultural identity and material for transformation. They are therefore simultaneously traditional and compositional. The crucial question is not where a melody came from, but what happens to it once it enters the quartet. That is where Bullock's authorship becomes most apparent.

The subtitle *From Darkness Light Reborn* can now be understood on three levels: structural, thematic and cultural. Structurally, the quartet moves from the sparse opening of the first movement towards increasingly full and active musical states. Thematically, the opening theme repeatedly disappears into other musical contexts and returns transformed. Culturally, Welsh Christmas melodies enter the quartet as inherited musical memory and are reborn through a new compositional context. These three processes reinforce one another. The light is therefore not something simply added to darkness. It grows out of what was already there. That is perhaps the most convincing aspect of the work.

The use of *Deffro Ddaear Llawenha*, *Suo Gân* and *Nos Galan* makes the Welsh identity of the work unmistakable, yet the quartet does not become a pastiche of Welsh traditional music. That is because the melodies are continually subjected to the structural demands of the quartet. They are redistributed among instruments, rhythmically altered, harmonically transformed, brought into counterpoint with original material, fragmented and recalled, and ultimately made capable of undergoing procedures as rigorous as retrograde inversion. The result is therefore neither traditional music nor modern music quoting tradition. It is traditional material absorbed into an individual compositional language.

Seen from this perspective, No. 26 also belongs naturally beside the preceding quartets. No. 24, *St. Petersburg*, taught us to recognise cultural identity in the behaviour of musical cells. No. 26 does something different but related. It allows cultural identity to reside in recognisable inherited melodies, while subjecting those melodies to the same transformational thinking that governs original material.

There is a further continuity. In *Abschied*, memory was associated with disappearance and return. In *St. Petersburg*, memory was associated with place. In *Nadolig*, memory becomes tradition. The

inherited melody is something that has survived across generations. When it enters the quartet, it is already a memory. When Bullock transforms it, that memory becomes new again. That is precisely the meaning of rebirth. The Welsh title is therefore not an afterthought. It is the key to the quartet's cultural and musical identity. Nadolig means Christmas, but here Christmas is understood through Welsh musical memory: *plygain*, *Deffro Ddaear Llawenha*, *Suo Gân* and *Nos Galan*. These are not simply references to Wales. They are the musical substance through which the quartet's central idea is enacted.

There is something particularly appropriate in the choice of a lullaby among them. The quartet begins in darkness, encounters the communal world of Christmas singing, remembers the lullaby, returns to the carol, and transforms the inherited material itself. The child asleep in darkness and the promise of light are therefore present without requiring the music to become literal or illustrative.

String Quartet No. 26 is ultimately a work about continuity through transformation. Its central proposition might be expressed very simply: nothing needs to remain unchanged in order to remain itself. The opening theme returns, but altered. The Welsh carols return, but transformed. *Suo Gân* returns in a new context. *Nos Galan* is turned through retrograde inversion. And yet the identity of each survives. This is why *From Darkness Light Reborn* is such an apt subtitle. The light is not the opposite of the darkness. It is darkness transformed. And *Nadolig* is not merely the setting in which that transformation takes place. Welsh Christmas tradition is itself one of the materials through which the transformation is made possible.

String Quartet No. 27 Op. 304

Alba

Programme Note

String Quartet 27, *Alba*, was composed at Senheim between 24 and 26 May 2020 and is dedicated In Memoriam Ronald Stevenson. The title *Alba* — Scotland — might suggest a musical portrait of a country. The quartet, however, is more personal than that. Scotland here is a landscape of musical memory: the memory of places, songs, friendship, performance and an earlier musical life.

At the centre of that memory stands Ronald Stevenson, the distinguished Scottish composer who was an early and important supporter of Bullock's music. The most personal element is *Summer Isle*, a short piano piece he wrote on a boat at Ullapool. Stevenson subsequently adopted the piece as an encore in some of his own recitals. It therefore acquired an association not only with the Scottish landscape in which it was conceived, but with Stevenson himself. *Summer Isle* had already appeared as a piano solo at the climax of his Kirk Opera *The Passioun o Sanct Andraa*, dedicated to Stevenson. In *Alba*, however, it undergoes a new transformation. In the fourth movement it enters into musical dialogue with the Scottish song *The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond*, and the two are ultimately blended. The *Summer Isle* material is also absorbed into the vigorous rhythmic writing based on the characteristic Scotch Snap. Thus three kinds of Scottish identity coexist: landscape, through *Summer Isle* and its Ullapool origins; tradition, through *Loch Lomond* and the Scotch Snap; personal memory, through Stevenson's connection with *Summer Isle*. The quartet does not present these elements as separate quotations. They are progressively absorbed into its own musical language.

The four movements trace a deliberately contrasting but continuous journey. The **first** establishes the quartet's reflective world, in which memory and homage are already present. From there the **second movement** turns outward. Its rapid 6/8 pulse, strongly accented rhythms and extensive use of *pizzicato* create a vigorous physical energy, drawing upon the characteristic rhythmic impulse of Scotland, the Scotch Snap. Yet this is not quotation. The rhythmic figure becomes a generative element, passed from instrument to instrument and developed through accumulation, contrast and contrapuntal interaction. Scotland is heard here as movement: communal, energetic and alive.

The **third movement** makes the most radical change of atmosphere. After the physical exuberance of the second, the music becomes spacious and contemplative. Long-held notes, gently arching melodic phrases, silence and carefully changing harmonies replace the rhythmic propulsion. The movement moves from *pizzicato* into *arco* and from rhythmic identity towards song. If the second movement presents Scotland as something lived and danced, the third suggests Scotland remembered and contemplated. Its stillness is therefore not an interruption in the quartet's argument but its emotional centre.

The **final movement** brings the accumulated experience of the work together. Scottish rhythmic energy returns, but now it carries the memory of what has preceded it. The music enters into dialogue with *Summer Isle*, associated with Ronald Stevenson, and eventually with *The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond*. These references are not presented as external quotations pasted onto the quartet; they are absorbed into its own musical language. Tradition becomes memory, and memory becomes personal expression.

The final pages withdraw from this rhythmic energy into sustained sonorities and silence. The score ends quietly, after the movement's considerable accumulation of rhythmic and melodic activity. The result is not a musical monument in the conventional sense but rather a remembrance of Scotland, times, places and experiences through music.

The dedication to Stevenson is consequently more than a commemorative gesture. Stevenson represents a particular musical understanding of Scotland in which tradition, landscape, history and individual imagination are inseparable. Alba responds to that understanding without attempting to imitate his voice. The quartet ends not with a triumphant assertion of Scottish identity but with something more complex: the recognition that musical tradition survives through memory, transformation and personal experience.

Discussion

There is a temptation with a work entitled *Alba* to look for Scotland immediately in the music: folk melodies, characteristic rhythms, perhaps the musical imitation of pipes or dance. **String Quartet No. 27** eventually provides allusions of this kind, but its conception is considerably more subtle. Scotland is not presented simply as a subject. It is presented as a network of memories.

At its centre stands Ronald Stevenson, whose importance to Bullock's early musical development gives the dedication an unusually personal significance. Stevenson was not merely an admired Scottish composer. He was an early and crucial supporter of Bullock's own music, and his later association with *Summer Isle* gives the quartet a direct line between personal history and Scottish musical identity. This distinction is fundamental. *Alba* is not primarily about Scotland as an idea. It is about Scotland as remembered through music.

The **first movement** initially avoids an obvious melodic declaration. The opening consists of sustained sonorities, widely distributed among the four instruments, from which shorter articulated gestures gradually emerge. This is an unusually appropriate beginning for a quartet concerned with landscape. The music does not immediately tell us what to recognise; it asks us first to inhabit a space.

The sustained sonorities establish a field within which smaller events occur. A brief *non legato* figure appears, another voice answers, harmonic weight accumulates, and the quartet moves from spaciousness towards greater articulation. The procedure is important because it establishes a distinction that persists through the work: landscape and event, continuity and gesture, stillness and movement. The Scottish character of the quartet therefore does not need to announce itself through a folk melody at the outset. The landscape comes first; the song will come later.

As the quartet develops, sustained sonority increasingly gives way to repeated attacks and more sharply articulated material. The music acquires weight through recurrence. This is one of the characteristic features of Bullock's compositional language: a musical object becomes significant because it returns in altered circumstances. A chord returns with different voicing, a gesture migrates to another instrument, or a rhythmic figure becomes more insistent. The identity of the material survives while its function changes. In *Alba*, that procedure becomes particularly important because the inherited Scottish material will eventually be subjected to exactly the same processes as Bullock's original material. The traditional and the personal are not treated according to different compositional rules. They become part of the same musical organism.

The deepest personal thread of the quartet is *Summer Isle*. The piece was written by Bullock on a boat at Ullapool and, in itself, therefore already contains a very specific relationship between place and music. But its history did not end there. Stevenson played *Summer Isle* as an encore in his own recitals, and the piece consequently acquired another layer of identity. It became a piece written in Scotland, a piece associated with Scotland, a piece of Bullock's own music, and a piece associated through performance with Ronald Stevenson. This is an unusually rich kind of musical memory. When *Summer Isle* enters *Alba*, it therefore does not arrive as an arbitrary quotation. It carries its own history with it.

There is another important layer. *Summer Isle* had already appeared in Bullock's *The Passioun o Sanct Andraa*, the Kirk Opera dedicated to Stevenson, where it occurs as a piano solo at the climax. But *Alba* does something new with it. Here, *Summer Isle* is placed alongside *The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond*. That distinction matters. The quartet is not simply repeating the role of *Summer Isle*

in *The Passioun*; it is re-contextualising it. The personal piece encounters a piece of the Scottish collective inheritance, and eventually the two are blended. That is a remarkable compositional idea. *Summer Isle* and *Loch Lomond* represent two very different kinds of musical memory. *Loch Lomond* belongs to the shared cultural imagination, while *Summer Isle* belongs to Bullock's personal musical history. One is inherited; the other is autobiographical. But in *Alba* they become capable of occupying the same musical space.

This is where the quartet's conception becomes more profound than simple musical nationalism. The question is not what does Scotland sound like? It is what does Scotland sound like when remembered by this particular composer? The answer necessarily includes both inherited and personal material. The vigorous rhythmic writing beginning at B in the **fourth movement** is therefore especially important. The Scotch Snap gives the music a strongly identifiable Scottish rhythmic physicality, but its real compositional importance lies in what it does to the other material. The rhythm does not merely accompany *Summer Isle* and *Loch Lomond*; it transforms their musical environment. The lyrical and the rhythmic become interdependent. The landscape acquires movement, the song acquires physical energy, and the personal memory is absorbed into the national rhythm.

This is a very different procedure from simply presenting a folk tune followed by an original theme. The materials are becoming indistinguishable within the compositional process. The fourth movement can consequently be understood as the point at which the quartet's various Scottish identities converge. The rhythmic world is vigorous and strongly articulated, while the melodic world is increasingly recognisable. *Summer Isle* brings the personal; *Loch Lomond* brings the communal; the Scotch Snap brings the physical character of Scottish traditional rhythm; and the quartet's own harmonic and contrapuntal language provides the medium through which all three are transformed. The result is not a collage. It is synthesis. That distinction is crucial. A collage preserves its components as separate objects. Bullock's quartet attempts to make the components belong to one another.

There is another important feature of the work. Memory in *Alba* is not passive. The remembered material is continually moving. This is entirely consistent with the broader development we have observed in these quartets. A theme is not necessarily preserved by leaving it unchanged; it may be preserved by transforming it sufficiently that its identity survives. This principle was already central to No. 26, where Welsh carols were quoted and subjected to adaptation, inversion and other transformations. But the procedure is different in *Alba*. In *Nadolig*, inherited Welsh material enters Bullock's musical world. In *Alba*, inherited Scottish material encounters Bullock's own earlier material, which itself already carries Scottish memory. That gives No. 27 a particularly intricate relationship between past and present.

Perhaps the most moving aspect of the dedication is what the quartet does not do. It does not imitate Stevenson's style, it does not need to quote a Stevenson theme, and it does not construct a musical portrait of him. Instead, Stevenson is present through a piece of Bullock's own music which Stevenson valued and performed. That is a very different form of memorial. It effectively says: I remember you through the music that was mine, but which you helped to give a second life. That makes the dedication inseparable from the quartet's central concern with musical memory. Stevenson's role is not that of an external subject. He is part of the history of the material.

Placed beside No. 26, the contrast is illuminating. In No. 26, *Nadolig*, Welsh traditional melodies are brought into the quartet - *Deffro Ddaear Llawenha*, *Suo Gân* and *Nos Galan* - and transformed through Bullock's compositional processes. In No. 27, *Alba*, Bullock's own *Summer Isle*, already connected with Scotland and Stevenson, encounters *The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond* and Scottish

rhythmic tradition. The direction is almost reversed. In No. 26, tradition enters the individual composer. In No. 27, the individual composer's memory enters tradition. That makes the two consecutive quartets a particularly revealing pair. Both are culturally specific, neither is merely folkloric, and both demonstrate that musical identity can be constructed through the interaction of inherited material and personal compositional memory.

After the rhythmic and melodic intensity of the fourth movement, the quartet eventually returns to sustained sonorities. The final page is strikingly restrained. This ending is important precisely because it refuses to turn the memorial into a monument. There is no grandiose final proclamation. The music simply settles. The Scottish rhythms have ceased, the songs have been transformed, the personal and collective memories have occupied the same musical space, and then the quartet becomes quiet. The final stillness therefore has a different meaning from the stillness of the opening movement. At the beginning, the sustained sonority is a space waiting to be filled. At the end, it is a space containing what has been remembered. That is a beautiful formal symmetry.

Alba is ultimately a quartet about musical inheritance, personal memory and transformation. Its Scottish identity is real and unmistakable, but it is not simply a matter of musical accent. It resides in the relationship between place, song, rhythm, memory, friendship and one's own music. The most personal thread, Summer Isle, began in Ullapool, acquired a special association through Ronald Stevenson's performances, appeared as a piano solo in *The Passioun o Sanct Andraa*, and is then reborn in *Alba* through its encounter with *The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond* and the Scotch Snap. That is not repetition. It is musical biography transformed into composition. Perhaps that is why *Alba* feels so different from a conventional memorial work. It does not ask us to remember Ronald Stevenson by recreating his music. It remembers him by allowing this music, which he valued and supported, to live again within the Scottish musical landscape. The title *Alba* therefore names both a country and a memory. The quartet's deepest achievement is to make the two inseparable: Scotland is remembered through music; the music is remembered through Scotland.

String Quartet No. 28 Op. 311

Frustgesang an Jens Spahn

Programme Note

Frustgesang an Jens Spahn was written in Germany in March 2021 during the Covid lockdown, at a time when the apparently endless restrictions and the absence of any clear prospect of release had become a source of profound frustration. The composer was particularly angered by what he perceived as the failure of government and media to communicate adequately the progress being made elsewhere with vaccination. There seemed to be no end in sight. Therefore the title is deliberately direct: *Frustgesang an Jens Spahn*—a "frustration song to Jens Spahn", then Germany's Federal Minister of Health. Bullock actually sent the score and a recording to him. There was no reply.

Political frustration was only part of the story. His granddaughter Evelyn had been born a month before the Covid crisis began. During the lockdown he knew that she was there, but he could not meet her. Seven months passed before he was finally able to hold her. She was, in a very real sense, unknown but present: a new person whom he loved, whose existence he could imagine, but whom he had never encountered.

That experience became the emotional counterweight to the anger of the **first movement** - the angriest music Bullock has ever written. Its repeated rhythmic figures, sharp attacks, obsessive returns and accumulating tensions give musical form to frustration which cannot find an outlet. The music repeatedly erupts and then falls back, as though attempting to regain composure, only to discover that the underlying anger remains. Its great climax does not resolve the situation; it exhausts it.

The **second movement** is titled *For Evelyn, my grand-daughter, so far away ...* It moves into an entirely different world: slower, more spacious, predominantly legato, and shaped by melodic fragments which pass between the instruments. Yet this is not simply a movement of consolation. It is music about distance—the extraordinary experience of knowing that someone exists and is loved while being unable to reach her.

Thus the two movements are intimately connected. One expresses the frustration of being unable to change a public situation; the other, the much more personal frustration of being unable to reach someone whom one longs to know. The quartet therefore ends not with resolution but with a kind of exhausted tenderness. The anger has not been answered, and the separation has not been undone.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 28 is an unusual work within Dafydd Bullock's cycle of quartets. Its title announces an unusually specific historical and political provocation: *Frustgesang an Jens Spahn*. It was / is specifically a protest about the lack of information during the Covid lockdown in 2021. Yet the music itself quickly reveals that its subject is larger and more deeply human than political complaint. The quartet is concerned with frustrated communication — with the experience of wanting to reach something or someone and finding oneself unable to do so. That distinction is crucial, because the work begins as an act of protest and ends as an act of remembrance, with one of the most striking emotional trajectories in the quartet cycle lying between those two positions.

The **first movement** does not prepare its anger; it begins in it. At the opening, the four instruments are immediately placed within a fast, asymmetrical rhythmic environment, with accented gestures and repeated figures establishing a sense of agitation from the outset. The material is notable for its insistence rather than merely its volume. Small rhythmic and melodic cells recur obsessively, are redistributed among the instruments and acquire increasing force through repetition. The effect is not that of an extended melody being developed according to traditional thematic procedures. Instead, the music behaves as though it has become caught within a thought that it cannot escape. This is precisely what makes it convincing as an expression of frustration. Frustration is repetitive: it returns to the same question, demands an answer and receives none.

At several points the quartet attempts to withdraw from its agitation. Sustained notes and quieter dynamics create temporary spaces of apparent composure, only for the earlier energy to reappear. The alternation is psychologically acute: the music does not simply become angry; it tries to stop being angry and fails. That failure is central to the movement's form. Its large-scale trajectory is therefore less a conventional progression than a cycle of emotional states - agitation, attempted restraint, renewed agitation and exhaustion. The climactic passage around bars 128 - 133 brings the accumulated pressure to its most concentrated point. The rapid figures, accents and increasing dynamic intensity culminate in *ff*, yet there is no triumphant conclusion. The music simply stops fighting. The final sustained sonorities have the quality not of resolution but of spent resistance. That is perhaps the most devastating feature of the movement: the anger has been articulated completely, but articulation has changed nothing.

It is only with the **second movement** that we understand how much more is contained within the first. The movement is dedicated *for Evelyn, my grand-daughter, so far away* Evelyn had been born only a month before the Covid crisis began, so the historical catastrophe coincided almost exactly with the beginning of a new personal relationship. But that relationship could not begin. For seven months, Evelyn remained an unseen presence. This is an unusually powerful form of absence because it is not the absence of someone remembered from the past. It is the absence of someone who ought to have been entering one's life. She was unknown, but already present, and that paradox transforms the second movement.

The music is no longer protesting against a minister, a government or a policy. It is confronting something much more intimate and much less negotiable: the impossibility of physical encounter. The opening of the second movement is therefore strikingly different from the first. At a slower tempo, *legato*, and in 12/8, the first and second violins introduce a flowing melodic texture before the lower instruments gradually join it. The effect is one of tenderness, but also of suspension. The music moves continuously without seeming to arrive anywhere, becoming an eloquent musical representation of distance.

The second movement does not attempt to turn Evelyn into a programmatic character. There is no literal musical portrait of a baby, nor any need for one. Instead, the dedication changes the meaning of the musical behaviour. Melodic fragments are passed between instruments; gestures appear, are continued by another voice, and then disappear into silence. Around bars 16 - 28, this exchange becomes increasingly distributed throughout the quartet. The quartet seems to be trying to establish contact. This is one of the most affecting aspects of the movement, because the instruments do not merely accompany one another: they reach towards one another. Since the listener knows that the person addressed by the dedication cannot yet be reached, the resulting musical dialogue acquires an extraordinary poignancy. The quartet is speaking into absence.

The structural relationship between the two movements is therefore deeper than contrast. The first expresses the inability to make an intolerable situation change; the second expresses the inability to reach the person one wants to know. Both arise from the same fundamental condition of blocked human agency. In the first, the obstacle is political and institutional; in the second, it is geographical, social and historical. The emotional mechanism, however, is identical: something precious lies beyond reach. This is why the second movement should not be regarded simply as a lyrical interlude following an angry first movement. It is the emotional completion of the quartet's argument, in which the political anger gives way to the personal wound that lies beneath it.

The quartet also offers two radically different experiences of time. The first movement is impatient. It wants something to happen now. Its repetitions, rapid figures and abrupt changes of intensity create a sense of time that has become intolerably slow precisely because one is desperate for it to pass. The second movement experiences time differently. Here time is stretched. A new life has begun, but seven months must pass before its grandfather can encounter it. The flowing 12/8 does not hurry towards the future; it inhabits the waiting. This gives the movement's lyricism an unusual quality. It is not nostalgia, because nostalgia looks backwards. It is anticipatory memory: imagining a person one has not yet known. That may be the most distinctive emotional idea in the quartet.

As the second movement progresses, the musical texture gradually becomes more animated. The later sections reintroduce quicker melodic figures, shared gestures and increasingly interconnected writing among the four instruments, yet the earlier anger does not return. Something has changed. The music has learned to live with its inability to control events. In the final section, the writing becomes increasingly gentle. From around bar 146, the first and second violins sing long *legato* phrases while the lower instruments provide a quiet, spacious foundation. The ending is particularly telling. There is no grand cadence, no rhetorical victory and no assertion that the frustrations of the preceding months have been overcome. Instead, the quartet simply becomes quieter and withdraws into a state of tenderness. That tenderness is not sentimental because it has been earned through frustration.

