

RICHARD ARNELL String Quartets.

Tippet Quartet (John Mills, Jeremy Isaac, Julia O'Riordan., Bozidar Vukotic)

Dutton Epoch CDLX7268 (65 minutes)

Quartet no. 1 Op 4

Quartet no 2 Op 14

Quartet no 3 Op 41

Quartet no 4, Op 62

and Quartet no 5 Op 99

To his friends, Richard Arnell was Tony. I was glad to be in that company.

I remember the first time I hear his Symphony no 5 conducted by John Carewe. It was an amazing experience and the finale was unashamedly romantic. While we are grateful for Dutton recording all the symphonies, the recording of the Fifth Symphony cannot hold a candle to Carewe.

Beecham was the man for Arnell's symphonies. Next to Delius, Arnell was Beecham's next love.

In all my correspondence, talks and interviews with Tony he was always wise and circumspect. He was a very gracious man and I believe that his death was probably brought about by the news that the Musicians Benevolent Home in Bromley where he was living, was about to close.

One thing that he was adamant about was anyone prying into his private life and marriages. He would say that anyone who spoke about this or published anything about this would not be a friend but a humbug and a scoundrel and he would sue them to the maximum limit.

On Arnell's death, Lewis Foreman wrote in the British Music Society newsletter about such matters as did someone called Paul Jackson. This was scandalous and unforgivable but these two writers are irresponsible and both also lay claim to the nonsense that William Glock at the BBC prevented the performances of some composers and, as a result, ruined their respective careers.

This is not true. See my articles about William Glock.

What Foreman wrote about Arnell had mistakes and the editor of this journal, Rob Barnett, should have checked this out but then he knows nothing about music. He would not know a semibreve if he sat on one. He once wrote to me demanding to know what key Webern's symphony was in! How ignorant can people be!

It is my view that Tony's quartets are not his finest works. He composed a magnificent Piano Concerto and his Ode to the West Wind is a masterpiece as sung by Olivia Blackburn. Whatever happened to her? The symphonies are fine and there is the famous event that Barbirolli cut about 15 minutes out of the Symphony no. 3 because he did not have the skill to conduct those passages. Norman Del Mar performed it later without any cuts and so does that show that Del Mar was a better conductor than Barbirolli?

I remember asking Sir Malcolm Arnold what he thought of Barbirolli. In serious mood, he answered, "I don't like Italian food!"

Tony's String Quartet no 1 was written in New York in 1939 and lasts about nine minutes and, while it is a good work, it shows no individuality. This cannot be said of the Quartet no 2 with three movements taking about 13 minutes. At the time the composer may have been emulating Hindemith but, today, Hindemith's





greatness is not appreciated. Notwithstanding any influences, this quartet is far more original and contains some fine music and splendid ideas.

The String Quartet no 3 was the composers favourite and probably the best of the five. It is more substantial lasting just under 20 minutes. While it dates from 1945, it was not premiered until 1949 at Cheltenham with the Blech Quartet. It is predominately tonal and uses the tritone to great effect. The opening is profoundly beautiful and there is a calm relaxed feel about the piece but this does not make the work of less effect.

There is among reviewers and people who write about music, a suicidal tendency to compare works with works of other composers. This quartet has been likened to Tippett and then to Korngold and Tony hated this nonsense.

The finale lets the work down a little as it is stop and start music.

The String Quartet no 4 of 1950 is also a short one -movement work and has much to commend it. It has contrast, which is essential for any work, ranging from a gorgeous lyricism to moments of red-hot energy.

There is a wonderful sense of logic and coherence in this piece, two more essentials for a great work.

The String Quartet no 5 received high praise from Hans Keller and others. It is the most original but made up of short movements which gives it an unsatisfactory overall structure. The work gets lost in academic dogma. The second movement is a canon on four subjects with a ground.

Again ill-informed people have said that this work is akin to Shostakovich. Others have said it resembles Purcell, the sort of remark that is saying that it is all right because it is like Purcell and, since Purcell is an established and great composer, we can accept Arnell.

Then there are those who have to pigeon-hole works. Where do these quartets stand with the quartets of Bridge, Britten, Rawsthorne, Rubbra and Tippett. Who cares?

Someone has likened one of these quartets to Britten. Again, this seems to say that Britten was a great composer and so if there is any Britten in Arnell, then Arnell is good.

The playing seems to be first class although I only have Quartet no 3 as a score. The cello solos in Quartet no 5 are very fine and the sound is good.

These quartets are better than many other British quartets although Bridge's Second and Tippett's Second are very fine indeed.

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