

Centenary Snippets



Contemporary Music 1918 – 2018

‘Huddersfield is not the first place where you would look for new music. It is a town with a long-standing musical reputation, of course, but known rather for its adherence to tradition rather than for any consuming interest in the future.’¹

Thankfully Gerald Larner wrote this six years before the instigation of the now internationally famous Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, and to the casual observer, the archive of music played at the Huddersfield Music Society seems to corroborate his view: long-established works, mainly from the romantic period, with very little ‘contemporary’ music at all. However, on closer inspection many pieces have been played within the lifetime of their composer: what is regarded by today’s audience as traditional repertoire was of course once modern.

In 1918, when the society was founded, composers such as Ravel, Elgar, Bartók and Shostakovich were still alive and their works were being regularly performed in Huddersfield. The founder of the Society, Dr Arthur Eaglefield Hull, was an enthusiastic exponent of modern music. He and his group of fellow concert promoters engaged artists who performed works at the Aeolian Hall in London; a few weeks later the concerts were repeated in Huddersfield. Thus the Bartók and Dohnányi string quartets, the Elgar Op 82 violin sonata and Respighi’s *Quartet in the Dorian Mode* were played here within weeks of their premières in London. In November 1927 Jelly d’Aranyi and Myra Hess played the Ravel *Violin Sonata*; it had been premièred by them only three weeks earlier.

However, the society can justly claim a few premières. In 1963 Evelyn Rothwell and Valda Aveling played the British première of Arnold Cooke’s *Sonata for Oboe and Piano* and in 1970 the Stadler Trio played the world première of Elizabeth Maconchy’s *Sonata for Clarinet and Viola*. In the 1960s it was decided to commission a piece by John Tavener to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Society. There was lengthy correspondence, but the extensive negotiations exasperated the committee and the arrangements were finally dropped. What masterpiece we might have missed out on is now only a matter of conjecture. The committee did finally commission a piece: *Essay for*

String Quartet by Douglas Young was premièred on 10th January 1972. It was described by the *Huddersfield Examiner* critic as ‘comparatively short, the work is always interesting and often exciting’.² Gerald Larner in *The Guardian* states: ‘the music alternates interestingly between intense activity and withdrawn repose, dislocated and in conflict but cleverly sustained by allusions to the opening phrase ... The Aeolian Quartet had discovered in it much that was no doubt as rewarding to play as it was attractive to hear.’³ What the audience made of it is not recorded; it was first performed on Radio 3 on 9th May 1974, under the auspices of BBC Young Composers’ Forum.

Many works, albeit not premières, have been given by their dedicatees. Harriet Cohen played for the Music Club a number of times in the 1920s, on each occasion including pieces by Bax, her close friend, most of whose piano works were written for her. Noel Mewton-Wood gave a recital in 1953 containing a piano sonata written for him by Bliss and the Pasquier Trio attended twice and played pieces written for them by Pierné, and Françaix. In 1972 Marisa Robles and Christopher Hyde-Smith played a programme almost completely consisting of works written specifically for them among which was *Fantasy Sonata: Naiades* by William Alwyn.

A number of composers have played their own works at our concerts. Josef Holbrooke played several of his own piano compositions at the second concert in 1918; the whole concert in February 1919 was dedicated to the ‘exposition of Mr. Cyril Scott’s works as a composer’.⁴ Benjamin Britten came to the Society twice and inevitably pieces written by him were programmed: in 1945 Peter Pears sang the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* and in 1950 Nancy Evans sang *A Charm of Lullabies* which was written in 1948 and dedicated to her.

During this centenary season the society is delighted to be associated with one of the first performances of Mark Simpson’s new work for piano trio; only time will reveal whether this work will eventually become part of chamber music’s core repertoire.

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- 1 Larner, G., *Guardian*, 11.1.1970, p 8
 - 2 S.H.C., *Huddersfield Examiner*, 11.1.1970
 - 3 Larner, G., *ibid*
 - 4 Concert programme, 19.2.1919

Below is a list of composers whose works were played at the society during their lifetime.

Alwyn	1905 - 1985	Fauré	1845 - 1924
Bantock	1868 - 1946	Françaix	1912 - 1997
Barber	1910 - 1981	Ginastera	1916 - 1983
Bartók	1881 - 1945	Glass	1937 -
Bax	1883 - 1953	Hindemith	1895 - 1963
Bennett, R.R	1936 - 2012	Holbrooke	1878 - 1958
Berkeley, L	1903 - 1989	Holst	1874 - 1934
Bliss	1891 - 1975	Howells	1892 - 1983
Bloch	1880 - 1959	Ibert	1890 - 1962
Bridge	1879 - 1941	Ireland	1879 - 1962
Britten	1913 - 1976	Khachaturian	1903 - 1978
Carter	1908 - 2012	Kodály	1882 - 1967
Clarke, R	1886 - 1979	Kreisler	1875 - 1962
Cooke	1906 - 2005	Lutoslawski	1913 - 1994
de Falla	1876 - 1946	Maconchy	1907 - 1994
Delius	1862 - 1934	Martinü	1890 - 1959
Dohnányi	1877 - 1960	Mathias	1934 - 1992
Duparc	1848 - 1933	McCabe	1939 - 2015
Dutilleux	1916 - 2013	Messiaen	1908 - 1992
Elgar	1857 - 1934	Milhaud	1892 - 1974

Panufnik, R 1968 -
Pärt 1935 -
Pierné 1863 - 1937
Poulenc 1899 - 1963
Prokofiev 1891 - 1953
Quilter 1877 - 1953
Rachmaninov 1873 - 1943
Ravel 1875 - 1937
Reich 1936 -
Respighi 1879 - 1936
Rubbra 1901 - 1986
Scott, C 1879 - 1970
Schnittke 1934 - 1998
Schulhoff 1894 - 1942

Shostakovich 1906 - 1975
Sibelius 1865 - 1957
Stanford 1852 - 1924
Stockhausen 1928 - 2007
Strauss, R 1864 - 1949
Stravinsky 1882 - 1971
Szymanowski 1882 - 1937
Takemitsu 1930 - 1996
Tippett 1905 - 1998
V. Williams 1872 - 1958
Villa-Lobos 1887 - 1959
Walton 1902 - 1983
Warlock 1894 - 1930
Young 1947 -