There is one final irony which belongs to the history of the work rather than its notation. The composer sent the score and recording to Jens Spahn, but there was no response. In a sense, the quartet's central experience was therefore reproduced in reality: it was a piece of music explicitly addressed to someone who did not answer. But this time the silence means something different. The first movement had been written in the hope that someone responsible might listen; the second had been written for someone who could not yet hear it. The quartet consequently contains two kinds of unanswered address, one political and the other familial, and the second ultimately overwhelms the first.

The political circumstances passed. Governments changed, vaccination eventually became widespread, and the particular frustrations that provoked the opening movement belong to a specific historical moment. But the experience contained in the dedication to Evelyn is permanent. A

grandfather waiting seven months to meet his granddaughter is no longer merely a Covid story. It is a story about human attachment interrupted at the moment it is beginning. That is why the quiet ending of No. 28 is so powerful. The quartet begins by demanding an answer from the world, but it ends by accepting that some things cannot be demanded at all. Somewhere between those two positions, the music discovers what remains possible: to remember someone one has not yet met, to imagine someone who is absent, and to make a song for someone who is, for the moment, unreachable.

That is why *Frustgesang an Jens Spahn*, despite its deliberately provocative title, ultimately becomes something much more intimate than a political protest. The quartet is about frustration transformed into love.

String Quartet No. 29 Op. 314

Sussex

Programme Note

This Quartet was written in Chiddingfold during the summer of 2021 and is dedicated to Susan Bullock and Richard Berkeley Steele.

The circumstances surrounding the work are important, but the quartet itself is not a diary of them. After the isolation and frustration of the preceding *Quartet 28 Frustgesang an Jens Spahn*, the composer found himself in Sussex, finally able to experience again the ordinary physical world from which the pandemic had separated him. Most importantly, he had finally met his granddaughter Evelyn, after the seven months during which she had existed in his life only as an anticipated presence.

The subtitle of the first movement, *A Sweet Country Life*, is a clue to the work's fundamental attitude. The music is rooted in the landscape and musical culture of Sussex, and many of its themes and episodes are based upon Sussex folksongs. These include *The Shepherd Boy, I've Been to France and ... Dover, The Plough Boy, The Sweet Rosy Morning* and other material drawn from the Sussex tradition. Their melodies, rhythms and characteristic turns of phrase are absorbed into the quartet's musical language and developed from within. Sometimes a melody is recognisable; elsewhere its identity has been so thoroughly transformed that what remains is only its intervallic or rhythmic character.

The **first movement** establishes the landscape in a spacious, lyrical texture. Its music moves between sustained sonorities and more active melodic gestures before finally settling into a quiet, suspended conclusion.

The **second movement**, *The Shepherd Boy*, brings movement and human activity into that landscape. Its 6/8 rhythm, *pizzicato* gestures and increasingly vigorous exchanges among the instruments give the music a rustic physicality.

The **third movement** withdraws almost completely into stillness. Long sustained notes create an unusually spacious central meditation before *The Plough Boy* emerges from the texture.

The **finale**, *The Poacher's Song*, returns to energetic 6/8 movement and develops the quartet's Sussex material through increasingly vigorous instrumental interplay. Later, *The Sweet Rosy Morning (Hunting Song)* appears explicitly, bringing another element of the local tradition into the musical fabric. The final pages become increasingly quiet.

The score concludes with the explicit acknowledgement: "*Sussex Folksongs taken from John Broadwood Collection, 1843.*" The quartet is therefore neither an arrangement of Sussex folksongs nor a conventional pastoral portrait. It is an attempt to absorb music from Sussex into the composer's own musical language. After the silence and frustration of the preceding quartet, Sussex is a return to the world, as was his own three week stay in that beautiful place.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 29 is a somewhat revealing work in the sequence of Bullock's quartets. It follows *Frustgesang an Jens Spahn*, perhaps the most explicitly angry and historically specific work in the cycle. That quartet emerged from lockdown, political frustration and the painful absence of a granddaughter who had been born just as the pandemic began. Sussex belongs to the same historical moment, but its psychological direction is almost the exact opposite. The world has reopened. The absent person has become present. And the composer turns outward. The result is not a quartet about Covid, nor even principally a quartet about his new grand-daughter Evelyn. It is a quartet about being somewhere. More precisely, it is about allowing a place to speak through the music it has inherited. From absence to presence

The relationship between Nos. 28 and 29 is perhaps the most important context for understanding Sussex. In No. 28, Evelyn was unknown but there. That phrase captures something extraordinary: she was already part of the composer's emotional world, yet she had not physically entered it. The second movement of No. 28 therefore became a music of anticipated memory. By the time of Sussex, that situation has changed. The seven-month separation is over. The child has been met. And yet Bullock does not respond by writing an intimate autobiographical quartet. Instead, he looks around. This is important. The emotional consequence of reunion is not self-absorption but renewed attention to the external world. The countryside is there. The people are there. The songs are there. The place can be heard again.

The **first movement** is headed *A Sweet Country Life*. The phrase might initially suggest an uncomplicated pastoral idyll. The music is more interesting than that. It begins quietly, with the four instruments distributed across a spacious harmonic texture. The cello and viola establish the first gestures while the violins initially provide sustained notes above them. The result is not a conventional pastoral melody. It is an environment. The music seems to allow things to exist at different distances from one another. A sustained note may remain while another instrument makes a small melodic gesture. The gesture disappears. Another appears. The harmonic field changes almost imperceptibly. This is music which observes rather than asserts. That seems exactly appropriate to the idea of allowing the place to speak. The song is not quotation: it is raw material.

The most important compositional fact about Sussex is the extent to which the quartet is built from Sussex folksong material. The score identifies individual songs explicitly. *The Shepherd Boy* appears as the second movement's title. *I've Been to France and ... Dover* appears prominently within the third movement's more animated sections. *The Plough Boy* enters later in III. And *The Sweet Rosy Morning*, identified as a hunting song, appears in IV. The ultimate source is explicitly given as the *John Broadwood Collection of 1843*. But the interesting question is not whether these melodies are quoted. It is what happens to them. The melodies are not treated as objects whose identity must remain intact. Instead, their musical DNA: a contour here, a rhythmic turn there, an intervallic pattern, a phrase shape, a cadence, a characteristic accent are taken and worked from. A The songs become the beginning of composition rather than the end of composition.

The **second movement** is headed *The Shepherd Boy* and moves in 6/8 at a dotted-quarter pulse of 120. The difference from I is immediate. The landscape has acquired a human figure. *Pizzicato*, repeated rhythmic gestures and the gradually increasing participation of all four instruments give the movement a physical, mobile quality. This is not pastoralism in the picturesque sense. It is work and movement within the landscape. The shepherd boy is not looking at Sussex. He is living in it. That distinction is important. The quartet's folk material consequently performs a cultural function: it provides the voice of people who belong to the place. As the movement progresses, the original

song material is increasingly redistributed among the four instruments. It becomes contrapuntal, rhythmically varied and harmonically integrated. The listener may recognise the source, but recognition is not the goal. The goal is assimilation. This is one of the strongest continuities between *Sussex* and the previous two quartets. In *Nadolig*, Welsh carols were transformed through musical processes. In *Alba*, *Summer Isle* and *Loch Lomond* entered into dialogue with Scottish rhythm. Here, Sussex folksong is absorbed even more comprehensively. The material becomes indistinguishable from the composer's own musical vocabulary.

The **third movement** is perhaps the quartet's most important structural counterweight. All four instruments begin with long sustained notes, predominantly p. The music appears almost suspended in time. This is remarkable after the rhythmic activity of II. But the stillness is not empty. The harmony continually shifts through subtle changes of pitch and spacing. The instruments move between consonance and slight instability without any need for overt rhythmic development. It is a music of attention. No. 28's stillness was the stillness of waiting. No. 29's stillness is the stillness of being present. The distinction is enormous. At B, the movement begins to change, and eventually *The Plough Boy* appears. The transformation is beautifully judged. The song does not simply interrupt the slow movement. It grows out of it. Human activity emerges from stillness. The plough boy emerges from the landscape. Again, the place is not being described from outside. It is speaking through its inherited song.

The **fourth movement** has the title *The Poacher's Song*. The character is immediately more vigorous. There is an element of furtiveness in the short phrases and sudden rests, but also a remarkable sense of pleasure in movement. This is no longer the contemplative countryside of I. It is the countryside at night. People are doing things. The quartet is alive. The song material becomes increasingly fragmented and recombined, moving rapidly between the instruments. The result is not an arrangement of a poacher's song. It is quartet music generated from the idea of the song. Again, the distinction is fundamental. At bar 112 the music suddenly identifies *The Sweet Rosy Morning (Hunting Song)*. The hunting song introduces yet another aspect of Sussex life. The quartet has moved from shepherd to plough boy to poacher to hunt. The landscape has gradually become populated. And this is perhaps why *Sussex* feels so different from a conventional pastoral work. A pastoral landscape is often empty. This one is inhabited. It contains work, leisure, secrecy, hunting, song and ordinary human activity. The folksongs provide the human voices of that world.

The final acknowledgement of the *John Broadwood Collection, 1843* is more than scholarly documentation. It establishes a temporal depth behind the quartet. The Sussex of 2021 is being heard through music collected in 1843. The physical place has changed. The people have changed. The social world has changed. But songs survive. This creates another kind of memory — different from the anticipated memory of Evelyn and different from the personal memory of Stevenson in *Alba*. It is cultural memory. The quartet brings three forms of time together: 1843, inherited Sussex song; 2021, the composer's experience of Sussex; and the future, the possibility of memory continuing beyond the present moment. The music therefore becomes a meeting place between historical and personal time.

The ending is extraordinarily restrained. After the considerable activity of the finale, the texture gradually thins. *Pizzicato* reappears; the dynamics fall through mp, p and finally pp; and the quartet comes to rest in widely spaced sonorities. The final page again carries the Chiddingly date: July 4th 2021.

String Quartet No. 30 Op. 318

Evelyn

Programme Note

The quartet was written for the composer's granddaughter Evelyn, whom he had finally met after the extraordinary separation imposed by the Covid crisis. She had been born only a month before the pandemic began, and for seven months he knew her only as a new person who existed somewhere beyond his reach. In the preceding *String Quartet 28*, that experience had become music of frustration, absence and what one may call called anticipated memory. Quartet 29, *Sussex*, followed the experience of finally being together again and turned outward towards place, landscape and the traditional songs of Sussex. This Quartet is about the emergence of a person. The music does not attempt to portray Evelyn through a collection of descriptive characteristics. There is no conventional lullaby, no sentimental portrait and no attempt to make the music sound childlike. Instead, musical gestures continually emerge, acquire identity, are repeated, varied, exchanged between instruments and absorbed into the collective texture. The quartet therefore treats personality itself as a process.

The **first movement** begins with lightly detached repeated eighth notes and contrasting sustained notes. Small gestures appear almost tentatively, sometimes in one instrument and sometimes distributed among several. As the movement progresses, these gestures become increasingly differentiated and assertive. The music repeatedly moves between activity and suspension, creating the impression not of a fixed character but of something gradually discovering itself.

The **second movement** changes the relationship between the four instruments. Material is shared, passed from voice to voice and temporarily unified before separating again. The quartet becomes less an environment in which things occur and more a community of interacting voices. The individuality of each part is increasingly apparent, while the four remain dependent upon one another.

The **third movement** provides the most striking transformation. It begins quietly and spaciouly before accelerating into increasingly vigorous rhythmic and contrapuntal activity. *Pizzicato* and *arco*, repeated figures, changing registers and relationships and exchanges between the instruments produce a sense of extraordinary physical vitality. The music repeatedly pauses and begins again, as though continually discovering new possibilities. The final accumulation of energy does not lead to a sentimental conclusion. Instead, the quartet ends decisively, with considerable force. The work was completed at Hinterthal on 17 August 2021.

Discussion

There is an unusual simplicity about the title of **String Quartet No. 30**. After *Nadolog*, *Alba*, *Frustgesang an Jens Spahn* and *Sussex*, one might expect another descriptive title: a place, an idea, perhaps a literary or historical reference. Instead, the quartet is simply called *Evelyn*. The name itself becomes the title. That is significant because the quartet represents a point at which the external circumstances surrounding its composition begin to fall away. The pandemic remains part of its history, and the extraordinary circumstances of Evelyn's birth and the seven-month separation remain essential to understanding its emotional background. But the music no longer needs to speak about those circumstances. It can speak about her. And yet it does so without attempting to tell us who she is. The deeper subject is the process by which a person becomes perceptible to another person. The position of No. 30 within the sequence is extraordinarily revealing. No. 28 was written during the Covid crisis, when Evelyn was physically unreachable. She had been born, but the relationship between grandfather and granddaughter could not yet become embodied. She was, in the most literal sense, unknown but present. The second movement of No. 28 consequently became a music of anticipation: a musical imagination directed towards someone who existed but had not yet been encountered. No. 29, *Sussex*, belongs to the moment after that separation. The composer is once again physically present in the world, listening to the countryside and absorbing its inherited songs. Then comes No. 30. The progression is extraordinarily simple: absence, encounter, personhood. This is why *Evelyn* should not be understood merely as the “granddaughter quartet”. Its subject is more fundamental. It is about arrival.

The **first movement** begins with the instruction that the eighth notes should remain unslurred, light and detached without becoming aggressive. That distinction — lightly but not aggressively — is important. The music has energy, but it does not begin with assertion. Instead there is a continuous succession of small impulses: short notes, long notes, rests, *pizzicato*, *arco*, and figures that appear and disappear. The quartet is already alive, but it has not yet settled upon a single identity. This gives the opening a quality of incipient personality. It would be misleading to say that one theme “represents Evelyn”. As yet there is no such simple correspondence. Rather, the material behaves as though identity itself is being formed.

One of the most striking features of the quartet is the frequency with which small musical gestures return, but they do not return unchanged. A figure appears and is repeated; another instrument takes it over; its register changes; its rhythmic context changes; it becomes part of a larger texture and then disappears. Later, something recognisably related returns. This is central to Bullock's musical language generally, but here it takes on a particularly suggestive meaning. Repetition becomes learning. A newly emerging identity discovers itself partly through repetition. The musical equivalent might be understood as an inner sequence of recognition and questioning: “This is me”, followed by “No - perhaps this”, and then “What happens if I do it again?” The quartet therefore creates a sense of personality without ever resorting to portraiture.

The movement continually alternates between collective activity and more isolated gestures. At some points the instruments seem to form a single rhythmic organism; elsewhere one voice becomes prominent while the others provide a more stable background. The texture repeatedly contracts and expands. This matters because a string quartet is inherently a particularly suitable medium for such a conception. There are four voices, and they can behave as one, as two pairs, or as opposing forces. One can stand alone, while a gesture can migrate from one voice to another. In *Evelyn*, these possibilities become almost metaphorical without ever becoming programmatic. A person emerges within a world of other people.

The pauses are as important as the activity. There are numerous moments in which the energetic repeated figures stop and the quartet suddenly becomes spacious. The score repeatedly alternates short articulated gestures with sustained notes and rests. These are not merely breathing spaces in the formal sense; they create moments of attention. The music moves, then stops. Something has happened. The quartet listens to what has happened. Then movement begins again. This is one reason the work avoids sentimentality. It does not continuously tell the listener how to feel. It observes.

The **second movement** changes the emphasis. Where the first is largely concerned with the emergence of individual gestures, the second is more concerned with interaction. The musical material is increasingly exchanged among the instruments. A gesture begun by one voice can be continued by another; rhythmic and melodic fragments circulate; temporary unisons give way to differentiation. The quartet has become social. This is a subtle but important stage in the conception. A person does not emerge in isolation. Identity develops through relationship. The four instruments therefore provide an extraordinarily apt medium. They retain their independence while constantly modifying one another's behaviour. The music becomes conversational without becoming literal dialogue.

The **third movement** is where the quartet's conception expands dramatically. It begins with relative stillness, but then accelerates into a much more active 6/8 environment. The transition from the quiet opening to the faster material is one of the most striking events in the work. The change feels almost like awakening. Suddenly the music has a body. The rhythmic activity becomes vigorous; the instruments exchange figures rapidly; *pizzicato* and *arco* produce contrasting physical sensations; and the musical energy continually regenerates itself. The person who was gradually emerging in the first movement and learning to interact in the second now seems fully engaged with the physical world. This is where I would resist a potentially misleading interpretation. The music is certainly capable of suggesting childhood vitality, but the quartet is not really about childhood. Its subject is life becoming individual. That is a larger idea.

The third movement does not simplify the musical language in order to suggest innocence. Instead, the writing becomes more complex, more contrapuntal and more physically demanding. The implication is almost the reverse of conventional child portraiture: this new person is not simple. She is a new centre of consciousness whose character has yet to reveal itself. The music therefore remains open. The long central passages of the movement are particularly important because the music repeatedly gathers itself and then disperses again. Around E, the score becomes more spacious before the active material gradually reasserts itself. This is not a conventional developmental climax. It is more like consolidation. The musical material has been tested in different forms. It has travelled between instruments, been accelerated and slowed, articulated and sustained, and now it can return with greater authority. This is why the final movement feels earned. The music has discovered its own identity.

The end of the quartet is particularly revealing. After the many transformations and periods of withdrawal, the music gathers itself into a forceful conclusion. That decision is important. A sentimental portrait of a grandchild might be expected to dissolve into softness. *Evelyn* does not. It ends with affirmation. The person who emerged during the quartet is not fragile musical decoration. She is a presence. The force of the conclusion therefore has a conceptual function. The quartet began with tiny gestures that had not yet acquired a fully independent identity; it ends with a musical world sufficiently confident to make a decisive statement. The arc is one of incipience, differentiation, relationship, vitality and affirmation. This leads to what I think is the central critical proposition of the work. *Evelyn* is not a musical portrait in the conventional sense. It is an enactment of personhood. The music does not give Evelyn a fixed theme and tell us that this theme

represents her. Instead, the processes of the music mirror the processes by which individuality becomes perceptible. Gestures emerge and recur; differences become meaningful; voices interact; identities separate and reunite; energy accumulates; and a coherent presence finally asserts itself. This is why the quartet can be so affectionate without being sentimental. Its affection lies not in saying, “this is a beautiful child”. Its affection lies in saying: “Here is a new person.”

The fact that each of the composer’s grandchildren has been given both a symphony and a string quartet adds another dimension to this work. These are not isolated dedications. They form a continuing musical act of recognition. Each child occupies a place in the catalogue, and each exists at two different instrumental scales: the symphony as the larger world, and the quartet as the intimate world of four voices. That distinction seems particularly apt for *Evelyn*. The quartet is fundamentally about relationship. No single instrument is sufficient. Identity is heard through interaction. The four voices provide a musical analogue for a family: individuals with their own identities, continually shaping and responding to one another. I would not push the analogy into programme music. The music does not “depict” a family. But the medium itself makes the idea available.

There is now a particularly beautiful relationship among Nos. 28–30. In No. 28, *Frustgesang an Jens Spahn*, Evelyn is present but unreachable. In No. 29, *Sussex*, the world becomes reachable again. In No. 30, *Evelyn*, a person emerges into musical presence. The three works are not a planned trilogy in any formal sense, but retrospectively they form one. And the transformation is not merely emotional; it is compositional. No. 28 is dominated by insistence, recurrence and blocked movement. No. 29 opens outward into landscape, folk memory and inhabited place. No. 30 turns inward again, but now without the claustrophobia of No. 28. The focus is a person. The world is no longer the obstacle. The world is the medium through which that person emerges.

There is something wonderfully appropriate about the fact that *String Quartet No. 30* has no further descriptive subtitle. It does not need one. After thirty quartets, after the places, histories, traditions, memories, arguments and landscapes, the title can simply be *Evelyn*. The name is enough. Because the music is not attempting to explain her, it is allowing us to experience something more elusive: the arrival of individuality. The small gestures of the opening gradually acquire identity. The voices begin to interact. The rhythmic life becomes more vigorous. The musical personality becomes increasingly differentiated. And finally the quartet speaks with unmistakable force. The journey is therefore not baby to child to person. It is possibility to awareness to relationship to presence. That is why Evelyn belongs so naturally after *Frustgesang an Jens Spahn* and *Sussex*. In No. 28, she was anticipated. In No. 29, she was encountered. In No. 30, she emerges.

Perhaps that is the most intimate gift a composer can make to a child: not to decide in advance what she will become, but to give musical form to the fact that someone entirely new has arrived. The final emphatic gesture is therefore not a portrait's full stop. It is an opening.

String Quartet No. 31 Op. 321

Michelangelo's Finger

Programme Note

The Quartet was written in Hinterthal, Austria, on 18–19 October 2021, and is dedicated to the composer's wife, Ulrike. The title refers to the celebrated detail in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel: the almost-touching fingers of God and Adam. What is interesting is not the painting as a whole, nor its religious narrative, but the extraordinary idea contained in that tiny space between the two fingers — the transmission of energy through an almost imperceptible point of contact. The quartet explores this idea in purely musical terms.

The **first movement** begins with a solitary gesture in the first violin. Gradually the gesture is taken up by the other instruments, multiplied, transformed and accumulated until it becomes a collective force. Sustained notes and rapidly moving figures continually confront one another, so that energy may be perceived both in movement and in suspension. After successive accumulations and releases, the movement finally subsides into quiet, sustained sonorities.

The **second movement** begins in the opposite condition: the energy is already present. Rapid figures, repeated attacks and dense sonorities continually pass between the four instruments, dispersing and re-concentrating the musical force. At the centre of the movement, the writing suddenly becomes very still and without *vibrato*, in effect a moment of suspended energy before the physical intensity returns.

The final section gradually releases this accumulated force. The music does not conclude through a conventional triumph or resolution, but through dissipation: what has been transmitted has passed through the quartet and remains only as a quiet resonance.

The dedication to Ulrike gives this abstract conception its personal destination. The work is ultimately concerned with the possibility of energy passing from one being to another through the smallest of gestures.

Discussion

Dafydd Bullock's **String Quartet No. 31** was written in Hinterthal in October 2021, ten years after the earlier quartet associated so strongly with his transition from Wales to Austria, it belongs to a very different imaginative world. The landscape has receded. In its place is a single, extraordinarily concentrated image: the near-contact of God and Adam in Michelangelo's Creation of Adam.

The title, *Michelangelo's Finger*, is deliberately narrower than a reference to Michelangelo himself or to the Sistine Chapel. The focus is the finger: the smallest physical element of the image, and the point through which the enormous conceptual energy of the painting is communicated. The quartet accordingly does not attempt to represent the fresco. Its subject is instead transmission.

The **first movement** establishes this principle with remarkable economy. The first violin alone initiates the work, mp, while the remaining instruments are silent. The opening gesture is therefore both musical material and dramatic agent. It is something that exists initially in one place. As the movement proceeds, this material is taken up by the other instruments. At bar 6 the second violin begins to participate, while the first violin develops a sustained registral layer; by bar 11 the four instruments have begun to form a common texture. The process is not one of conventional thematic exposition. Rather, a small musical impulse is transmitted. This becomes one of the quartet's defining compositional principles. Bullock repeatedly opposes rapid articulated figures to sustained notes. The former embody movement; the latter create a field of latent energy. Neither exists independently. The harmonic character of the music emerges from their interaction.

The resulting musical language is therefore less concerned with functional harmonic progression than with changing states of pitch. A sustained pitch establishes temporary stability; a moving figure disturbs it; the disturbance is then absorbed into another sonority. Harmony becomes a condition of tension between movement and persistence.

The first major accumulation occurs around bars 35 - 50, where increasing activity and dynamic pressure culminate in ff. The musical material has travelled a considerable distance from its solitary beginning. What was initially a tiny gesture has become a collective event. Yet Bullock immediately refuses to treat that climax as a goal in the conventional sense. The music withdraws, and at bar 52 the texture becomes predominantly sustained and quiet. The result is less a new episode than the aftermath of the preceding expenditure of energy. The subsequent sections repeat and transform this process. At C, articulated material returns; at D, sustained vertical sonorities become dominant; at E, more energetic material reappears before gradually dissolving. The movement thus possesses a strong internal logic: impulse becomes transmission, transmission becomes accumulation, accumulation becomes impact, impact becomes aftermath, and the process begins again before moving towards concentration and dissolution. This is precisely where the title ceases to be merely illustrative. The musical structure itself has become a study of transmitted energy.

The **second movement** reverses the initial condition. All four instruments enter ff, immediately establishing a dense, highly physical musical environment. There is no longer a single source from which the energy must travel. It has already arrived. The movement therefore concerns propagation rather than initiation. Rapid figures pass between instruments; sharply accented sonorities interrupt and generate new streams of motion; the quartet alternately fragments and reunifies. The music repeatedly converts horizontal energy into vertical impact and back again. At D, for example, coordinated attacks create a temporary sense of collective action before the music again becomes mobile. The most remarkable transformation comes at F, beginning at bar 86. After the preceding accumulation, the quartet introduces non vibrato writing and sustained notes. The removal of

vibrato is not merely a timbral effect. It strips the sound of some of its physical expressiveness and leaves the listener with pitch suspended in time.

Here the connection with Michelangelo's image becomes particularly suggestive. The power of the fresco lies in the fact that the two fingers almost touch. The energy is imagined in the interval between them. Similarly, Bullock's music reaches a point where very little is physically happening, yet the listener remains conscious of what has preceded it and what may follow. Stillness becomes charged. The subsequent return of *con vibrato* at G restores physical presence. The energy has not been extinguished but suspended. Finally, at H, the quartet reaches another *ff* before withdrawing through *mp*, *p* and *pp*. The final bars reduce the musical activity to a few sustained sonorities and a last *diminuendo*. The ending is therefore profoundly consistent with the title. The energy has been transmitted, multiplied and transformed; it does not need to remain indefinitely as physical force. Its final manifestation is resonance.

The dedication to Ulrike adds a private dimension to this conception. It would be inappropriate to reduce the dedication to a literal identification between the figures in Michelangelo's painting and the people represented by the dedication. Rather, the dedication gives the abstract idea of transmission an intimate human destination. The work is offered to Ulrike as a musical meditation on the possibility that something essential may pass from one being to another.

This is perhaps what makes *Michelangelo's Finger* particularly moving within Bullock's development. In the earlier *Hinterthal*, the composer confronted the external world of a new home and attempted to reconcile it with the remembered world of Wales. In No. 31, written a decade later in the same Austrian setting, the landscape no longer needs to be reconciled or described. The external world has been absorbed. The subject has moved inward. The quartet is no longer asking how one place can become another home. It is asking something more elemental: how energy, identity and creative impulse can pass between beings. Bullock answers that question not through programme music, but through the very construction of the quartet. A tiny gesture becomes a shared gesture. A shared gesture becomes energy. Energy becomes sound. Sound becomes resonance. And finally, resonance becomes silence. That is the real significance of *Michelangelo's Finger*. It is not a musical portrait of a painting. It is a quartet about the possibility of transmission itself.

String Quartet No. 32 Op. 329

Слава Україні - Glory to Ukraine

Programme Note

String Quartet 32, Op. 329, *Слава Україні (Glory to Ukraine)*, was written in March 2022, in the days immediately following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The principal thematic material of the quartet is drawn from the national anthem of Ukraine. The anthem is not simply quoted as a patriotic gesture; its melodic material becomes the substance of the composition itself, undergoing transformation, fragmentation, harmonisation, rhythmic intensification and redistribution among the four instruments.

This distinction is fundamental. The quartet is neither an abstract work to which a political title was subsequently attached, nor a conventional musical depiction of war. The Ukrainian anthem is present from the beginning, but it is continually transformed. At times its melodic character is immediately recognisable; at others it is absorbed into the harmonic and rhythmic fabric of the quartet.

The **opening** is restrained and exposed. Individual instruments introduce elements of the thematic material against sustained sonorities and silence. The alternation between vibrato and non-vibrato contributes to an unusual intimacy: a national melody that might ordinarily belong to public ceremony is heard here in a private, chamber-musical space.

The **second movement** takes this idea further. Beginning *con sordino*, the two violins initially carry the music while the viola and cello remain silent. The texture gradually expands, and an incredibly sad Ukrainian folk melody is played. The changing relationships between muted and unmuted sound, sustained notes, *pizzicato* and *arco* give the material continually different identities.

The **third movement** is the most forceful. At a rapid tempo, the thematic material is transformed into dense chords, sharply articulated rhythmic figures and increasingly energetic instrumental activity. Here the anthem is no longer simply sung: it is asserted. Yet the music does not remain at this level of intensity. The thematic material continues to reappear in contrasting forms, and the final stages of the movement return to sustained sonorities, quieter dynamics and the intimate distinction between *vibrato* and *non vibrato*. The final music moves through *pizzicato* and back to *arco* before coming to rest.

This music is both shocking and uplifting. The shock lies partly in hearing a familiar national melody subjected to such forceful transformation in the immediate aftermath of invasion. The uplift comes from the persistence of that melody: it may be fragmented, obscured, intensified or surrounded by silence, but it is never lost. The quartet therefore becomes an affirmation not through a simple triumphant statement, but through the survival and transformation of the anthem.

Discussion

There is a moment in the study of a composition when an apparently general observation suddenly becomes specific. That happened with **String Quartet No. 32** when it became clear that the thematic material is drawn from the Ukrainian national anthem.

Until then, it was possible to describe the quartet as a work written in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine: a work of sharply contrasted states, of violence and tenderness, assertion and silence. That description is not wrong, but it is incomplete. The more fundamental fact is that Ukraine's own musical voice is inside the quartet. The anthem is not merely its subject. It is its material. And that changes everything. The quartet was written between 24 and 28 March 2022, only weeks after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The dates and places are recorded directly in the score: Chiddingly, Sussex, on 24 March; Chiddingly and Hove on 25 March; and Hove/Chiddingly on 28 March. The speed with which the work came into existence matters. This was not a subject contemplated at a historical distance. The political event and the composition were almost contemporaneous.

The choice of material was therefore extraordinarily direct. Rather than inventing a new musical emblem for Ukraine, the quartet takes Ukraine's existing national song and makes it its own musical bloodstream. That decision immediately places the work in a different category from conventional programme music. The anthem already carries cultural, historical and emotional meaning. The compositional task is therefore not to invent meaning, but to transform an already meaningful musical object without destroying its identity. That becomes the central technical and expressive problem of the quartet.

The **opening** is remarkably restrained. The instruments do not present the anthem as a full public proclamation. Instead, elements of its melodic material emerge within a sparse texture, surrounded by sustained notes, silence and changing instrumental colours. The distinction between *vibrato* and *non vibrato* is especially important.

A national anthem normally belongs to a public space: many voices, a large sound, collective singing. Here it is brought into the intimate world of four players. The anthem becomes personal. That is one of the quartet's most affecting transformations. The melody has not lost its identity, but its context has changed. It is no longer simply something sung by a nation. It is something that can be remembered by an individual, carried by one instrument and passed to another. The chamber ensemble becomes a kind of miniature community. This is also why it would be misleading to describe the quartet simply as a work containing quotations from the Ukrainian anthem. Quotation suggests that the quoted material remains somehow external to the composer's own language. Here it does not.

The anthem is subjected to the same processes that characterise the rest of the quartet. Its melodic gestures are fragmented and redistributed; its pitches become part of changing harmonic fields; its rhythmic character is altered; and its material appears in different registers and instrumental combinations. In other words, the anthem becomes Bullock material without ceasing to be the Ukrainian anthem. That tension is the compositional heart of the piece. The work has to transform the melody enough to make a quartet from it, while preserving enough of its identity for the listener to recognise what is being transformed. That is a surprisingly difficult artistic balancing act.

The **second movement** is perhaps where this process becomes most subtle. It begins with the two violins *con sordino*, while the viola and cello are silent. The effect is striking. The anthem has been

temporarily removed, and replaced by a melancholy and highly evocative Ukrainian folk song. It is whispered, almost. The thematic material is heard against an extraordinarily reduced texture, and only gradually does the quartet reconstitute itself. The entrance of the other instruments is therefore more than a matter of orchestration. It changes the social character of the music. One voice becomes two; two become a larger ensemble; the private becomes collective. Again, I would not insist upon a literal programme here. The score does not tell us that this is “the refugee remembering home”, for example. But the historical circumstances make the analogy extraordinarily compelling. A national melody, separated from its homeland and heard in a new country, is almost inevitably a music of memory. The changing sound-world of the movement reinforces this. Muted and unmuted sonorities, *arco* and *pizzicato*, sustained and more articulated material continually alter the emotional distance. The same musical identity is repeatedly encountered anew.

The **third movement** changes everything. It begins with a sudden, emphatic musical force at a very rapid tempo. Dense sonorities and strongly articulated gestures establish a radically different physical presence. Here the anthem ceases to be merely remembered. It becomes highly fragmented and assertive. The music is increasingly driven by rhythmic energy, accented gestures and dense instrumental interaction. The thematic material is no longer sheltered by spaciousness. It is pushed into the foreground and subjected to pressure. The resulting music can be genuinely shocking. And I think that matters. A weaker response to the invasion might have produced a consolatory or sentimental setting of the anthem. This quartet does something much more uncomfortable. It tests the anthem. It places it inside turbulence. It allows the musical identity of Ukraine to encounter violence without allowing the violence to define that identity. That is a considerably more powerful gesture.

The third movement becomes increasingly energetic, but the anthem does not disappear. Its melodic characteristics continue to inform the material even when the surface becomes highly active. Rapid figurations, sharply articulated gestures and dense sonorities coexist with sustained harmonic structures. This is where the quartet's structural and historical meanings converge. The anthem is repeatedly transformed, but it remains itself. That gives the work a metaphorical power that does not need to be imposed upon it from outside. Identity survives transformation. And that is perhaps the most important thing happening in the quartet. It is shocking. The shock is not simply the result of volume or aggression. It comes from hearing a familiar national melody placed inside a musical world that refuses to protect it from violence. The uplift comes from the opposite fact: the melody remains. It emerges again after being fragmented. It survives the dense textures. It survives the rhythmic assault. It survives silence. And by the final stages of the quartet it is once again capable of being heard in a more spacious, sustained environment.

The ending is particularly eloquent. After the force of the third movement, the music returns towards broader, more sustained gestures. The quartet moves through further transformations of the thematic material, and the final pages gradually reduce the dynamic and density. Eventually the instruments play *pizzicato* before returning to *arco*. There is no grandiose victory. Instead, there is continuance. This is why I would now be even more confident in calling No. 32 a change of direction. The change is not simply stylistic. The musical vocabulary has not suddenly been discarded. The quartet still contains the lyrical writing, harmonic sensitivity, textural contrasts and instrumental colour that belong to the larger body of work. What has changed is what that language is being asked to carry. For perhaps the first time in this sequence, a musical identity originating outside the composer's own invented language becomes the central protagonist. And rather than merely quoting it, Bullock enters into a dialogue with it.

The composer is no longer simply asking what he can do with his musical material. He is asking what his musical language can do with somebody else's musical identity. That is a profound

compositional shift. There is also something important in the fact that the quartet was subsequently played to newly arrived Ukrainian refugees. The circumstances create a remarkable circle. A Welsh composer in Germany hears of the invasion of Ukraine. He takes the Ukrainian national anthem as his thematic material. He transforms it into a string quartet. And then, almost immediately, people who have been forced to leave Ukraine hear their own anthem transformed by someone living in the country to which they have fled.

The music therefore crosses a boundary that analysis alone cannot describe. The anthem has travelled. But it has not been erased. It has acquired another form. That is precisely what the quartet itself does. Seen this way, the quartet is not ultimately about war. Nor is it simply about Ukraine. Its deeper subject is identity under pressure. What happens to a musical identity when it is subjected to violence, displacement, fragmentation and transformation? The answer given by the quartet is remarkably clear. It changes. It is wounded. It is fragmented. It is placed in unfamiliar surroundings. But it remains recognisable. Indeed, its identity may become more powerful precisely because it has survived transformation.

This gives the quartet an unexpected relationship with a much broader concern in Bullock's music: the persistence of identity through change. But here the question has become external and historical. It is no longer only the composer's musical identity that is at stake. It is another people's identity. And that makes the work ethically as well as musically interesting. String Quartet No. 32 is therefore a remarkable intersection of circumstance, material and musical technique. It was written in the immediate aftermath of an invasion. Its title is an explicit declaration of solidarity. Its thematic substance comes from the Ukrainian national anthem, and its first listeners included people who had themselves been displaced by the events that prompted its composition.

Yet the work avoids the limitations of topical music because the anthem is not merely pasted onto an otherwise independent composition. The anthem becomes the composition. It is remembered, transformed, fractured, intensified, whispered, shouted, shared and finally allowed to continue. That may be the most important distinction between this quartet and a conventional patriotic work. The music does not simply say "*Glory to Ukraine*". It asks what happens to a national identity when history subjects it to extraordinary pressure. Its answer is neither sentimental nor naïve. The identity can be transformed without being destroyed. And so, when the quartet finally becomes quiet, the quietness does not signify defeat. The anthem has survived. The four instruments are still together. And that, perhaps, is why the people who heard the work in those extraordinary circumstances found it both shocking and uplifting. It tells the truth about the shock - while refusing to surrender the possibility of life beyond it.

String Quartet No. 33 Op. 330

Bergklang

Programme Note

String Quartet 33, *Bergklang*, was written at Hinterthal on 11–13 July 2022, as the composer was saying farewell to his flat and his time in Austria. The title *Bergklang* - the sound of the mountains - refers to the physical landscape of the place he was leaving, but the quartet is concerned with something larger than the departure from a particular dwelling. It is about the relationship between people, places and memory, and about what remains when a life moves on.

The three movements approach this from different perspectives. The **first, *Tiefen***, begins with continuous streams of repeated notes shared by all four instruments. The music is restless and physical, repeatedly accumulating and releasing energy. Its movement seems almost independent of the individual who is about to leave: the world continues to exist and move.

The **second movement, *Dorfabend***, turns towards the human world within that landscape. The village evening is inhabited, rhythmic and active. The music evokes not a picturesque postcard but a living community: the people, activities and sounds that make a place a home.

The **third movement, *Aros Mae***, brings the personal meaning of departure into focus. The title refers to the Welsh phrase *Aros Mae'r Mynyddoedd Mawr* -the great mountains remain. The song was composed by Meirion Williams, brother of the man who baptised the composer, and is one of his favourite Welsh songs. He does not quote the song itself in this movement. Its meaning is carried by the title. As well, there is another, very deliberate memory here. He quotes the opening of his *String Quartet 3, Fachwen*. That quartet was associated with his former Welsh home, and its opening material therefore brings another landscape and indeed another period of his life directly into the farewell to *Bergklang*. The quotation is explicit: the earlier music is not merely recalled in spirit but actually returns.

The effect is to place two homes, separated by years and geography, within the same musical space. The quotation also changes the meaning of *Aros Mae*. The great mountains are not merely those of Austria. The mountains of Wales are present too, carried within memory. The movement gradually withdraws from human activity into sustained and increasingly spacious sonorities. The people disappear from the musical landscape. The mountains remain. People and activity are impermanent.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 33, *Bergklang*, initially appears to be a relatively straightforward work of farewell: a composer says goodbye to his Austrian home. The score, however, reveals a much larger conception. The three movements move progressively from the physical world, through the inhabited world, towards memory and endurance. And in the third movement, a single explicit musical quotation transforms the whole meaning of the work: at A, Bullock brings back the opening of *String Quartet No. 3, Fachwen*. At that moment, the past enters the present. The farewell to *Bergklang* becomes a farewell understood through another farewell: the memory of *Fachwen*, another home, another landscape, another period of life. The quartet is consequently not about leaving one place. It is about what happens to places when we leave them.

The **opening movement, *Tiefen***, begins with relentless repeated-note movement in all four instruments. The effect is almost elemental. The quartet does not begin with a lament. It begins with life continuing. Repeated cells pass through the instruments; rhythms accumulate; accents intensify; textures expand and contract. The music repeatedly generates its own momentum. This is important in the context of farewell. The world does not stop because an individual leaves it. The music itself seems to know this. Its repeated figures have something almost impersonal about them: they belong to the environment rather than to an individual voice. The composer is already beginning to disappear from his own landscape. Throughout *Tiefen*, the continuous motoric activity is repeatedly interrupted. New rhythmic configurations appear. The texture becomes sparse. Sustained sonorities interrupt the streams of shorter notes. Dynamic extremes create moments in which the music seems to gather itself and then begin again. These interruptions can be heard as recollections but they are also something more fundamental. The music is learning how to let go. It cannot simply continue indefinitely.

The **second movement** changes the subject from environment to community. *Dorfabend* is the village at evening: not mountains in the abstract, but a place inhabited by people. The music accordingly becomes strongly rhythmic and interactive. Individual lines emerge from the quartet and return to the collective texture. There is a sense of social activity rather than isolated contemplation. This distinction matters. A house becomes a home because people inhabit it. A village becomes a place because people give it memory. So if *Tiefen* presents the physical world, *Dorfabend* presents the human world within it. The quartet has therefore moved from: nature towards human presence. The third movement will reverse that process.

The title of the **third movement, *Aros Mae***, introduces a very different scale of thought. *Aros Mae'r Mynyddoedd Mawr* means, approximately: *the great mountains remain*. The phrase comes from the Welsh poem and song set by Meirion Williams, whose personal connection to the composer's life makes the reference especially intimate. Yet the song is not quoted. The music does not need to reproduce the melody because the title already carries the idea. The Welsh song is functioning as memory rather than quotation. The memory is not merely musical, it is existential. People come and go, the mountains remain. At A, however, another kind of memory enters. The opening of *Fachwen* is explicitly quoted. This is one of the most significant moments in the quartet. *String Quartet No. 3, Fachwen*, is itself rooted in a place: the former Welsh home whose name became the quartet's title. The opening establishes its characteristic material immediately and now that music appears inside *Bergklang*. An Austrian home is left and the music of a Welsh home suddenly returns. The two places have no geographical connection. But they have a human connection: the quotation therefore creates a form of musical geography of a life. *Fachwen* is not being remembered because an old theme is being used. It is being remembered because leaving

Bergklang has activated the memory of having left another home. That makes the quotation an act of recognition.

There is consequently a profound symmetry between the two quartets. *Fachwen* gave musical identity to a home in Wales. *Bergklang* gives musical identity to the farewell from a home in Austria. The earlier quartet therefore becomes almost a witness to the later one. The young composer who once wrote about *Fachwen* is still present inside the older composer who is leaving *Bergklang*. The musical material survives, the place does not need to. This is perhaps the deepest meaning of the quotation. The music has outlived the house and now it carries that earlier house into another departure.

The presence of *Aros Mae* alongside the *Fachwen* quotation produces another extraordinary effect. The immediate mountains are the Austrian Alps. But the remembered mountains are Welsh. The quartet therefore contains two landscapes at once: the mountains before the composer and the mountains within the composer. This makes the title *Bergklang* unexpectedly ambiguous. It can mean the sound of the Austrian mountains. But once *Fachwen* has entered, it can also mean something more general: the sound of mountains remembered. The later course of III is consequently very important. The music gradually becomes more spacious. Earlier rhythmic activity gives way to sustained sonorities, isolated gestures and longer harmonic durations. This is where the meaning of *Aros Mae* becomes fully audible. The human beings have been present, they have spoken remembered and left. What remains is the landscape. This is why the ending should not be characterised simply as melancholy. It is depersonalised. The composer has ceased insisting upon himself. The music has become landscape.

The last pages are dominated by sustained chords and increasingly quiet dynamics. The effect is one of extraordinary stillness. The earlier human activity has vanished, the village is silent, The traveller has gone, but the mountains remain. And here the quotation from *Fachwen* acquires a final significance. The earlier music has survived its original physical context and is now embedded in another work, another place and another moment.

This makes *Bergklang* one of the most explicitly autobiographical quartets in the cycle—not because it tells a chronological story, but because it allows different geographical identities to coexist. There is *Bergklang*, the present place, *Dorfabend*, the community within it; *Fachwen*, the remembered former home; Wales, the deeper cultural landscape from which so much of the composer's sensibility derives; and there are the mountains, the enduring physical world that surrounds and outlasts the human presence within it. Connecting all these places is one human consciousness. This is a much richer conception of autobiography than simple reminiscence. Bullock does not merely say, "I remember *Fachwen*." He makes *Fachwen* happen again. The remembered place becomes present within the new place, not as an anecdotal recollection but as a living musical reality. That is considerably more powerful.

There is also a revealing relationship here with *No. 29, Sussex*. In *Sussex*, The composer wrote of "allowing the place to speak for itself", and he achieved this by absorbing Sussex folksongs into his own musical language. In *Bergklang*, almost the opposite process takes place. He is leaving the place, and therefore he brings his own past into it. *Sussex* says, in effect, "I listen to this place." *Bergklang* says, "I carry other places with me as I leave this one." That represents a profound development. The composer is no longer merely receiving landscape; he is carrying landscape. Places have become part of the consciousness that moves through the world, and consequently they can reappear wherever that consciousness finds itself.

The quotation from *Fachwen* makes the farewell circular. The opening of *Fachwen* returning inside *Bergklang* creates a remarkable sense of recurrence: a place once left behind returns musically at the moment when another place is itself being left behind. The past is therefore not linear but layered. Leaving *Bergklang* causes *Fachwen* to return, while *Fachwen* in turn carries the memory of an earlier self. This is why the quotation should be understood as a structural event rather than a passing allusion. It is the point at which the quartet ceases to be solely about Austria. It becomes, more deeply, about a life of departures.

Seen in this light, the phrase *Aros Mae* becomes almost unbearably precise. The great mountains remain, but they are not the only things that remain. The music remains too. *Fachwen* is gone as a home; *Bergklang* is being left as a home; yet the music written about these places survives. The quartet therefore establishes three different forms of endurance: the landscape endures, memory endures, and music endures. The individual does not. That is not pessimistic. It is simply the truth around which the quartet has quietly organised itself. *Bergklang* begins with movement and ends with endurance. *Triefen* gives us the world in motion; *Dorfabend* gives us the world inhabited by people; and *Aros Mae* gives us the world after the people have departed. Yet at the centre of the whole work stands that extraordinary quotation from *Fachwen*. It tells us that the farewell to *Bergklang* can never be only a farewell to *Bergklang*. When one leaves a home, one carries the others with oneself. The music of *Fachwen* enters the mountains of Austria; the Welsh mountains enter the memory of the Alps; and the present becomes inseparable from the past.

The phrase *Aros Mae'r Mynyddoedd Mawr* therefore acquires a profoundly personal meaning. The people depart. The mountains remain. But there is one further thing that remains between them: the music. This may be the ultimate achievement of *Bergklang*. It does not attempt to prevent departure. It does something more subtle and more lasting. It turns departure into memory, memory into music, and music into a means by which the places themselves are allowed to remain. This also explains why *Bergklang* does not become a memorial to the flat itself. A building is temporary. A residence is temporary. Even one's relationship with a particular landscape is temporary. What persists is the sound of experience. The quartet becomes the place's afterlife within his music. The home is gone from his physical possession, but *Bergklang* remains. That is the paradox at the heart of the work: he composes a farewell in order to preserve something which he is simultaneously acknowledging that he can no longer possess.

In that sense, *Bergklang* is not really a monument to a place at all. It is a transformation of place into memory, and of memory into something capable of surviving the departure that created it. The physical home passes out of his life; the musical home remains. And perhaps that is why the work feels larger than its immediate subject. It is not ultimately concerned with losing one particular residence, but with the strange human fact that every home is temporary, while the experiences accumulated within it can continue to travel with us. The quartet gives those experiences somewhere to live.

The farewell is therefore neither an ending nor an attempt to deny the ending. It is an act of transmission. *Fachwen* is carried into *Bergklang*; *Bergklang* is carried into the music; Wales is carried into Austria; and the past is carried into the present. What appears at first to be a quartet about a particular place becomes, by the end, a meditation on what human beings can carry when they themselves must move on. The mountains remain. The homes do not. The people do not remain forever either. But music can hold the traces of all three. In *Bergklang*, departure becomes the very condition through which memory becomes audible.

String Quartet No. 34 Op. 336

Auerbach's Keller

Programme Note

Written in 2023, *Auerbach's Keller* takes its title from the famous Leipzig tavern immortalised by Goethe in Faust. The quartet was written just after a visit to Auerbach's Keller to celebrate the composer's seventieth birthday.

The three movements form a loose dramatic progression. *Doktor Faustus denkt nach* ... opens in a world of hesitation and questioning. Fragmentary melodic gestures pass between the instruments, while sustained notes and chromatic inflections create a sense of thought continually searching for resolution. The movement is less a portrait of Faust than an evocation of consciousness itself: a mind considering possibilities which remain deliberately unfinished.

The abrupt energy of *Fassreiten* provides a dramatic contrast. Rapid scales, repeated accents, *pizzicati* and constantly exchanged figures propel the four instruments through a music of exhilarating instability. The traditional Faustian image of the barrel ride becomes a study in physical momentum: exhilarating, comic and increasingly dangerous.

The **final movement**, *Gefangen*, turns the experience inside out. The music becomes slow and spacious, built from sustained notes, repetitions and carefully measured changes of register and harmony. What was movement becomes stasis; what was freedom becomes confinement. The work therefore moves from thought to movement to imprisonment, but its conclusion is not one of catastrophe. The final pages gradually withdraw into a fragile, suspended quiet, disappearing a niente.

The result is not a musical retelling of Faust, but a personal meditation prompted by Goethe's world: on thought, desire, experience and the strange passage of time.

Discussion

There is a delicious irony in the circumstances of **String Quartet No. 34**. Dafydd Bullock re-encountered Faust not now as a young composer discovering Goethe but at the age of seventy, visiting Auerbach's Keller in Leipzig. The location is already layered with history, literature, theatrical mythology and the accumulated memory of countless visitors. Yet the resulting quartet does not attempt to compete with any of those associations. Instead, it uses them as a point of departure for something much more personal.

The **first movement's** title, *Doktor Faustus denkt nach ...*, immediately establishes the essential difference. This is not Faust, but Faust thinking. The distinction is crucial. Bullock's music has always shown a particular interest in the way musical material can behave as thought: a melodic idea appears, is questioned, redirected, remembered or transformed rather than simply developed according to conventional thematic procedures. In this opening movement, that tendency becomes almost literal. The music seems to think aloud. The opening is extraordinarily economical. A small melodic gesture appears in one instrument, another answers, and the material migrates through the quartet. Silence is not merely a pause between events; it becomes part of the psychological vocabulary. The effect is one of suspended decision. The harmony behaves similarly. Rather than establishing a single tonal destination and moving purposefully towards it, Bullock allows tonal implications to accumulate and alter one another. His characteristic understanding of harmony as something generated locally by melodic movement is particularly evident here. The music does not appear to ask, "What key are we in?" so much as, "Where does this thought lead?"

The **second movement** provides the answer — or perhaps the temptation. *Fassreiten* is an extraordinary transformation of psychological uncertainty into physical energy. The quartet suddenly becomes almost orchestral in its kinetic ambition. Rapid scalar passages are exchanged between the instruments, while accents and *pizzicati* provide the sensation of an unstable surface beneath the music. The title supplies the theatrical image, but the music does not need to illustrate a man riding a barrel. Instead, it makes the listener feel motion itself. There is humour here, but it is dangerous humour. The repeated figures have something compulsive about them. The performers appear to be caught inside a machine which they themselves are generating. The more the movement accelerates, the less possible it becomes to distinguish between voluntary action and being carried along.

That makes the **third movement** inevitable. *Gefangen* is the consequence of *Fassreiten*. The word means simply "imprisoned", but Bullock does not depict imprisonment through chains, walls or violence. He creates it through time. Repetition becomes the prison. The long sustained notes of the opening seem almost innocent. Yet their recurrence gradually changes our perception of them. What first sounds like repose begins to feel like entrapment. The instruments are active, but their activity is constrained. Each voice occupies its own temporal space, and the ensemble becomes a kind of slowly shifting architecture from which there is no obvious exit. The dedication *for little E* makes this movement particularly poignant. It introduces a dimension that Goethe could never have supplied: the composer's own lived experience of time, family and mortality. The Faustian question is no longer simply about knowledge, ambition or the desire to transcend human limits. It becomes, more quietly, a question about what it means to be alive within time. That is perhaps why the final pages are so affecting.

Bullock does not give us a grand Faustian ending. There is no apotheosis and no theatrical damnation. Instead, the music gradually becomes quieter. The dynamics retreat; sustained notes remain; the texture becomes increasingly transparent until the sound itself seems to lose the will to

continue. The final marking, *a niente*, is wonderfully apt. The music does not stop so much as cease to insist upon its own existence. This gives the quartet an unexpectedly autobiographical resonance. At seventy, to visit Auerbach's Keller and then write a quartet about Faust is almost inevitably to encounter the figure of Faust differently from the way one might have done at thirty. The youthful Faust is defined by hunger: he wants more knowledge, more experience, more life. Bullock's Faust is already looking backwards as well as forwards. He thinks. He rides. He becomes trapped. And finally he listens as the world grows quiet.

Yet there is no pessimism in the conclusion. The extraordinary thing is that *Gefangen* does not sound defeated. Its final stillness has a strange dignity. The imprisonment has become contemplation again. The circle closes. Thus the three movements may be heard as a single psychological arc: I. Thought — What is possible? II. Experience — Let us find out. III. Consequence — Now we must live with what has happened. Perhaps that is the real significance of *Auerbach's Keller*. The famous place in Leipzig provides the theatrical façade, Goethe provides the myth, and Faust provides the protagonist. But underneath all three is something much more intimate: a composer at seventy, looking at the accumulated material of a life and continuing to think. That final ellipsis in *Doktor Faustus denkt nach* ... therefore turns out to be the key to the entire quartet. The thinking never really stopped.

String Quartet No. 35 Op. 340

Norah

Programme Note

This was written in Senheim on 11 August 2023. The title identifies the work directly with the composer's granddaughter Norah. The quartet is built around a small number of intensely personal musical ideas. The first is Norah's three-note motif - based on her names - introduced at the beginning of the first movement. It is deliberately small: a few notes which gradually acquire identity through repetition, transformation and redistribution among the four instruments. Around it, the second violin and viola maintain flowing repeated-note figures, while the cello alternates between *pizzicato* and *arco*. The first movement allows this 'name-motif' to develop. The three-note cell is placed in different registers, surrounded by increasingly varied textures and eventually contrasted with more vigorous material.

The second movement draws on material from the Symphony he wrote for Norah, and in particular from a characteristic triplet figure. The movement begins *con sordino* creating an entirely different musical world from the opening movement. Later another family connection becomes explicit: the theme with the syllables *** *. The name of Norah's mother, his daughter. The composer based a lullaby he wrote for her on the thematic idea derived from her name. The lullaby is combined with Norah's musical material. Mother and daughter therefore become simultaneous presences in the quartet: the mother's lullaby and Norah's three-note identity exist within the same musical texture. This is a form of musical inheritance!

The third movement withdraws into a much more spacious and contemplative world. The energetic material of the earlier movements gradually gives way to sustained sonorities, repetition and silence. At the end, the music becomes almost motionless before settling into long, quiet chords.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 35 belongs to a group of works in which the personal and the musical have become almost impossible to separate. But *Norah* is particularly revealing because its personal relationships are not merely the subject of the work. They are built into its compositional structure. *Norah* has a three-note motif. *Norah* has a symphonic musical world. Her mother has a lullaby and at the centre of the quartet these identities meet. The work is therefore not simply dedicated to a child. It is about inheritance.

The **first movement** begins with a strikingly modest gesture. While the second violin and viola provide continuous repeated-note motion, the first violin introduces the small three-note figure that will become *Norah's* identity. The cello enters with its own answering gestures, and the texture immediately establishes a world around the new motif. This is an extraordinarily appropriate way to begin. *Norah* does not arrive with a fanfare, she arrives with three notes, and the rest of the quartet seems to discover what those three notes can become. That is one of the most characteristic aspects of Bullock's mature compositional thinking: a small cell is not merely repeated mechanically but placed into different contexts so that its identity changes according to its surroundings. The cell is constant, its meaning is mobile.

This little theme represents a musical person, it is not a musical label. This is an important distinction. It would be possible to say that the three-note motif "represents *Norah*" but that is actually too simple. The motif does something more interesting, it behaves like a person. It appears in one voice, it is taken up by another. It is accompanied, interrupted. It returns and becomes more assertive. It is heard against different harmonic backgrounds. It changes its relationship with the other voices. In other words, *Norah's* identity is not presented as something fixed, It is developed through relationship. This recalls the extraordinary conception we discovered in *Evelyn*, where the music seemed to enact the emergence of a person. But there is an important difference - in *Evelyn*, the emphasis was on emergence but in *Norah* the person has entered a world that already possesses history. *Norah* is born into a family. She therefore enters an existing musical universe.

The family is already in the music! That becomes increasingly apparent in the first movement. The three-note motif is repeatedly surrounded by other kinds of material. At A, for example, the texture expands and becomes harmonically more assertive; later, at B, the musical character becomes more vigorous. The point is not simply contrast because the world already exists and *Norah* enters it. That is exactly what happens in a family. A child does not arrive into silence. She arrives into relationships, memories, songs, voices and identities which precede her. The quartet makes that fact musical.

The **second movement** introduces another level of identity. The principal triplet figure comes from *Norah's* Symphony. The significance of this is considerable. The quartet does not merely create a motif for *Norah*, it reaches outward into her larger musical portrait and imports part of the symphony into the more intimate medium of the quartet. The movement begins *con sordino*, with the triplet figure already defining the musical surface. There is a beautiful change of scale here. The symphony represents *Norah* in a larger orchestral world and the quartet takes one of its characteristic ideas and says, in effect: now hear this person close up. The triplet figure becomes more concentrated and is passed among four instruments rather than an orchestra. Its energy becomes chamber music. This is where the distinction between the first and second movements becomes important. The three-note motif gives a name. The triplet figure says something larger: *Norah's* world. The first is an identifying cell. the second is a field of activity and the quartet allows the two ideas to coexist without reducing either to a mere leitmotif. This is not Wagnerian

symbolism. It is closer to the composer's own principle of allowing musical cells to generate their surrounding tonal and contrapuntal environment. Norah is therefore not represented by one musical object, she is generated by a network of musical relationships.

Then comes G. And here I think the quartet suddenly becomes extraordinarily moving. The score actually writes: *** * That is his daughter's name and the melody is from the lullaby he wrote for her so this is not simply a reference to another member of the family. It is a mother's musical voice entering the daughter's quartet. The effect is profound - the lullaby is not presented alone but combined with the *Norah* material. So we hear mother and daughter together. The relationship is literally contrapuntal. Inheritance becomes sound.

This may be one of the most beautiful examples we have yet encountered of the way Bullock's family music works. A lullaby written for the mother becomes part of a quartet written for her daughter. The music has travelled one generation but it has not remained unchanged. It has been transformed. That is exactly what inheritance actually is - we do not inherit things intact. We receive them, change them, and pass them onwards. At G, the musical inheritance is therefore not merely thematic, it is generational. The mother's music becomes part of the daughter's identity. The three-note motif is still there, and this is crucial. Norah's motif does not disappear when her mother's lullaby arrives. The two are combined, the mother does not replace the daughter, the daughter does not erase the mother. They coexist. That is a remarkably subtle musical statement about family. Identity is not succession, it's continuity with differentiation. Mother remains Mother and Daughter remains Daughter - but their musical identities can occupy the same space.

The **third movement** changes the emotional perspective again. After the energetic triplets and the family convergence of II, the music gradually becomes spacious. The score eventually reaches long sustained notes, repeated chordal sonorities and increasingly quiet dynamics. This is not another dramatic climax, but a withdrawal into presence. The music has said who Norah is, and shown her world. It has brought her mother into that world and now it can simply be quiet. That is an important compositional decision. A portrait does not always need a final statement. Sometimes the most intimate ending is simply to allow the subject to remain in the mind.

There is now an especially fascinating relationship between the two sisters' quartets. *Evelyn*, No. 30, taught us to hear the quartet as an enactment of the emergence of a person. *Norah*, No. 35, begins after that emergence has already occurred. Norah is born into a world that contains her sister Evelyn, her mother, the family's musical history and already, remarkably, her own symphony. So the two quartets make different propositions. *Evelyn*, a person emerges. *Norah*, a person inherits a world—and begins to make it her own. That is a beautiful progression. There is, in fact, a remarkable three-level genealogy within No. 35: The mother's lullaby, Norah's Symphony and Norah's String Quartet. The music moves through generations and genres. A lullaby becomes family memory, a symphonic idea becomes chamber music, A tiny three-note motif becomes the individual's signature. This is not merely a collection of quotations. It is a musical genealogy.

String Quartet No. 35 is therefore one of the most intimate works in the sequence. Its intimacy does not come from softness or sentiment but from compositional truthfulness. Bullock has taken actual musical identities from the lives of three people and allowed them to interact according to the logic of music itself. At G, the mother and daughter literally inhabit the same musical space and that is the moment at which the quartet's deeper meaning becomes unmistakable. Norah does not arrive alone, she arrives carrying a history - and yet she is not merely the continuation of that history. She has three notes of her own. The quartet's final quietness is therefore not an ending in the conventional sense - it is almost the opposite. The music has given Norah a place within the family

and then leaves her there, quietly, as an individual. That is an extraordinarily tender piece of musical inheritance.

String Quartet No. 36 Op. 347

February

Programme Note

February was written at Senheim on 3 - 4 February 2004. The title refers neither to winter as such nor to the arrival of spring. It refers to transition and potential: to that particular point in time when change has not yet occurred, but the possibility of change is already present.

The quartet is in two movements. The **first** begins with small, lightly articulated gestures passed between the instruments, gradually developing into broader sustained sonorities. A strong climax is followed by increasingly spacious writing, and the movement eventually withdraws into quietness.

The **second movement** begins in a markedly different conception of time. Long sustained lines create an almost suspended musical space. The music appears still, yet this stillness is not empty: it contains the possibility of movement. That possibility becomes explicit with a tempo change, the metre to 6/8, and continuous rhythmic figures set the quartet suddenly in motion. The passage is energetic rather than violent. It does not represent an event that has happened; it is the emergence of potential into movement.

The music returns eventually to the slow tempo and sustained sonorities which are now different after the experience of movement. The final pages remain spacious and quiet, ending without a dramatic resolution. The music does not arrive at a new state; it remains poised before it.

February is therefore a quartet about the moment before change, about transition held in suspension, and about the quiet presence of something that may yet come into being.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 36, *February*, is among the most quietly evocative of the quartets considered here. Its title is deceptively simple, while the score itself offers no explicit programme beyond the dedication “for my Friends”. The work was written at Senheim on 3 - 4 February 2004. It would therefore be inappropriate to assign a specific narrative to the quartet without further information from the composer. Yet the music itself suggests something remarkably consistent with the character of February as a month of transition. The central concern of the quartet is not winter as such, but the relationship between stillness and the possibility of movement.

The **opening** is built from small, clearly articulated gestures. The first violin speaks first; the second violin follows; the viola and cello subsequently enter. The quartet therefore begins not as a mass but as a conversation. Short figures are contrasted with longer notes and rests, giving the opening an unusually spacious quality despite the moderate tempo. The music seems to be listening to itself. As the movement progresses, however, the individual voices increasingly merge into common sonority. From bar 23 onwards, sustained notes occupy all four instruments, and the music temporarily becomes almost chordal. From bar 34 the accumulated energy produces a sudden climax. But the climax does not initiate a conventional developmental process. Instead, it releases the music into a quieter, more spacious state. This is a characteristic feature of the quartet: intensity is followed by expansion rather than by further intensification.

The formal divisions at A, B and C are therefore best understood not simply as thematic sections but as changes in the condition of the musical space. At A, bar 46, the quartet returns to quiet, sustained writing. At B, bar 63, more active and chromatically coloured material appears. The movement thus creates an alternation between activity and repose, but without treating either as definitive. This is not a struggle between opposing musical forces. It is more like breathing. The music expands, contracts, gathers and releases.

The **second movement** radically expands this principle. Its tempo marking is half-note - 50, and its opening is dominated by very long sustained notes. The four instruments are almost suspended in a single harmonic field. This changes the listener's perception of time. The first movement asks us to follow events; the second asks us to inhabit sound. The sustained lines of bars 1 - 42 unfold so slowly that the smallest changes of pitch and register become significant. It is music of duration rather than event. The most dramatic structural event of the quartet occurs at B, bar 62. The tempo changes, the metre changes to 6/8, and continuous rhythmic figures appear in the inner strings. The transformation is remarkable precisely because the preceding music has been so still.

The rhythmic figures are energetic rather than aggressive. They create a sense of awakening. This is perhaps the point at which the title *February* becomes most suggestive. February is a month in which the visible world may still appear dormant while change is already taking place beneath it. The quartet produces exactly such a paradox: stillness containing movement, and movement emerging from stillness. The active section from bar 62 onwards is also revealing because it never becomes chaotic. The repeated figures in the second violin and viola provide a continuous rhythmic mechanism, while the first violin and cello articulate more independent melodic material. The quartet has acquired momentum without losing equilibrium.

That distinction matters. This is not the nervous energy of *Changing Times*, nor is it the violent rupture of *Fragmented Winter*. It is life returning to a quiet environment. At bar 122 the music returns to half-note = 50 and to the sustained texture. But now the listener hears the stillness differently. Before bar 62, stillness was simply the condition of the music. After bar 122, stillness

has become something that has been chosen after movement. This gives the second half a particular serenity. The music has discovered that it can move, and can nevertheless return to repose.

D at bar 122 continues the spacious writing, while F at bar 206 leads into the final section. The final twenty bars are especially striking. The four instruments sustain long overlapping phrases, with the dynamic ultimately falling to p. There is no dramatic final cadence. The music simply becomes quieter and quieter. This makes the ending feel less like conclusion than continuation beyond the frame of the work. If the title is taken as a seasonal metaphor, the quartet can be understood as occupying a threshold. It does not depict the darkness of winter, nor does it proclaim the arrival of spring. It inhabits the uncertain middle ground between them.

That is exactly what the musical structure does. The first movement moves repeatedly between gesture and stillness. The second begins in stillness, discovers vigorous movement, and then returns to an altered stillness. The final state therefore contains the memory of movement. The quiet ending is not the same quietness with which the movement began. It has been changed by experience. That is, perhaps, the most beautiful interpretation of February that the score itself permits: the world has not yet changed visibly, but the music has begun to sense that it will. The dedication for *my Friends* adds a human warmth to a quartet whose musical world is otherwise remarkably restrained. The work's final quietness consequently does not feel lonely.

String Quartet No. 37 Op. 351

Sumer Is Icumen In

Programme Note

String Quartet 37 is conceived in three movements, corresponding to three stages of the season: *Early Summer*, *High Summer* and *Late Summer*. "*Sumer Is Icumen In*" translates approximately to "Summer Has Come In" or "Summer Has Arrived." The song was apparently written in the Wessex dialect of Middle English and is one of the earliest English lyrics about the coming of spring and summer, probably composed between 1240 and 1310. The title derives from this famous medieval English summer song, but the quartet does not attempt to reconstruct or imitate medieval music. Rather, the text provides a point of departure for a meditation on the changing experience of summer and, ultimately, on the passage of time itself.

The **first movement**, *Early Summer*, begins quietly and spaciouly, with the first violin emerging from a largely silent texture. Gradually the other instruments join, and the music becomes increasingly animated. At its central stages the movement alternates between lyrical spaciousness and passages of intense rhythmic activity, culminating in a rapid, energetic section. This is summer as arrival and growth: a world becoming increasingly full, active and alive.

High Summer, the **second movement**, is more strongly articulated from the outset. Its 3/4 metre and *marcato* character establish a more physical presence, while increasingly chromatic and rhythmically insistent writing suggests the saturation and intensity of the season at its height. At the centre of the movement, however, activity gives way to an extended passage of sustained sonorities. Time appears almost to stand still. The music inhabits a landscape rather than travelling through it, before gradually recovering movement towards the close.

The **final movement**, *Late Summer*, changes the atmosphere radically. The tempo is reduced and all four instruments play *con sordino*. Long, slowly unfolding phrases replace the earlier rhythmic energy. Here summer is no longer something arriving or flourishing. It is something remembered. The final pages bring a last, subdued resurgence of activity before the music withdraws into increasingly quiet sustained sounds and pauses. The quartet ends without dramatic resolution, simply allowing its sound to disappear. The title remains apt throughout. *Sumer Is Icumen In* says that summer has come; the quartet reminds us that, from the moment it arrives, summer has already begun to pass.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 37 does not present itself through biography, place or narrative. There is no named individual at its centre, no explicit personal event and no geographical landscape requiring interpretation. Instead, it takes something apparently universal and uncomplicated - summer - and subjects it to the same close musical scrutiny that elsewhere has been applied to memory, identity and place. The result is much less simple than its title might suggest. The quartet is not a musical picture of summer, but instead a study of our changing relationship to summer as time passes. The three movements provide the essential framework. *Early Summer*, *High Summer* and *Late Summer* are not merely descriptive headings. They establish three different temporal states, and the music progressively transforms its treatment of rhythm, melody, harmony, texture and silence in order to embody them.

The **opening** of *Early Summer* is deliberately unhurried. The first violin introduces the musical world before the other instruments fully inhabit it. There is something almost phenomenological about this beginning. The world is not yet fully present, it is coming into being. The first violin's melodic gestures are answered and gradually surrounded by the other instruments. Long notes coexist with shorter, repeated figures. The texture develops incrementally rather than being announced as a completed structure. This makes the subsequent acceleration particularly meaningful. At A, the tempo suddenly increases and the quartet acquires a markedly more vigorous rhythmic character. The difference is not simply one of speed, it is a change in density of experience. The world that was initially spacious has become crowded with activity. Short rhythmic figures circulate among the instruments, generating a texture in which individual voices become parts of a larger continuous movement. This is one of the most characteristic aspects of this writing: the distinction between melody and accompaniment becomes increasingly porous. A figure may begin as an accompanimental pattern and then acquire melodic significance; conversely, a melody can dissolve into the harmonic fabric. Summer grows organically rather than being represented and then, crucially, the movement slows its perception of time again. The more spacious passages following the first energetic phase are not merely contrasts. They establish the idea that summer itself is experienced through alternating states of attention: activity, repose, intensity, stillness. The enormous acceleration at D pushes this process to its extreme. The music seems almost unable to contain its own vitality but that very abundance contains the first hint of mortality. Anything moving this quickly cannot remain indefinitely.

High Summer, the **second movement**, begins differently. There is no gradual awakening, summer is already here. The music enters at once into its environment, with *marcato* articulation and a strongly defined rhythmic profile. The effect is almost physical. Where the first movement was concerned with growth, the second is concerned with fullness. But fullness gradually becomes saturation. This is perhaps the most interesting psychological aspect of the movement. High summer ought to be the climax of happiness: warmth, abundance, light, maturity. Yet the musical language increasingly suggests that such abundance has a price. The harmonic language becomes more chromatic, rhythmic patterns recur insistently, and the quartet increasingly sounds as though it has reached the limits of its own energy.

Then comes the great still centre. The extended passage beginning around bar 126 has abandoned much of the preceding rhythmic momentum. This is the point at which the quartet becomes almost philosophical - nothing is happening, and yet everything is changing. Small alterations of pitch, spacing and voice-leading become perceptually significant because the larger temporal framework has become so still. Here the composer's conception of harmony as a kind of tonal space becomes particularly apparent. The harmony does not need to propel the music towards a destination. It can

simply establish a space in which the listener remains. The distinction is important. A conventional harmonic progression says: we are going somewhere. This passage says: we are here - and that is precisely what high summer feels like when experienced from within it. It seems permanent.

Late Summer, the **third movement**, reveals that it was never permanent. The *con sordino* marking and the tempo immediately transform the quartet's sound. The mutes are especially significant, because they do not merely make the quartet quieter. They remove brilliance. The sound is veiled. The long phrases seem to exist on the other side of the intense activity of the earlier movements and here the quartet achieves something rather remarkable: it does not depict autumn. There is no need for falling leaves, coldness or darkness. It remains summer, but summer is now late. That distinction gives the movement its poignancy. The melodic lines repeatedly rise and then return, often over long spans. The phrases seem to breathe slowly, almost imperceptibly. At A, the four instruments create great arching structures whose beginnings and endings are separated by substantial spans of time. The music has ceased to be about becoming. It is now about remembering what has become and that is why the simplicity of the material matters so much. The quartet does not need increasingly elaborate musical events. At this stage, the smallest change can carry the weight of an entire preceding movement.

The later sections are especially moving because the music does not simply continue towards extinction, indeed there are moments of renewed animation. At B and C, the music briefly gathers some of its former vitality, including more active upper-string writing. But these gestures have a different meaning now. In the first movement, activity meant life happening - here, activity means life being remembered. That is a profound difference. The same basic musical world has become psychologically transformed by what has preceded it.

This is one of the reasons the three-movement design works so well. The movements do not merely follow one another; they reinterpret one another retrospectively. After III, we hear I differently and after the stillness of II, we hear its earlier abundance differently. After the quiet ending, the enormous energy of I acquires something almost heartbreaking. The title is therefore more than an attractive reference. The medieval *Sumer Is Icumen In* represents an extraordinarily old human response to the arrival of summer. This quartet takes that ancient declaration and places it inside a much larger temporal arc. The irony is exquisite: "Summer has come" but the quartet asks: What happens after it has come? The answer is the entire work. This also explains why the quartet does not need literal quotation of the medieval melody to justify its title. The reference functions conceptually rather than illustratively. The old song provides the cultural memory against which your own musical summer unfolds. The old title and the new music meet in the same human experience.

Looking at No. 37 from the perspective of the larger sequence of quartets, I think its significance becomes clearer. The earlier works we have discussed have repeatedly asked how music can preserve something: a person, place, memory, an experience, a relationship. No. 37 asks a slightly different question: Can music preserve something that by definition cannot be preserved? Summer cannot be kept, neither can a particular moment of summer. What music can preserve is the experience of having experienced it. That is why the final movement is not tragic, but elegiac. The music does not protest against change - it accepts it. The ending may be the most eloquent part of the quartet. After all the rhythmic energy of I, the saturation of II and the long reflective phrases of III, the final music reduces itself to isolated sonorities and silence. Nothing is resolved in the conventional dramatic sense, but something has been completed. The quartet began with the arrival of summer and it ends with the disappearance of the sound of summer. Perhaps that is why the medieval title is so apt after all. *Sumer Is Icumen In*. Summer has come - and therefore, inevitably, it will go.

String Quartet No. 38 Op. 357

Programme Note

There is no programme behind String Quartet 38. It is simply music. The quartet therefore makes no attempt to represent a person, a place, a historical event, a literary character or an external idea. Its subject is the musical material itself: its capacity to generate movement, repose, tension, release and transformation.

The **first movement** establishes this world immediately. A sustained upper voice is set against continuous semiquaver activity in the inner instruments, creating a fundamental tension between long melodic lines and rapid underlying motion. This relationship continually changes. The restless figuration is interrupted by more spacious, chordal writing; melodic material emerges from the rhythmic texture; and the earlier activity subsequently returns in altered form. The music moves decisively from continuous motion towards sustained sonority, while later sections restore the energy of the opening. The movement eventually subsides into extended sustained sonorities.

The **second movement**, marked *con sordino*, enters an entirely different acoustic world. Its material is quieter and more spacious, with rests becoming as important as sounds. Small melodic gestures gradually emerge from silence, expand, retreat and return. The music does not appear to travel towards an external destination; instead, its harmonic and contrapuntal relationships invite the listener to remain within the sound itself.

The **third movement** removes the mutes and returns to a more strongly rhythmic world. In 6/8, rapid figures and accented gestures circulate among the instruments, creating an immediate sense of physical movement. Later the tempo increases, intensifying the rhythmic energy still further. Yet the spaciousness of the second movement has not disappeared. It repeatedly returns within the third, so that movement and stillness are no longer opposites but complementary aspects of the same musical language. The final section gathers the principal characteristics of the quartet together. Rhythmic activity and sustained harmony coexist before the music gradually releases its energy. The final pages settle into quieter sonorities and ultimately a final *pizzicato* gesture.

Discussion

Among the thirty-eight quartets considered so far, **String Quartet No. 38** occupies a curious and, ultimately, important position. It has no descriptive title. There is no person behind it, no named landscape, no literary character, no quotation whose significance must be uncovered, no biographical event waiting to be explained. There is simply the score. That apparent absence of subject matter is itself revealing. For by this point in the quartet cycle, we have become accustomed to discovering that apparently abstract material is carrying memories of places, people, family relationships, cultural inheritance or personal experience. No. 38 refuses that route. It says: '*Nur die Musik*', and consequently it asks a rather different question: What can the music itself do?

The **opening** provides the answer immediately. The first violin presents sustained melodic material while the second violin and viola generate continuous rapid motion beneath it, with the cello supplying its own strongly articulated foundation. There is no need to explain this opposition - it is enough to hear it. The sustained line and the moving texture coexist, and the tension between them generates the musical situation from which the movement develops. This is perhaps the purest expression we have yet encountered of one of the fundamental characteristics of Bullock's compositional language: a small musical relationship is sufficient to generate an entire field of activity. The semiquavers do not merely accompany the melody, they create the space in which the melody exists - and the melody, in turn, changes the significance of the semiquavers. The relationship is reciprocal.

One might describe the rapid figures simply as repetitive, but that would miss their real function. They repeat, certainly - but they do not return as identical objects. Whenever material reappears, it has acquired the memory of what has happened to it in the intervening music. This is one of the most persistent characteristics of the quartets as a whole. A thematic cell is rarely a fixed label, it is more like a musical organism. It can be compressed, expanded, displaced, re-harmonised, redistributed among the instruments or placed in a completely different textural environment. No. 38 demonstrates this without any programme to distract us from the process. At A, for example, the continuous rapid motion suddenly gives way to sustained chordal writing. The music has not gone somewhere geographically or psychologically, it has simply changed its state.

This is where the quartet becomes particularly revealing from the perspective of the compositional thought. The rhythmic cells generate movement, Movement generates contrapuntal relationships and those relationships produce harmonic fields. The harmonic fields then create the conditions from which new melodic material can emerge. In other words, there is no obvious hierarchy of melody - accompaniment - harmony. Instead, all three continually generate one another and this is why the sustained passages are so important. They are not pauses in the real composition they are places where the consequences of the preceding motion become audible as harmony. The music has been moving rapidly and then it stops, and suddenly we hear what that movement has made.

The **first movement** is a sustained musical argument. The large structure of I can therefore be understood without reference to anything outside the score. The movement establishes rapid motion and sustained melody, then moves towards sustained harmony and contrapuntal expansion and then returns to rapid motion and finally arrives at extended stillness. The return of the earlier highly active material is particularly important because it demonstrates that the movement is not simply progressing from A to B to C. It is remembering itself - the material comes back, but it comes back altered by experience. Eventually the motion is exhausted. The final sustained sonorities are not an imposed conclusion; they are the logical consequence of a process which has repeatedly alternated between activity and suspension.

The **second movement** may initially seem to be a retreat from the first, but It is more than that. The *con sordino* marking immediately changes the physical character of the quartet but the deeper transformation is temporal. The first movement continually generates momentum but the second asks: What happens when momentum is removed? The answer is not emptiness, it is concentration. Small gestures become significant because they occur within a much larger field of silence. A single entrance can change the balance of the entire quartet. A sustained note can become an event. The rests are therefore not negative space, but structural material. The second movement is perhaps the clearest example in No. 38 of harmony behaving as space rather than propulsion. The quartet often seems content to remain within a sonority, allowing small changes of pitch, register and instrumental colour to alter our perception of it. There is no necessity for every chord to "lead" somewhere. A sonority can simply be. This is exactly where a distinction between tonal space and conventional harmonic progression becomes useful. The harmony is not necessarily a road, it can be a landscape and because the movement is so restrained, the listener has time to inhabit that landscape.

The **third movement** begins by removing the mutes. The difference is physical. After the veiled sound of II, the strings now speak openly. The 6/8 metre introduces a rocking, propulsive quality, while rapid figures and accents immediately establish renewed energy. At A the acceleration intensifies the process, yet this is not simply a return to the first movement. That would make the structure merely circular. Instead, the music now knows what silence is and that knowledge changes the meaning of movement. This is perhaps the central structural achievement of the quartet. The energetic material of III can be heard as related to the activity of I, but it is no longer trapped within the same opposition between movement and sustained melody. The second movement has intervened and Silence has become part of the musical vocabulary. Consequently, III can move freely between extremely active passages and spacious harmonic fields. The two states now belong together. Movement does not have to defeat stillness. Stillness does not have to suppress movement. They are simply two conditions of musical existence.

This is why I would not describe No. 38 as simply cyclical. It is better understood as spiral-shaped. Something returns, but because it has passed through another musical state, it means something different when it returns. There is another aspect which becomes particularly clear when the work is considered without a programme: the physicality of the instruments. In I, the strings are driven by rapid repeated figures and emphatic attacks. In II, the *con sordino* sound demands extraordinary control of balance, intonation and sustained tone. In III, the 6/8 metre, rapid exchanges, accents and *pizzicati* turn the quartet into a highly physical ensemble once again. Thus the work can almost be experienced as a study of the four instruments themselves: they move; they sustain; they listen; they move again. The quartet is not describing physical action, it is being physical.

This is where I think No. 38 acquires its particular importance in the retrospective. The earlier quartets have taught us to ask: What is this about? No. 38 answers: Nothing. Listen to what it does. That is not a retreat from meaning, it is a different conception of meaning. The meaning resides in the relationships between sounds. A repeated figure means something because of what precedes it and what follows it. A sustained chord matters because of the movement that led to it, a silence because of the sound that surrounds it, returns because the music has changed in between. Nothing external is required. There is therefore a paradox at the heart of No. 38. It is perhaps the least "explanatory" of the quartets and for that very reason it may be one of the most revealing. When all external elements are removed, only the compositional language itself remains.

The final pages are particularly satisfying in that context. The music does not need a symbolic ending, it simply allows its energy to diminish. The final section gathers together rhythmic and

sustained material, then gradually releases its intensity until the final quiet sonorities and *pizzicato* gesture. The music has reached the point at which it no longer needs to continue, and that is enough. *String Quartet No. 38* is therefore important precisely because it refuses to tell us what it is about. It demonstrates that, after all the stories and memories accumulated across the cycle, the music does not require an external subject in order to possess identity. It can generate its own meaning. The first movement creates a world of motion and discovers stillness. The second inhabits stillness and discovers its latent movement. The third allows the two to coexist. Nothing needs to stand behind these processes - they are sufficient. So perhaps the most appropriate critical description of No. 38 is also the simplest: It is not music about something, it is music becoming itself. *Nur die Musik*.

String Quartet No. 39 Op. 361

Programme Note

String Quartet 39 is another work without a programme or descriptive title. Its subject is therefore not an external event or narrative, but the nature of musical movement itself. The quartet is constructed around a persistent distinction between continuous rhythmic motion and longer melodic or harmonic spans. In the **first movement**, rapid semiquaver activity provides an underlying current against which sustained lines and changing harmonic sonorities unfold. At times the current disappears altogether, leaving the quartet suspended in sustained sound, before movement gradually returns. The music consequently seems to breathe between motion and stillness, although the two are never entirely separate.

The **second movement** takes the same fundamental idea and transforms it. The semiquaver motion of the first movement gives way to continuous triplets. What had been a rhythmic figure increasingly becomes a texture: an almost perpetual flow beneath longer melodic lines. The instrumental roles shift, too, allowing the cello and upper strings to emerge successively from the moving fabric.

The music thus develops not through the conventional presentation and development of contrasting themes, but through the transformation of relatively simple musical cells. Repetition becomes movement; movement becomes texture; texture becomes harmonic space. The apparent simplicity of the underlying material allows increasingly complex relationships to arise above it.

Towards the end of the quartet, the continuous motion finally subsides. The music becomes spacious and quiet, and the final sustained sounds are marked *non vibrato*. After the rhythmic activity that has animated so much of the work, the ending strips the sound back to its most elemental form: pitch, duration, resonance and silence.

The quartet therefore has a deceptively simple trajectory. It begins with movement, discovers stillness within movement, transforms movement into an almost continuous musical environment, and finally allows that environment to fall silent. In this sense, the work is concerned less with what music describes than with what music is.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 39 - on the surface, - is an exceptionally fluent and immediately comprehensible work. Beneath that surface, however, lies a remarkably rigorous conception: the use of continuous rhythmic motion as a structural constant against which melody, harmony, register and instrumental colour can be continually redefined. The work's essential material is not particularly elaborate. What matters is what happens to it. This is characteristic of Bullock's mature compositional thinking. Rather than relying upon the multiplication of thematic ideas, he increasingly allows a small number of fundamental processes to generate the musical argument. The significance of a figure is therefore determined less by its intrinsic complexity than by its function within the larger musical field. In No. 39, that function is initially rhythmic.

The **first movement** establishes its principle almost immediately. The first violin presents sustained melodic gestures while the inner parts introduce rapid repeated motion. The two kinds of musical time coexist: one is measured in relatively long spans, the other in the incessant subdivision of the beat. This creates more than a conventional melody-and-accompaniment relationship. The repeated motion has its own structural identity. It establishes a musical present which continues independently of the melodic line above it. The sustained melody can therefore pause, extend, rise or fall without having to carry the entire burden of forward movement. The underlying rhythmic current is already performing that function. This separation of functions is one of the quartet's central achievements. The music possesses both direction and continuity, but they are not necessarily supplied by the same material. When the rapid motion disappears, the consequence is therefore striking. At the first major structural change, the quartet is temporarily deprived of its rhythmic engine and becomes a field of sustained sonorities. Yet this does not constitute a rupture. The listener has already learned that motion and stillness belong to the same musical organism. The absence of movement becomes meaningful precisely because movement has been established as the norm.

This is where Bullock's use of repetition becomes particularly interesting. Repetition traditionally carries one of two apparently contradictory implications. It can establish stability, or it can generate insistence and momentum. Here it does both. The repeated rhythmic figures are stable enough to establish identity, but their persistence produces energy. Because the surrounding melodic and harmonic material changes, the repeated figure is continually heard in a new context. Consequently, repetition does not mean remaining in the same place. It means carrying something recognisable into another place. This is closely related to Bullock's wider cellular approach to composition. A musical idea need not return as a conventional theme in order to remain present. Its identity can survive through rhythmic behaviour, intervallic contour, register or function. The cell becomes a kind of genetic material.

Another important feature of No. 39 is the attention given to instrumental sound itself. The alternation between *vibrato* and *non vibrato*, and between *arco* and *pizzicato*, is not merely a matter of colouristic decoration. These instructions contribute directly to the work's structural vocabulary. The score introduces *non vibrato* passages and later returns to *arco* and *pizzicato* as the music approaches its conclusion. The distinction is fundamental. A vibrating string produces a sound perceived as expressive and continuously alive. A *non vibrato* note can instead seem more objective, almost architectural. Bullock exploits this distinction to move between different conceptions of musical sound. The quartet is therefore not concerned solely with notes, it is concerned with the physical conditions under which notes become musical events.

The **second movement** provides the most elegant structural stroke in the work. The first movement is characterised by continuous semiquaver motion. The second introduces continuous triplet motion. The principle has remained, but its rhythmic identity has changed. This is not simply contrast for its own sake. The listener recognises the underlying continuity at a deeper level. The second movement seems to say: what if the same conception were placed inside a different rhythmic world? The result is almost like seeing the same landscape under different light. The triplets gradually lose their identity as individual rhythmic figures. Their persistence turns them into a surface of sound. This is a crucial development. In the first movement, continuous motion is something we can hear as a rhythmic motor. In the second, it increasingly becomes something we hear through. It is no longer merely an event, but now an environment.

This transformation has important consequences for the melodic writing. Because the rhythmic ground is so persistent, the longer lines above it can become increasingly independent. The melodic instruments do not have to manufacture continuity; they can instead explore contour, register and harmonic implication. The result is a particularly characteristic Bullockian relationship between melody and harmony. Melody appears to determine the curvature of the musical space, while the persistent rhythmic material gives that space a sense of physical continuity. The two are therefore interdependent without being identical. At the later stages of the second movement, the first violin rises increasingly above the triplet texture, while the inner voices maintain the continuous motion beneath it. Eventually this relationship has become exceptionally clear. The texture is now almost self-sustaining.

It would be misleading to describe this process simply as "development" in the conventional symphonic sense. Bullock is not taking a theme apart and reconstructing it. He is accumulating consequences. A small rhythmic idea establishes a current. The current supports melody. The melody changes the perceived harmonic field. The harmonic field affects the expressive character of the melody. The resulting density leads to further instrumental differentiation. The whole process is therefore cumulative rather than analytical and this is one reason the music can feel simultaneously spontaneous and inevitable.

The most important structural event may be the final one. After the rhythmic continuity of the second movement, the music arrives at rehearsal I around bar 196 and begins to empty itself. The long sustained notes return, The dynamic falls, *vibrato* is removed, the rhythmic machinery disappears. Finally the music is reduced to a handful of quiet sounds and silences. This ending retrospectively changes our understanding of the whole quartet. The continuous motion was never an end in itself, it existed in order that the listener could experience its eventual absence. The final silence is therefore not simply a conclusion, it is the negative image of the entire work.

The most revealing way to understand No. 39 may therefore be to trace the changing status of its repeated material: figure → motion → continuity → texture → space → silence. At the beginning, we hear repeated notes, by the middle, we hear a continuous current and later, we cease to listen consciously to the individual repetitions and instead experience the resulting field. Eventually the field disappears and what remains is silence. The composition has therefore transformed a very small amount of musical information into a very large perceptual experience. That is perhaps the most mature aspect of the quartet.

Placed against the quartets we have been discussing, No. 39 seems to mark another step away from the necessity of overt thematic explanation. Again there is no title to guide the listener. There is no external narrative, no programme. The music does not need one because its argument is entirely internal. Yet it is not abstract in the dry sense. Quite the contrary: it is intensely physical. The bow, the vibrating string, the repeated subdivision, the weight of sustained notes, the distinction between

vibrato and *non-vibrato*, and finally the disappearance of sound itself are all part of the compositional argument. This is music about musical existence, but without ever needing to announce that fact. *String Quartet No. 39* is, therefore, deceptively modest in its materials but ambitious in its implications. Its central discovery is that continuous repetition need not produce stasis. Properly placed within a changing harmonic and melodic environment, repetition can become movement itself. From there, movement can become texture, texture can become space and space can finally become silence. That trajectory gives the quartet an unusual unity. Its two movements are not merely contrasting constructions but two manifestations of the same underlying idea: the first through semiquaver continuity, the second through triplet continuity. The rhythmic surface changes, but the deeper compositional principle remains constant. The final *non vibrato* sounds therefore less like a conventional ending than like the removal of the last layer of musical activity. What remains is extraordinarily simple: sound and silence - and the knowledge, accumulated over the preceding eighteen pages, that the two are not opposites but the final terms of the same musical process. No. 39 is a particularly clean example of that.

String Quartet No. 40 Op. 363

Distaw

Programme Note

Distaw is a Welsh word describing the particular calm that returns after storm and turbulence. The quartet was written at Senheim on 22 July 2025 it arose directly from a deeply disturbing encounter: a conversation with a hitherto unsuspected Holocaust denier which left the composer with an acute sense of shock, anger and moral disorientation. The work was written, in his own words, "in one breath" following that experience. and is dedicated "***For the Denied.***" The dedication refers to those whose potential is prevented from being realised - whether through political circumstances, economic deprivation or limitations imposed by health. It is not a reference to a particular group or individual, but to a broad human condition: lives containing possibilities that circumstances do not permit to unfold. This gives the quartet a dimension beyond the immediate metaphor of storm and calm.

The turbulence of the **first movement** can be heard not only as an external force that must eventually subside, but as a reminder that human possibility is vulnerable to forces beyond the individual's control. The brief *Dankgesang* at the beginning of the second movement then becomes especially poignant. It is a moment of thanksgiving for the possibility of recovery and continuation - a possibility that is not equally available to everyone.

The long central passage, in which rhythmic energy is gradually transformed from agitation into support, can consequently be heard as an affirmation of life's unrealised as well as realised potential. The music moves, develops and eventually finds serenity; the dedication asks us to remember those for whom such development has been obstructed or denied.

The **final *Distaw*** therefore has an ethical as well as an emotional significance. Its serenity is not a declaration that all lives find fulfilment. Rather, it creates a quiet space in which the listener may become conscious of the fragility of fulfilment itself. The quartet ends in peace, but the dedication prevents that peace from becoming complacent. There are those who find their way through turbulence to fulfilment, and those whose potential is denied before that journey can be made. *Distaw* is offered to both — but especially to the latter.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 40, *Distaw*, Op. 363, written in Senheim on 22 July 2025, arose directly from a deeply disturbing encounter: a conversation with an unsuspected Holocaust denier which left the composer with an acute sense of shock, anger and moral disorientation. The work was written, in his own words, "in one breath" following that experience. Its Welsh title, *Distaw*, refers to the particular calm that follows storm and turbulence, whether physical or psychological. The dedication, however, is simply '*For the Denied*'.

Those two elements—the calm after turbulence and the denied—prevent the quartet from being understood merely as a personal musical account of anger followed by consolation. The first movement confronts turbulence in its most violent and unstable form, while the second discovers a very different kind of quietness. Yet the dedication broadens the meaning of that quietness. "*The Denied*" refers not only to those denied peace, justice or recognition, but also to people whose potential is prevented from being realised through political circumstances, economic deprivation or limitations imposed by health. The quartet therefore moves from a specific experience of moral shock towards a much wider meditation upon the vulnerability of human possibility.

The opening of the **first movement** is extraordinarily direct. There is no preparation and no gradual entry into the subject. The first violin is silent while the second violin, viola and cello establish an immediately harsh, dislocated sonority at *ff*. The cello sustains a low foundation while the viola repeatedly articulates a chromatically inflected figure and the second violin adds sharply accented gestures above it. The effect is not simply dissonant. It is physically confrontational. The music seems to have begun in the middle of an event. That is important in relation to the circumstances of the work. A conventional dramatic structure might have represented shock by gradually building towards an eruption. Here there is no such psychological preparation. The eruption is already present. The listener is placed inside the disturbance rather than being led towards it.

The first movement proceeds through repeated transformations of this initial condition. Short, sharply defined gestures are separated by sustained notes and silences. The harmonic language remains severely chromatic, and the music repeatedly alternates between attacks and strangely suspended sonorities. At bar 32, rehearsal A introduces one of the movement's most striking episodes: rapid descending chromatic figures appear simultaneously in the outer voices and viola, while the upper instruments answer with forceful, accented gestures. The effect is almost one of musical disintegration, but the material is not arbitrary. Its repeated contours and rhythmic identities give the violence a coherent vocabulary.

That coherence is significant. The music is turbulent, but it is not confused. It knows exactly what it is doing. The passage that follows at bar 40 temporarily withdraws the violence. The quartet is reduced to sustained notes, marked *mf*, and the rhythmic surface becomes sparse. Yet this is not consolation. It is more like the aftermath of an explosion: the absence of activity makes the disturbance that preceded it more audible in retrospect. The violence returns. At bar 57 the dynamic rises towards *ff*, and by the approach to rehearsal B at bar 62 the rapid chromatic figures return with renewed intensity. The movement repeatedly establishes this pattern of eruption and withdrawal, but never allows the quieter episodes to become securely consoling. The listener learns that stillness is provisional. Turbulence can return at any moment.

This becomes especially stark at rehearsal D, bar 83. All four instruments suddenly participate in a relentless stream of rapid semiquavers. The texture is almost completely saturated: every instrument contributes to the same violent and highly charged mechanism, producing a dense chromatic current

which continues across several pages. At bar 87, the upper instruments emerge from that current in sustained, accented notes while the cello continues the rapid movement below. The result is extraordinary: the quartet appears simultaneously to be trapped inside the turbulence and attempting to rise above it. In the final bar the voices reach *fff* and the movement's violence is at its most concentrated in a violent and final *pizzicato*. Yet even this does not provide cathartic resolution. The first movement is therefore not a conventional journey from darkness towards light. It is a musical enactment of turbulence itself: abrupt, recurrent, disruptive and resistant to rational containment. The quiet passages are not answers to the violence. They are spaces in which its consequences can be heard.

It is only with the **second movement** that the title *Distaw* begins to acquire its full meaning. After the extreme violence of the first movement, the second begins with all four instruments *con sordino*, *arco*, and *mp*. The opening is extraordinarily simple: long, gently connected notes move through the quartet in a sustained four-part texture. The effect is immediately one of calm, but it is not the calm of emotional emptiness. The music has a pulse, a harmonic direction and an inner melodic life. Most importantly, the opening is deliberately chorale-like. Its character evokes, for a brief time, the idea of a *Dankgesang*, a song of thanksgiving. This is not a quotation of an existing chorale, but an invented chorale-like musical space. The distinction matters. After the moral ugliness represented by the first movement, the second does not offer a borrowed religious answer. It creates its own brief possibility of thanksgiving.

That moment is extremely short, but its significance extends far beyond its duration. The chorale-like writing is soon joined by a more flowing, soothing melody. The two ideas begin to alternate and overlap: the invented chorale suggests stillness, contemplation and gratitude, while the more lyrical material provides warmth and continuity. The contrast is not between two unrelated themes but between two ways of inhabiting calm. One is static and communal; the other is personal and flowing.

At bar 21 the music reaches *f*, but the character remains fundamentally lyrical. Rhythmic activity is gradually transformed into support rather than aggression. The running figures that appear at rehearsal A in bar 32 create a persistent rhythmic foundation beneath the upper voices, and this becomes one of the central compositional ideas of the quartet. In the first movement, energy is destructive; in the second, energy becomes supportive. The same basic musical phenomenon - continuous movement - has acquired an entirely different ethical and emotional function. From this point the *ostinato*-like *pizzicato* and flowing upper voices establish a sustained musical current. The upper melody can now move freely because the rhythmic foundation carries it. The music is no longer struggling against itself. Its energies have become mutually sustaining.

This is where the dedication *For the Denied* becomes especially important. If *Distaw* were simply about the composer's own recovery after an unpleasant encounter, the second movement might be heard as a private return to peace. But the dedication prevents that interpretation from being sufficient. The serenity is offered also to those whose circumstances have prevented them from realising their potential—those for whom the journey from turbulence towards fulfilment may have been interrupted, distorted or made impossible. The music therefore contains an implicit ethical tension. It finds serenity, but it cannot assume that serenity is equally available to everyone. This is why the title *Distaw* is more complex than "peace". It describes the calm that follows a storm, but it does not claim that every storm is followed by calm.

The second movement's most poignant moments arise precisely because the music knows what has preceded it. Its chorale-like opening would have a different meaning if it stood alone. Following the

first movement, it sounds like an act of thanksgiving for the possibility of calm itself. The central lyrical passage is consequently not sentimental. It is hard-won.

As the movement continues, the relationship between rhythmic support and lyrical expression becomes increasingly integrated. At bar 57 the music broadens and slows down, briefly, while the melodic voices rise over the continuing rhythmic texture. At bar 58, *a tempo* restores the flowing movement, and the music again combines sustained melody with repeated rhythmic figures. The effect is one of renewed life rather than mere relaxation. Later, the quartet increasingly permits spaciousness to emerge between gestures. Around bar 73 it broadens into more sustained writing, while subsequent passages alternate activity and repose without ever returning to the psychological violence of the first movement. At bar 91, *pizzicato* reappears beneath the lyrical voices, but now it feels almost like a quiet continuation of life rather than a disturbance. The movement's energy has been domesticated: what was threatening in the first movement has become part of the support structure of the second.

The final pages are among the most important in the quartet. From bar 99, rehearsal C, the music returns to sustained sonorities. The rhythmic mechanisms disappear and the four instruments once again inhabit a spacious harmonic field. From bar 109 there is a further change in the texture, and the dynamics gradually fall from *mf* towards *p*. By bar 119 all four instruments are marked *non vibrato*, and the sound becomes increasingly pure and unadorned. The end of the Quartet is consequently not merely quiet, but stripped of agitation. The last *non vibrato* sonorities possess an almost impersonal serenity. The *vibrato* has disappeared; the rhythmic turbulence has disappeared; the violent chromatic activity of the first movement has disappeared. What remains is the quartet itself, reduced to sustained sound and slowly changing harmony. The final 6 bars are marked *molto ritardando*, and the music comes to rest. There is no triumphant cadence and no rhetorical declaration that the crisis has been overcome. The music simply arrives at stillness. That is precisely what the Welsh word *Distaw* means.

The dedication means that this stillness cannot be heard complacently. The quartet does not say that turbulence can always be overcome, nor that every human life finds its way towards fulfilment. Rather, it creates a musical space in which the possibility of fulfilment can be recognised alongside the terrible knowledge that such possibility may be denied. This gives the work a dimension which reaches far beyond the immediate circumstances of its composition. The first movement confronts a particular manifestation of human moral failure: denial of an historical reality so terrible that its denial becomes itself a form of violence. The second movement responds not by arguing, explaining or retaliating, but by creating another kind of human possibility - a space of listening, continuity, gratitude and calm.

That is why the brief *Dankgesang* at the beginning of the second movement is so significant. It is not an escape from the first movement. It is its answer - and the answer is not that everything is well. The answer is simply that calm is possible, music is possible, life is possible. And the dedication adds the necessary qualification: but not everyone is given the same possibility. In this sense, *Distaw* belongs to a recurring concern in Bullock's music with transformation rather than resolution. The music does not erase its starting condition. The turbulence of the first movement remains necessary to the meaning of the serenity that follows. The calm is meaningful precisely because the listener has experienced its opposite. The two movements therefore form not a simple opposition between violence and peace, but a transformation of musical energy: the first movement's energy fractures, attacks and destabilises; the second takes energy and turns it into motion that supports melody; eventually even that motion subsides, leaving only sustained sound. The progression is therefore from destructive energy, through sustaining energy, into stillness.

This is a remarkably concise musical embodiment of the idea contained in *Distaw*. Perhaps the most moving aspect of the quartet is that its final serenity does not belong exclusively to the composer. Through the dedication, it is offered outward. *For the Denied* asks us to remember those whose lives contain possibilities that circumstances do not permit them to realise. The quartet cannot restore those possibilities. It cannot undo political oppression, economic deprivation, illness or the innumerable other forces that can obstruct a human life. What it can do is acknowledge them. The final calm is therefore not a declaration of victory. It is an act of compassion. The storm has passed, but the music remembers that there are people who may never have been permitted to reach the calm beyond it. The quartet ends in peace, but the dedication prevents that peace from becoming complacent.

In the end, *Distaw* is not really a quartet about anger followed by serenity. It is a quartet about the moral significance of serenity after one has understood how fragile human possibility is. The first movement says, in effect, "this is what turbulence can do"; the second says that another state remains possible; and the dedication says: remember those for whom that possibility has been denied. The final *molto ritardando*. does not close the argument so much as leave it suspended in silence. The music becomes quiet and the question remains.

String Quartet No. 41 Op. 366

November Moon

Programme Note

String Quartet 41, *November Moon*, was begun on the Dutch island of Vlieland in November 2025 and completed shortly afterwards in Senheim. The quartet arose from the experience of the island in late autumn: its spaciousness, muted colours, changing light and alternation between stillness and movement. But there is another, more personal continuity within the work. Some of its thematic material derives from a piano, violin and cello trio which the composer wrote on Vlieland in the 1990s and which was subsequently recorded in Prague at the State Opera House.

The earlier material is not quoted in its entirety. Rather, fragments of it are allowed to reappear, sufficiently recognisable to establish a bridge between two periods of his musical life. Its subsequent development in *November Moon*, however, is entirely new. Thus the quartet contains two encounters with the same place, separated by more than thirty years.

The **first movement** begins with isolated sounds emerging from an unusually spacious texture. The four instruments gradually establish a delicate harmonic world, repeatedly dissolving back towards silence. Muted strings and later *non vibrato* writing create a veiled, almost weightless sonority.

The **second movement** provides a dramatic contrast. The mutes disappear and the tempo increases, while short rhythmic cells circulate rapidly between the instruments. Yet the stillness of the first movement remains within the second: spacious passages, *pizzicato*, muted sound and *non vibrato* writing repeatedly interrupt and reshape the rhythmic flow.

The quartet gradually returns to the quiet world with which it began. *Con sordino* and *non vibrato* once again remove brilliance and expressive weight from the strings, and the final pages settle into sustained, increasingly quiet sonorities.

The title *November Moon* suggests a particular quality of light rather than a literal image. The music is similarly concerned with things that remain partly concealed: memory within new material, movement within stillness, and the persistence of an earlier musical self within the present. The earlier Trio is not quoted as an historical object. Here it is remembered, transformed and made new.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 41 is one of those works whose apparent simplicity conceals an unusually complex relationship with time. On the surface, *November Moon* is a response to a particular place and season: the Dutch island of Vlieland in November 2025. The music's spaciousness, muted sonorities, sudden rhythmic activity and long stretches of silence all seem to belong naturally to that landscape. But the discovery that some of its thematic material originated in a piano, violin and cello trio written on Vlieland in the 1990s changes the significance of the work profoundly. The quartet is no longer simply a musical response to a place. It is a meeting between two visits to the same place by the same composer, separated by more than thirty years. That makes *November Moon* a work about continuity, but it is a very particular kind of continuity. The past is neither reproduced nor abandoned, it is transformed.

The geographical fact is almost uncanny. Vlieland in the 1990s. Vlieland in November 2025. The island has remained but the composer has not. Between those two moments lies more than three decades of musical experience, countless compositions, changes of circumstance, relationships, places and ways of thinking. Yet something of the earlier music survived, not as a preserved artefact but as potential. The old Trio material could return because it had never entirely ceased to belong to the composer's musical imagination. That is the crucial distinction. The material from the earlier Trio is not quoted wholesale. A literal quotation would establish a relationship between two works by presenting the older material as something recognisable and complete. That is not what happens here. Instead, fragments of the earlier material enter the quartet sufficiently to establish recognition, while their subsequent development is entirely new. The old music therefore functions almost like a musical memory trace. One recognises something without encountering it as an intact object. The past is present, but it has been changed by the passage of time. That is perhaps the most convincing musical equivalent of memory itself. We do not remember the past as a complete recording, we remember fragments - and those fragments are continually reconstructed by the present.

The **first movement** begins with extraordinary spaciousness. The first violin speaks in isolated notes, with the other instruments entering only gradually. Knowing the history of the material, this opening acquires another dimension. It is not necessary or desirable to identify every returning fragment. Indeed, the quartet should remain completely comprehensible without knowledge of the Trio - but for the composer, these gestures occupy a double temporal position. They belong simultaneously to the music of the 1990s and the music of 2025. The earlier material has become part of a new harmonic and contrapuntal environment. It therefore no longer sounds like the music of the earlier work, it sounds like the present composer remembering himself. This may be the most important concept to take from No. 41. The earlier material does not function as a bridge merely because it connects two compositions, it connects two versions of the composer. That makes the quartet unusually autobiographical, but in a very restrained way. There is no narrative, no declaration of nostalgia, no attempt to recreate the 1990s. Instead, the earlier self appears through musical traces, and because the material is transformed, the younger composer is not being imitated.

The spacious opening movement provides the ideal environment for this kind of memory. The music allows individual gestures to appear, resonate and disappear. The extended rests are not merely pauses; they create the temporal distance in which memory can become audible. The arrival of *con sordino* at A further removes the brilliance of the sound. The music seems increasingly distant from the immediate physical world, but this distance is not emotional withdrawal, it is perspective. The present is looking back. The great sustained passage beginning around C is particularly important. Here the music ceases to behave as conventional thematic development and becomes harmonic atmosphere. That is exactly the condition required by the older material. The

fragments of the Trio do not need to announce themselves they can simply inhabit the new harmonic space. The old and new are therefore not placed side by side but interwoven and that is why the continuity is so convincing.

The title *November Moon* now becomes more revealing. Moonlight is itself reflected light and does not originate where it appears to. That makes it an extraordinarily appropriate metaphor for this quartet. Some of the music we hear in 2025 is illuminated by something that originated decades earlier. But the light is different, the source may be old and the appearance is new. That is almost exactly the relationship between the Trio material and its transformation in No. 41. The past illuminates the present without becoming the present.

The **second movement** is essential because it prevents the quartet from becoming nostalgic. Mutes removed, the music suddenly becomes highly active. The quiet, spacious world of I is replaced by rapid rhythmic cells, accents and continuous movement. This is not a recreation of the past, it's the present taking possession of the material. The earlier ideas have been absorbed into a new rhythmic and contrapuntal environment and the music moves forward. That is why the work's continuity is fundamentally different from nostalgia. The second movement also connects directly with the compositional principle we have repeatedly encountered in the later quartets. Small cells are repeated, are circulated, layered, interrupted and transformed. The same underlying material can therefore carry very different meanings according to its surroundings. This is precisely what happens with the Trio-derived material which is not preserved as a quotation but treated as generative material. The old music gives the new music something from which to grow. The movement repeatedly returns to the quieter sound-world of I. At D, the activity begins to broaden into more spacious writing. At E, *non vibrato* returns, followed later by renewed *vibrato* and *arco*. Later, *con sordino* returns. These are not necessarily quotations in thematic terms but instead memories of musical states. In effect the quartet remembers how it sounded earlier. This creates a larger conception of continuity: not only does the work carry material from the 1990s into 2025, but each movement carries its own earlier states into its later ones. Memory operates simultaneously on two scales: within the quartet and across thirty years. This gives No. 41 at least three temporal levels, the immediate present and the experience of Vlieland in November 2025 and the remembered past - the Trio written on Vlieland in the 1990s. There is a completely new development of that material within Quartet No. 41. The three are not separated, they coexist and that is why the quartet can feel both familiar and new without contradiction.

There is therefore something deeply moving about the role of Vlieland. It is not simply scenery, it becomes a kind of witness. The same island has encountered two different stages of the composer's life. The first time, it generated the Trio and more than thirty years later, it generated *November Moon*. The island has remained sufficiently itself to provoke a return but the music proves how much the person encountering it has changed. That is why the geographical continuity matters so much. The place becomes the fixed point against which personal time can be measured.

The ending of the quartet brings this temporal conception to its quiet conclusion. The rhythmic activity of II gradually disappears, *con sordino* returns and then *non vibrato*. The music becomes increasingly sparse and quiet and finally, the quartet arrives at its last sustained sonorities and silence. At first glance, this might seem simply to return us to the atmosphere of the opening but it cannot be the same silence. The silence at the end therefore contains everything that has happened. It is remembered silence. This is, ultimately, what I think distinguishes *November Moon*. The quartet is profoundly concerned with the past, but it is not nostalgic. The earlier Trio is not presented as something lost. It is presented as something still capable of becoming. That is a very different attitude to time. The music says, in effect: what was written then is not dead, but neither is

it unchanged. It can live again by becoming something new. That seems to me an extraordinarily mature conception of artistic continuity.

Seen against the immediately preceding quartets, the trajectory becomes especially interesting. No. 38: *Nur die Musik*. The music discovers its own necessity without external programme. No. 39: Movement becomes space, a continuous rhythmic process becomes a musical environment. No. 41: Space becomes memory. The musical environment is now connected to an actual place, and that place activates material from another period of the composer's life. The process has not been reversed and the external world is still absorbed into musical process. Vlieland does not dictate the music, iIt awakens something in it.

November Moon is therefore not simply a quartet inspired by an island. It is a quartet about continuity through transformation. A musical idea conceived on Vlieland in the 1990s survives, but not intact. It returns in fragments, enters a new harmonic world and encounters a different rhythmic language. It is transformed by thirty years of experience, and eventually it becomes indistinguishable from the new music while still carrying the trace of its origin. That is precisely what makes the continuity so powerful. The past is not repeated but allowed to continue.

String Quartet No. 42 Op. 367

In Memoriam

Programme Note

Written at Senheim on 14 - 15 January 2026, the **Quartet No. 42** is dedicated to “Raimund Lang and Lawrence Wallington.” Both were good friends and colleagues, of the composer and both had died recently. Raimund was a gifted violinist, Lawrence was a singer.

The quartet is not conceived as a conventional funeral lament. Its opening is quiet and spacious: The first violin is initially silent while the other three instruments sustain slowly changing sonorities. Gradually, melodic material emerges, particularly in the first violin, creating the impression of a voice becoming present within an otherwise contemplative musical space.

The **first movement** repeatedly alternates between sustained sonorities and more expressive melodic passages. Rather than building towards a dramatic climax, it seems to dwell upon the act of remembrance itself: a thought or memory appears, becomes articulate, and then recedes.

The **second movement**, at a much slower tempo develops this lyrical quality further. The first violin immediately sings an extended melodic line over sustained accompaniment, giving the music an almost vocal character. The music repeatedly moves between individual melodic expression and collective quartet sonority, as though the remembered voice is gradually being absorbed into the musical whole.

The connection is particularly poignant given that the work commemorates both a violinist and a singer. The violin is itself the medium through which one musician is remembered, while the lyrical, almost vocal quality of the melodic writing evokes the other. Towards the end, the music becomes increasingly quiet. The first violin, *senza vibrato* is the very last to leave and removes the last continuous physical movement from the sustained notes. The work does not end in despair but in silence as remembrance. The two musicians are no longer present.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 42, *In Memoriam*, Op. 367, was written at Senheim on 14 - 15 January 2026 for two recently deceased friends and colleagues, Raimund Lang and Lawrence Wallington. It is a memorial work, but it does not behave like one in any conventional sense. There is no funeral march, no dramatic lament and no great climax representing grief. Instead, the quartet is remarkably restrained. Its subject is not death itself. It is the continuing presence of those who have died within the memory of those who remain.

The **opening** makes this immediately apparent. The first violin remains silent while the second violin, viola and cello establish the first sustained sonorities. In a quartet, the absence of one voice is immediately perceptible. The ensemble is incomplete. One should be careful not to turn that into a literal programme - the score does not say that the absent first violin represents the deceased violinist - but the expressive coincidence is striking. The work begins not with a statement but with an absence. Only gradually does the absent voice become present.

At A, bar 45, the first violin enters and begins gradually to assume a more melodic role. This transition seems central to the first movement. Memory is initially something indistinct: sustained sound, harmonic atmosphere and fragments of presence. Then it becomes articulate. A line appears. It has direction. It can be followed. The first violin's increasing lyrical prominence therefore creates the impression of memory finding its voice. That phrase becomes particularly resonant because one of the two people commemorated was a singer. The quartet does not literally reproduce a vocal line, but its melodic writing increasingly possesses the qualities of song: contour, breath, phrase and expressive continuity. The first movement repeatedly places such melodic activity against sustained sonorities. This creates a fascinating relationship. The melody is individual, while the sustained harmony is collective. The remembered person therefore appears within a continuing communal sound. The quartet is not attempting to reconstruct the deceased. It is creating a space in which memory can exist. That is why the work avoids the rhetoric of mourning. Mourning would make absence the final fact. This music instead makes memory the continuing fact.

The **second movement** intensifies this idea. The first violin immediately presents a flowing melodic line over sustained notes in the lower instruments. The musical surface has become much more song-like. At bar 12, the expressive intensity increases before again subsiding. There is a sense of someone singing from within the quartet, and yet the melody is never isolated. The other instruments continuously provide its environment. This creates a poignant metaphor for remembrance: the individual voice survives within the memory of the community. The dedication gives this musical process an unusual double significance. Raimund Lang was a violinist, while Lawrence Wallington was a singer. The quartet therefore contains two particularly apt forms of remembrance. The violin itself is the physical medium of one musician's art; the song-like melodic voice evokes the other.

But the two do not remain separate. As the second movement develops, the voices increasingly participate in a common musical fabric. The memorial therefore becomes communal rather than representational. Neither musician is portrayed. Both are remembered through the act of making music. At C, bar 65, the texture begins to open again. Later, at D and E, lyrical material returns with renewed expressive intensity. This repeated return is important. The melody does not appear once and disappear forever. It comes back. That gives the work a different conception of time from a conventional elegy. Death is irreversible. Memory is not, and memory returns. The final section is perhaps the most eloquent part of the work. At bar 93 the melodic activity continues, but at F a *senza vibrato* passage begins to strip the sound of its continuous expressive motion. The music falls

to pp. The final sonorities are almost disembodied.

This is where the quartet's conception of remembrance reaches its most delicate point. The remembered voice is no longer singing, but neither has it been violently silenced. It has receded into the surrounding stillness.

The distinction is important. The work does not dramatise death. It allows sound to become memory. The ending is extraordinarily quiet. The final effect is not annihilation. It is absence made peaceful. The music has moved from the physical presence of sound towards something that can only be called remembered sound. That is perhaps the most appropriate ending for a work written for two musician friends. The music cannot restore them. It can do something else. It can continue the act of listening to them.

I think the quartet ultimately says something very simple and very moving: a musician's physical life ends; the musical presence created by friendship and memory does not necessarily end with it.

The first violin's initial absence, the gradual emergence of melodic voice, the extraordinarily lyrical second movement and the final *senza vibrato* all contribute to that idea. There is a beautiful symmetry here with the previous Quartet, *Distaw*. There, the music finally reaches serenity after turbulence. Here, it reaches silence after song. *Distaw* ends by saying that the storm has passed. *In Memoriam* ends by saying that the voice has passed - but we will remember the song. That seems to me the emotional truth of this quartet.

String Quartet No. 43 Op. 373

Breuddwydion

Programme Note

The composer writes: '*Home again in Wales for too short a time, and with a singing heart, I had the idea to make a kind of dream sequence (hence **Breuddwydion** - **Dreams**) moving between the wonderful melodies of two folk songs and part of a hymn - not an arrangement or a setting, but a written improvisation/evocation using fragments which circled endlessly in my thoughts during this visit in July 2026*'.

Breuddwydion is a quartet in three movements, each connected with a Welsh song: *Lisa Lân*, the *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa*, and *Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn* and as well some elements of the lovely hymn *Hyfrydol*. The songs, however, are not treated according to a single method. Each becomes the source of a different kind of musical memory. The title *Breuddwydion* - *Dreams* - refers less to dreams as escape from reality than to the strange transformations that familiar things undergo when they return to us through memory. A melody may become a fragment, a rhythm, an atmosphere, a physical sensation or a landscape.

The **first movement**, *Lisa Lân*, begins in a state of suspension. The muted strings sustain long, slowly changing sonorities, with the cello initially silent. The song is not immediately presented as a melody. Rather, it seems gradually to emerge from the surrounding sound. Soon more articulated material begins to stir beneath the sustained upper voices. The music increasingly awakens. Fragments pass between the instruments, become more recognisable and eventually acquire considerable animation. The movement becomes particularly energetic before returning to the muted and sustained world from which it began. The song is therefore experienced as a memory which becomes vivid and then recedes again.

The **second movement**, *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa*, is fundamentally different. The popular song is not quoted in the quartet. What remains is not its melody but its kinetic energy. This has a particularly personal origin. As a child the composer sometimes - and doubtless illegally - travelled up and down the mountain in an engine on Snowdon Mountain Railway, his grandfather being the driver. The experience was therefore not simply one of hearing a familiar song about the railway, but of knowing its movement physically: acceleration, vibration, ascent, descent, changing landscape and the extraordinary sensation of travelling through the mountain world from the engine itself. By way of contrast at one point some of the inspiring thematic material of the hymn *Hyfrydol* is explored.

The movement begins with rapid semiquaver activity and *non legato* articulation. The song is transformed into movement itself. The energy passes between the four instruments, sometimes becoming almost continuous, sometimes interrupted by spacious sustained sonorities. These interruptions are important: the physical journey momentarily becomes landscape, before motion begins again. Later, the music again opens into slower and more sustained writing before returning to its very busy character. Thus *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa* is not a musical depiction of the song. It is a musical memory of the experience behind it.

The **final movement**, *Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn*, returns to a much quieter world. All four muted instruments participate from the beginning in long, overlapping sonorities. Here the remembered song is gradually absorbed into the harmonic fabric of the quartet. Melodic fragments emerge,

disappear and return, but the music never needs to make a definitive statement of the tune. Later the first violin briefly allows a more explicit lyrical voice to emerge. Eventually the quartet settles into long sustained sonorities and closes in stillness.

The three movements therefore represent three forms of remembered experience: memory awakens; memory moves; memory remains, or, more personally: the remembered song, the remembered journey, the remembered landscape. The three songs are not simply arranged. They have become part of the inner world of the quartet — three dreams, each remembered in a different way.

Discussion

String Quartet No. 43, *Breuddwydion - Dreams*, Op. 373, is perhaps best understood not as a work about three Welsh songs, but as a work about what happens to music when it becomes memory. The three movements - *Lisa Lân*, *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa* and *Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn* - offer three radically different solutions to the same compositional problem. The first treats a song as something remembered. The second treats a song as something experienced physically. The third treats a song as something retained inwardly. This explains why the quartet does not sound like a sequence of folk-song arrangements. The songs are subjected to no uniform procedure. Instead, each is allowed to determine its own musical psychology.

The **opening** is remarkably restrained. The muted strings establish long, sustained sonorities, while the cello is initially absent. The important feature is not simply the slowness of the music. It is the suspension of musical identity. The listener is not immediately given a melody which can be recognised and followed. Instead there is an atmosphere from which melodic identity gradually emerges. This is an extraordinarily appropriate technique for a work entitled *Breuddwydion*. A dream does not necessarily present its objects clearly. Recognition may precede identification. Something is familiar before one knows what it is.

At A, the cello introduces articulated material beneath the sustained upper strings. The musical memory has acquired physical movement. This is the first stage in a process which continues throughout the movement: suspension → fragment → recognition → animation. At B, the material becomes increasingly distributed among the instruments. The song is no longer associated with one particular voice. The quartet itself remembers it. This is important. The work does not treat *Lisa Lân* as an object placed before the listener but rather as something recalled by consciousness. Around D, the music becomes dramatically more active. Rapid figures pass through the ensemble and the earlier contemplative atmosphere is temporarily transformed into energetic motion. The memory has become vivid, but the movement does not remain there. At E, *con sordino* returns and the music settles again into sustained sonorities. The trajectory is consequently circular rather than teleological. The music has remembered, awakened and experienced the remembered thing intensely. Then it has allowed it to disappear again. The movement might therefore be characterised as: memory awakening and then falling back into dream.

The **second movement** requires a different interpretation. It would be misleading to describe it as a setting, paraphrase or disguised quotation of *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa*. The song is not quoted. What remains is its kinetic idea. That distinction is crucial. The title carries an autobiographical memory: as a child, the composer repeatedly travelled illegally in the engine cab on the Snowdon Mountain Railway, going up and down the mountain while his grandfather drove the engine. This makes the movement's physical energy more than an imagined response to a popular song. It is embodied memory. The railway was not something seen from a distance, it was experienced from the engine. The movement begins with rapid semiquaver activity and *non legato* articulation. There is no need for the song's melody. The music immediately possesses the physical properties of travel: propulsion, repetition, vibration, acceleration and continuous forward energy. The figures are exchanged among the instruments so that no single voice becomes "the train". The whole quartet becomes the moving mechanism. This is why I think the phrase kinetic energy is not merely a useful metaphor. It describes the actual compositional principle. The song has been transformed from melody into physical behaviour.

The movement would become mechanical if its rapid motion were uninterrupted. Instead, the music repeatedly stops or opens into sustained sonority. Just before A, for example, the rapid activity

stops and waits before the kinetic material resumes. These interruptions are structurally essential and they create a second experience: motion → stopping → seeing → motion. The railway is moving, but the landscape is passing around it. And here the childhood memory becomes particularly vivid. A child sitting in the engine cab would not experience the railway as an abstract symbol. One would experience the machinery, the movement and the changing mountain world simultaneously. The music does the same.

The major transition at bar 73 is especially revealing. The tempo falls the metre changes to 3/4 and the rapid non legato activity gives way to sustained legato writing. Fragments of the hymn '*Hyfrydol*' appear and are developed. This is not merely a slowing-down, it is a change of perception. The kinetic experience temporarily opens into contemplation and then movement returns, recreating the experience of being carried through a landscape while simultaneously feeling the physical energy of the machine carrying you.

The **third movement, *Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn***, enters another world. All four instruments are muted and participate from the beginning in long, overlapping sonorities. The contrast with II could hardly be greater. The railway was movement without melody and here, melody is almost without movement. The remembered song is no longer being rediscovered as in *Lisa Lân*. Nor is it transformed into hyper active behaviour as in *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa* - It is absorbed into the harmonic fabric. The melody becomes environment. The first movement gradually brings the remembered song into consciousness - the third movement begins as though the song is already inside consciousness. Small articulated figures, motivic hints and suggestions, periodically disturb the sustained sonorities. Further activity appears around C, but never destroys the prevailing stillness. At D, the first violin finally permits a more explicit lyrical gesture to emerge above the sustained quartet. For a moment, the remembered song becomes a voice. Then it disappears again. From bar 133 onwards, the quartet settles into long sustained sonorities. The final effect is not a conclusion in the conventional dramatic sense. The melody has passed so deeply into the quartet that it no longer needs to be stated. This is the third and final form of memory: not remembering something, but carrying it.

The autobiographical revelation concerning *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa* also changes the meaning of *Breuddwydion* as a whole. The three movements now correspond not merely to abstract psychological states but to three different kinds of childhood and cultural memory. *Lisa Lân* is remembered as song. *Trên Bach Yr Wyddfa* is remembered as physical adventure - the movements of the steam engine, the mountain, the forbidden excitement of sitting in the engine cab, and the extraordinary intimacy of having one's grandfather at the controls. *Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn* is remembered as landscape and atmosphere. The three songs therefore become three doors into an inner Welsh world. This makes the plural *Breuddwydion* particularly apt. There is no single dream, there are many. The score does not merely preserve pieces of Welsh musical culture. It preserves the way those pieces of culture have been lived, experienced and remembered by one particular life.

String Quartet No. 44 Op. 374

Jordi

Programme Note

Dafydd Bullock wrote this Quartet in July 2026 in Senheim, Germany, as a 'welcome to this life' present for his grandson, whose names are spelled out by the same three note (for three syllables) thematic cell which features throughout his Symphony 41, also dedicated to him!

String Quartet No. 44 is conceived as a three-movement meditation on time, imagination and continuity. Its movement titles - *To Sleep*, *To Play*, and *From the Past and the Future* - suggest stages of childhood, yet the work reaches beyond biography towards a broader reflection on human experience.

The **opening movement**, *To Sleep*, inhabits a world of stillness. Muted strings and a restrained tempo create an atmosphere in which time seems to slow, inviting the listener not to anticipate events but to dwell within them. Rather than relying upon conventional tonal destinations, the music unfolds through subtle interactions between independent melodic lines, allowing harmony to emerge naturally from their relationships.

To Play forms the energetic heart of the quartet. Here the four instruments engage in an animated conversation in which ideas are exchanged, transformed and rediscovered. The movement celebrates curiosity rather than display. Its vitality lies not in virtuosity for its own sake, but in the freedom and spontaneity that arise from disciplined craftsmanship.

The **final movement**, *From the Past and the Future*, brings together the emotional worlds of the first two. It is neither nostalgic nor prophetic; instead it reflects upon the present as the meeting place of memory and possibility. Musical ideas seem less to return than to be remembered, creating a sense of continuity that reaches beyond traditional cyclic form.

Throughout the quartet, the four instruments remain equal participants in a continually evolving dialogue. Rather than presenting conflict and resolution, the music explores relationships, balance and transformation. The result is a work whose expressive power lies in quiet concentration, inviting repeated listening and revealing new perspectives with each encounter.

String Quartet No. 44 is both an intimate personal statement and a meditation upon the continuity of generations. It affirms that what we inherit from the past and what we offer to the future are united in the creative possibilities of the present.

Discussion

Among the most remarkable features of Dafydd Bullock's String Quartet No. 44, *Jordi* is the confidence with which it declines many of the assumptions that have shaped the string quartet tradition for over two centuries. This is not a work driven by conflict, thematic confrontation or dramatic rhetoric. Instead, it invites us into a musical world in which continuity, listening and patient transformation become the primary expressive forces. *String Quartet No. 44*, is a deeply personal work, but its personal circumstances illuminate rather than determine its meaning. Dedicated to *Jordi, my Grandson*, the quartet was written for a child only six months old. Its three movements, *To Sleep*, *To Play* and *From the Past and the Future*, might initially suggest a simple portrait of infancy, yet the music reaches considerably further. Sleep, play and the encounter with an unknown future become ways of contemplating consciousness, memory, continuity and the passage of time itself.

The personal significance of the opening is made still more precise by the three-note motif with which the quartet begins. This is the epic motif from the Symphony written for Jordi, and its presence establishes a connection between the two works before the quartet has developed any argument of its own. The motif is therefore more than a thematic idea. It is almost a musical act of naming: something small, simple and unmistakably individual from which an entire musical world can grow. At the same time, it places Jordi within a continuity that existed before him. The motif has already belonged to a Symphony; it now belongs to this quartet; and its future significance remains open.

The **first movement**, *To Sleep*, immediately establishes a distinctive conception of musical time. With restrained dynamics and extensive use of mutes, the opening is spacious and unhurried. Notes appear singly or in small groups, frequently separated by silence, and the music seems less concerned with progression than with allowing sound simply to exist.

This is not a lullaby in any conventional sense. There is no borrowed rocking rhythm and no attempt to depict sleep through familiar musical symbolism. Instead, Bullock creates a condition of suspended attention. Long values and carefully spaced entrances give individual pitches unusual weight, while silence becomes an active component of the musical texture. The music seems to watch rather than act.

That quality becomes particularly affecting in the context of Jordi's infancy. The music does not describe a sleeping child so much as place the listener beside him. At section A the texture becomes more sustained, with gently overlapping sonorities reinforcing the intimacy created by the mutes; subsequently, the movement gradually reduces its activity and dynamic intensity until it reaches its quiet conclusion. There is no emphatic cadence because none is needed. Sleep does not require rhetorical resolution. It is a state into which the music enters and in which it finally rests.

The movement also reveals something fundamental about Bullock's mature musical language. Tonal direction is rarely asserted through conventional harmonic rhetoric. Instead, tonal centres emerge through the interaction of independent melodic lines, so that harmony seems to grow organically out of counterpoint. The resulting sense of direction is real but never coercive: the music possesses coherence without rigidity, and movement without the need for constant assertion.

To Play transforms this world almost completely. The tempo is increased, considerably - the first violin launches immediately into quick, articulated figures. Yet the contrast is more than one of speed. The first movement inhabits time; the second discovers what can be done with it. Here the

three-note motif acquires another kind of potential. Short scales, repeated notes, accents, *glissandi* and sharply articulated gestures generate an atmosphere of curiosity and physical discovery. Ideas are tried, repeated, interrupted and passed between the instruments. The quartet becomes a space of exploration rather than competition: its four voices behave as equal participants in a shared act of discovery.

Bullock's conception of play is therefore not simply synonymous with cheerfulness. There is wit, but also unpredictability. Gestures provoke one another, while recurring patterns continually change in register, instrumentation, articulation and harmonic context. Repetition becomes a means of learning: the same thing happens again, but never quite in the same way. What might on paper appear repetitive becomes, in musical experience, accumulated discovery. This principle of repetition with difference is central to the quartet as a whole. It is particularly appropriate to the idea of childhood, where repeated actions are simultaneously familiar and newly experienced. But it also describes Bullock's compositional method more generally: continuity is maintained without requiring literal recurrence, and musical identity can survive while its surroundings change.

The close of *To Play* reveals its deeper relationship with the first movement. After the energetic activity, the quartet gradually settles into sustained sonorities and a *diminuendo*, the final *pizzicato* gestures suggesting the dissipation of physical energy. Play does not simply contrast with sleep; it leads naturally towards it. The two movements can therefore be heard as complementary states within the same world — movement and stillness, discovery and rest.

The **final movement, *From the Past and the Future***, enlarges the perspective. Its moderate tempo and persistent rhythmic patterns create a sense of continuity, particularly in the middle voices, above which the outer instruments introduce more lyrical material. The effect is almost architectural: something inherited provides a foundation upon which something new can emerge.

Here the title becomes central to the work's meaning. The past is not represented through nostalgia, nor is the future approached through prophecy. Instead, the two are understood as inseparable aspects of the present. Jordi enters a world that already exists. He inherits a family, a history and a musical language that preceded him; yet his arrival has itself generated new music. The three-note motif makes this paradox tangible. Something already belonging to his musical identity has entered a new work, while the work itself could not have existed without his arrival.

The musical construction mirrors this idea. Repeated rhythmic patterns provide continuity while lyrical lines continually alter the foreground. Familiarity and difference coexist. Earlier materials return in altered circumstances, so that the effect is less one of literal repetition than of memory: something remains recognisable while the context surrounding it changes.

The treatment of the future is notably unsentimental. Bullock does not attempt to write music that "looks forward" through conventional gestures of acceleration, ascent or triumph. The future is unknowable, and the music respects that. It can only be approached through possibility. The recurring patterns suggest inheritance and continuity; the emerging melodic material suggests what may grow from them. This is why the three-note motif becomes more than a recurring theme. It is a thread connecting works, generations and moments in time. It has already existed in the Symphony; it now exists within the quartet; and its future significance cannot yet be known. It is simultaneously remembered and newly created. Through it, the composer's past and Jordi's future meet in the present.

The final stages of the movement gradually withdraw the energy accumulated earlier. Longer values replace rapid figuration, the texture becomes increasingly spacious, and muted entries reappear. At

K the music becomes quieter and more fragmented before arriving at L in a final, carefully balanced sonority. The quartet ends *pianissimo*, without rhetorical insistence. That ending is crucial. The quartet does not conclude by telling us what Jordi's future will be. It cannot. Instead, it leaves that future open. The final sonority is therefore not so much a conclusion as a blessing.

The three movements consequently form something much more coherent than a sequence of descriptive titles. *To Sleep* explores inward stillness and the suspension of ordinary time; *To Play* explores curiosity, movement and discovery; *From the Past and the Future* places the individual within the continuity of memory, inheritance and what has yet to come. Sleep, play and inheritance are not separate subjects but successive aspects of a single conception of life.

The treatment of musical time is particularly important to this conception. The opening movement asks the listener to abandon conventional expectations of progression and cadence and instead to attend to duration itself. Silence functions not as interruption but as resonance, allowing phrases to continue inwardly after the instruments have fallen silent. The central movement then fills that temporal space with restless curiosity, while the final movement transforms it into a continuum joining memory and possibility. Time is therefore not merely the framework within which the music occurs; it becomes one of its principal expressive materials.

Here is also a subtle reversal in the position of the composer. Bullock is not writing about his own childhood, nor simply writing as a grandfather. He is writing towards someone whose life has scarcely begun. The composer therefore occupies the past while the child occupies the future. Yet the music collapses that distinction. Through the motif, grandfather and grandson meet in the present. This gives *Jordi* its particular emotional character. It is intimate without being private, affectionate without becoming sentimental, and autobiographical without becoming anecdotal. The circumstances of its composition provide its emotional point of departure, but the work transforms those circumstances into something larger: a meditation on what it means for one human life to arrive within the continuity of others. The quartet's emotional power also derives from its economy. The music does not strive for effect; it trusts repetition, silence, contrapuntal interaction and the gradual transformation of material to carry its meaning. Its structures are discovered rather than announced. This confidence is characteristic of a mature musical language in which novelty is less important than deepening coherence.

In this respect, *Jordi* occupies an interesting position within Bullock's long sequence of string quartets. It does not seek novelty for its own sake, but extends an already individual musical philosophy into a profoundly personal subject. Its language remains recognisably his: melodic independence, contrapuntal interaction, tonal coherence and a particular sensitivity to the relationship between continuity and change. What is new is the human circumstance through which those principles are brought into focus.

Forty-Four Quartets: A Retrospective

Looking back over forty-four string quartets invites a particular kind of temptation. Once a substantial body of work is complete enough to be surveyed, chronology begins to suggest a narrative of its own. The early works seem to demand the label of beginnings, the later ones that of maturity; certain quartets appear to mark turning points, while others seem to confirm tendencies that have already emerged. Such a narrative is not entirely false in the case of Dafydd Bullock's quartets, but it is incomplete. There is development, and in some respects it is considerable, yet the sequence resists the idea of a straightforward progression from one style towards another. The more closely the quartets are considered together, the clearer it becomes that the development is recursive as well as forward-moving. Ideas return after long absences, earlier music enters later works, and experiences that appear to belong to one period of the composer's life acquire new significance when viewed from another.

The earliest quartets already establish a number of concerns that continue to animate the later sequence. *Fachwen*, in particular, demonstrates an interest in musical transformation that goes beyond conventional thematic development. Its continuity depends upon changes of texture, density, register and instrumental relationship, while its material repeatedly reveals possibilities that were not immediately apparent at its first appearance. This way of thinking would become more sophisticated and, in later works, sometimes remarkably economical, but it was present from an early stage. The retrospective view consequently makes it difficult to divide the forty-four quartets into neat stylistic periods. There are certainly changes of emphasis, but the same musical instincts repeatedly reappear in different circumstances.

One of the most important of these instincts is the tendency to treat musical material as something capable of changing its condition without losing its identity. A cell may be compressed, expanded, redistributed or placed within a completely different textural environment. Repetition does not necessarily mean recurrence in the strict sense, because the material returns carrying the effect of everything that has happened in the meantime. This is particularly exposed in the later abstract quartets, where there is no external programme to divert attention from the process itself. In No. 38, for example, rapid motion, contrapuntal activity, harmonic fields and sustained sonority continually generate one another. The movement does not simply proceed through a series of independent sections; it changes state, and the later stillness becomes the audible consequence of the earlier activity.

This principle of transformation helps explain the remarkable stylistic range of the cycle. The forty-four quartets include works associated with Wales, Austria, Prague, Russia, Sussex and other places; works prompted by literature and history; intensely personal works of grief and remembrance; family portraits; political responses; and pieces that are concerned almost entirely with musical behaviour. Such variety might suggest a catalogue divided into unrelated territories, yet the same compositional habits frequently appear beneath very different surfaces. The subject changes, but the process by which experience is absorbed into music remains recognisable.

Faust provides an early and particularly interesting example. The quartet does not attempt to retell Goethe's drama in literal sequence. Rather, the characters and situations become distinct kinds of musical behaviour. The literary source provides a dramatic framework, but the actual meaning of the work emerges through the contrast between searching, interruption, lyricism, physical activity and reflection. The subject has been transformed into a way of organising sound. This is characteristic of Bullock's relationship with external material throughout the quartets. A place, person or event may provide the initial impulse, but the finished music is not bound to reproduce its

source. It is allowed to discover what that source can become once it enters a specifically musical world.

The treatment of place is one of the clearest examples of this process. A considerable number of the quartets are connected with particular locations, but geographical identity rarely functions as scenery. The places are experienced, remembered and subsequently carried into the music. *Hinterthal* is central to this aspect of the sequence because it explicitly brings together two homes. Written after the composer had left *Fachwen* in Wales and moved to *Hinterthal* in Austria, the quartet incorporates the principal theme of the earlier *Fachwen* quartet within a musical environment containing Alpine dance, song, bells and other elements of the new surroundings. The question underlying the work is not simply whether one place can replace another, but whether the new can become home without requiring the old to disappear from memory.

The answer offered by the music is deliberately more complex than a simple choice between past and present. The *Fachwen* material is not treated as a quotation from an earlier life placed beside Austrian material as an act of contrast. The two worlds gradually inhabit the same musical space. As the work progresses, the new environment becomes increasingly active and communal, yet the earlier theme remains part of the texture. The result is not nostalgia but reconciliation: two geographical identities are allowed to coexist.

The significance of this idea becomes still clearer much later in *Bergklang*. Here, the return of *Fachwen* material occurs at the moment of another departure, and the retrospective relationship becomes more extensive. A place once left behind enters the music as another place is itself being left. The sequence of memories is therefore layered rather than chronological. Wales enters Austria, and the present is altered by the return of an earlier self. The music suggests that departure does not erase the places from which one has departed; instead, the act of leaving may be precisely what turns experience into memory and memory into material capable of further transformation. In this sense, the later quartet does not merely remember *Fachwen*. It changes our understanding of what *Fachwen* had become over the years.

This retrospective alteration of meaning is one of the most fascinating aspects of the entire cycle. Later music frequently causes the listener to hear earlier music differently. *Schatten* provides a more concentrated example within a single work. Its initially quiet gestures subsequently acquire rapidity and intensity, so that the apparent stillness of the earlier movements is retrospectively revealed as containing possibilities that had not yet been released. When the quartet eventually returns to a more reflective condition, the material is recognisable but cannot simply return to its original state because both the music and the listener have passed through something else. This principle, identified in the individual discussion of *Schatten*, can be heard more broadly across the forty-four quartets: continuity is not merely a matter of recurrence, but of remembering what recurrence has undergone.

That idea becomes particularly significant in the treatment of cultural inheritance. The Welsh works do not attempt to preserve traditional material in an untouched state. Instead, the inherited melodies are made available for further life. In *Nadolig*, the use of familiar carols is sufficiently recognisable to preserve their cultural associations, but the musical procedures continually alter their shape and function. In *Breuddwydion*, the relationship between remembered melody and present experience becomes still more fluid. A song may emerge directly, while another may become associated with the physical experience of movement through landscape or be absorbed into a larger sonorous environment. The underlying principle is that memory is active. What is inherited acquires new meaning because it enters another consciousness and another period of time.

This is also one of the reasons why Welshness in these quartets cannot be reduced simply to the presence of Welsh melodies or titles. The deeper relationship lies in the persistence of cultural and geographical memory. Wales may be explicitly present, as in *Fachwen*, *Emynau*, *Nadolig* or *Breuddwydion*, but it may also reappear indirectly in later works written elsewhere. The *Fachwen* theme entering *Hinterthal* and subsequently *Bergklang* demonstrates that cultural memory can travel. The music does not require a geographical return in order to return imaginatively.

The quartet has also proved capable of accommodating an increasingly personal engagement with family. In the works associated with grandchildren, the danger of musical portraiture is avoided by allowing identity to emerge through relationship rather than through sentimental illustration. A motif may function almost as a name, but its meaning depends upon the environment into which it enters. This is especially apparent in *Jordi*, whose opening three-note motif had already appeared in the Symphony written for the composer's grandson. The motif therefore arrives in the quartet with an existing history, linking the child, the symphonic work and the more intimate medium of four instruments. Its significance is not exhausted by the circumstances of its first appearance. It has already moved from one work into another, and its future remains open.

The title of the final movement, *From the Past and the Future*, consequently has a significance that reaches beyond the immediate subject of the work. The child is new, but he enters a world already possessing history. The motif is new to the quartet, but not to the musical life surrounding it. The future cannot be predicted, but the past continues to participate in its formation. That conception provides an unexpectedly appropriate point from which to consider the forty-four quartets as a whole. They are not a sequence in which one stage is simply replaced by another. Earlier material and earlier experience remain capable of re-entering the present.

The medium itself has an important role in this process. A string quartet contains four independent voices, but their independence is never absolute. Each instrument is continually defined by its relationship with the others. This can create intimacy, argument, conflict or collective strength, and the distribution of musical authority can change from moment to moment. In *Constantine*, the relationship between individuality and collective force becomes sufficiently central to form part of the quartet's larger subject. The four instruments behave like a small society in which authority is continually negotiated and redistributed. Yet the same possibilities extend far beyond that particular work. Across the cycle, the quartet repeatedly becomes a medium in which individual identity and collective identity can coexist without either being permanently dominant.

This relationship may help to explain why the quartet has remained so fertile for Bullock over such a long period. The four voices are sufficiently distinct to create a dramatic interaction, yet sufficiently close in character to merge into a common sonority. A musical idea can pass from one instrument to another without losing its essential identity, but the change of voice inevitably alters its character. This corresponds closely with one of the larger compositional concerns of the cycle: continuity through transformation.

The development of musical time is another important feature of the retrospective. The earlier quartets often contain powerful rhythmic movement, abrupt contrasts and a strong sense of forward pressure. None of these characteristics disappears. The later works can be equally energetic and, in places, more technically intricate. What gradually changes is the composer's willingness to allow other states to occupy an equally important structural position. Sustained sound, quietness and silence increasingly become places in which the music can remain rather than merely transitional spaces between more active events.

No. 38 is again instructive because the contrast is built directly into the structure. The first movement alternates continuous activity with increasingly extended stillness, while the second

transforms the removal of momentum into a condition of concentration. Individual entrances and sustained notes become significant precisely because of the silence surrounding them. Harmony is allowed to function as space rather than simply as a sequence of events demanding resolution. The music does not abandon direction, but direction becomes less dependent upon conventional harmonic rhetoric.

By No. 44, this conception has become exceptionally assured. *Jordi* begins with restrained dynamics, muted instruments and notes separated by silence. The music is concerned less with dramatic progression than with allowing individual sounds to acquire presence. At the same time, the quartet remains firmly coherent. Tonal centres emerge through the interaction of independent melodic lines, and harmony appears to grow from counterpoint rather than being imposed upon it from outside. The resulting stillness is not emptiness and does not represent a withdrawal from musical substance. On the contrary, it depends upon a confidence that very little material can sustain considerable expressive weight.

This may be one of the clearest developments across the sequence, although even here the retrospective resists a simplistic account of progress. Stillness, sustained melody and spaciousness occur much earlier; rapidity and physical energy remain important in the late quartets. What changes is the relationship between these states. The later music seems increasingly able to permit them to coexist without requiring one to defeat or justify the other. Activity may create stillness, stillness may contain the potential for activity, and a return to earlier material may preserve the memory of everything that has happened between its appearances.

It is tempting, after forty-four works, to search for a single stylistic definition that might encompass the entire sequence. The quartets themselves resist this. Their range is too considerable, and any attempt to reduce them to a single category would exclude something essential: the Welsh inheritance, the literary and historical works, the intense personal responses, the humour, the journeys, the family works and the increasingly abstract explorations of musical behaviour. The coherence of the sequence lies elsewhere.

It lies partly in the persistence of melody, even when melody is fragmented, distributed between instruments, transformed into rhythm or submerged within texture. It lies in the interaction between melodic movement and harmonic space, increasingly allowing harmony to emerge from the behaviour of independent lines. It lies in a fascination with changing musical states: the possibility that a gesture may become something other than what it first appeared to be. It lies, too, in the importance of memory, not as a passive recollection of something finished, but as an active force capable of changing the present.

Above all, perhaps, the forty-four quartets reveal an expanding capacity to absorb experience without allowing the experience to dictate the form of the music. A place becomes music without becoming landscape painting. A literary character becomes musical behaviour rather than operatic narration. Grief finds expression without requiring a fixed vocabulary of mourning. Family relationships become continuity and interaction rather than sentimentality. Political anger may uncover a more private experience of separation and frustrated communication. Even in the most explicitly autobiographical works, the music discovers a significance larger than the circumstances from which it arose.

Seen in this light, the sequence resembles less a single road leading towards a final destination than a landscape through which certain paths are travelled more than once. Sometimes the composer returns knowingly; sometimes an earlier idea appears to have waited, perhaps for years, before a new circumstance made its return possible. The retrospective view enables us to recognise these

relationships, but it should not be mistaken for a final explanation. The forty-four quartets make patterns visible without exhausting their meaning.

That is particularly important because the last quartet offers no convincing sense of finality. *Jordi* is concerned with sleep, play, inheritance and the future, but its future is deliberately unknown. The three-note motif has a history before the quartet begins and a life beyond the circumstances of its first appearance. The work concludes a sequence only in the numerical sense. Musically and imaginatively, it leaves continuity open.

For that reason, the most useful conclusion to a retrospective of the forty-four quartets may be a provisional one. We can now see that the development has not consisted in the abandonment of an earlier language and the acquisition of a later one. Rather, the range of what can belong to the composer's musical world has steadily expanded. Earlier concerns remain available, but they acquire new contexts. Places are remembered from elsewhere. Melodies survive transformation. The individual voice enters and leaves the collective texture. The past continues to participate in the present without preventing the future from arriving.

Forty-four quartets are sufficient to reveal the contours of a substantial musical landscape. They show recurring concerns, unexpected returns and significant changes in the treatment of time, texture, melody and memory. They also demonstrate that the string quartet has become one of the principal places in which Bullock has been able to think through experience in musical terms. It has provided a medium intimate enough for private reflection, dramatic enough for argument, flexible enough for humour and experiment, and rigorous enough to sustain the most serious forms of musical enquiry.

Whether the forty-fourth quartet represents the end of that particular journey is, of course, another matter. The retrospective can describe what has become visible so far, but the history of the cycle itself offers a warning against assuming that the last work has the final word. One of the most persistent lessons of these quartets is that music can return to what appeared to have been left behind and discover that it was not finished after all. A new work may alter the meaning of an old one, and an idea may acquire another life when placed in circumstances that did not exist when it first appeared.

For the moment, then, the forty-four quartets can be understood as a substantial and coherent body of work, but not as a closed one. Their retrospective significance lies precisely in the tension between continuity and change that runs through them from the beginning: a musical world capable of remembering itself without remaining still, and of changing without losing the sense of where it has come from.

Dafydd Bullock

Dafydd Bullock was born in 1953 in Llanberis, Gwynedd, Cymru (Wales). A composer, conductor, arranger and teacher, he graduated in Music (University of Manchester and the Royal Northern College of Music, 1971 - 1976) where he studied with George Hadjinikos, and took a Master's Degree in International Relations (University of Sussex, 1981 - 1983). In 1993 and 1994 he won first prizes at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and in 1995 he was honoured in Wales by admission to the highest Order of the Gorsedd of Bards. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 2005.

His compositions include 41 Symphonies, 19 Symphonic Poems, 2 Operas, 2 Requiems, 2 Mass settings, a Missa Brevis, an Oratorio, 44 String Quartets, 9 Trios and other chamber music and many songs and pieces for piano. He has written scores for 2 films.

Works have been published in the British Isles by Cwmni Gwynn, Curiad and Bardic Edition, in Belgium by Alain Van Kerckhoven Editeur, in the USA and in Luxembourg by Luxembourg Music Publishers, Music Enterprise and Double You. He has made 42 CDs to date, with SAIN (Wales), AVK (Belgium) and LakeSound. His music has been performed and broadcast in many countries, including Japan, China, Brazil and Colombia as well as widely within Europe.

Dafydd Bullock has a particular relationship with Prague: his Second Symphony was given its world premiere by Musici de Praga during the 1996 Prague Spring Festival and the Third Symphony, again in Prague, on St. Valentine's Day, 1997. The third and fourth String Quartets were also recorded in Prague (Becher Quartet) as were the complete works for Cello and Piano (Jindrich Ptacek) and five Trios. Virtuosi di Basso, the twelve solo celli of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra have recorded and performed music especially written for them. In 2008 and 2009 he premiered his Requiem for Jan Palach in Luxembourg and in Prague.

Website:

<http://www.bullockmusic.info>

Recordings::

<http://soundcloud.com/dafydd-bullock>

Downloads: <https://dafyddbullock.bandcamp.com/>

Scores:

<http://stores.lulu.com/dolbadarn>

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