



Hugh Benham

String Quartets

Tippett Quartet

Tracklist

String Quartets

STRING QUARTET NO. 1

1	With movement	3:56
2	Leisurely	4:22
3	Fast	3:57

STRING QUARTET NO. 2

1	Moderately fast	3:58
2	Lyrical, relaxed	4:18
3	Vigorous	2:55
4	With movement: initially restless	3:43
Total running time		27:05

Programme Note

Apart from a preceding trial work, the two quartets recorded here are my first music for this medium since university days. An *Adagio and Fugue* composed for a Southampton University students' Composition Concert in 1965, with some supervision from Jonathan Harvey, now languishes, unheard for decades, on a vintage reel-to-reel tape. The 'trial work', *Summer Variations* (2023), like most of my music, is published by United Music Publishing (UMP). It was first performed by a quartet led by Sophie McKellar, to whom my Quartet No. 1 is dedicated.

Among my preliminary listening in the early 2020s, I heard all of Tippett's quartets – although these were not a direct 'influence', and represent no basis for comparison. Nevertheless, I was delighted that the Tippett Quartet was chosen by Adrian Green of Convivium Records to record my work. I am deeply grateful to them.

Quartet No. 1 (2024) is 'abstract', with no underlying story or programme. Like its successor, it is predominantly lyrical, with very limited use of percussive effects and only occasional double-stopping. Its three

movements follow the time-honoured quick-slow-quick pattern, and each is concise, the whole work playing for about 12 minutes. I was encouraged to note that Shostakovich had occasionally operated on a fairly similar time-scale.

Melodic patterns and harmonic vocabulary are tonally based, with A as the principal tonal centre, while there are some important moves to the 'tertiary' keys of F and (enharmonically speaking) D flat. All three movements acknowledge traditional 'forms' or structural patterns. Thus movement 1 is undergirded by sonata form, while movement 2 is essentially ternary, with relaxed opening and closing sections (based on a repeated melody) separated by more vigorous material. Movement 3 is basically a sprightly rondo, with a less active but harmonically richer episode roughly half way through. The final bars refer back to the beginning of movement 1.

Quartet No. 2 (2025) is a little more extended, with four movements spanning about 15 minutes. The principal tonal centre is B flat (with D for movement 2). The notes B flat, D, F, G are harmonically and

Programme Note

melodically prominent in several places, notably at the start of movement 1 and in the accompaniment pattern at the start of movement 4. These outer movements are essentially ternary in shape with middle sections featuring repeated-note patterns (movement 1) and slower writing that includes a decorated circle of fifths progression (movement 4).

The relaxed lyrical style of movement 2 is interrupted by a distinctly disturbed interlude, with insistent syncopated notes for the cello (mostly low E flats). Movement 3 ('Vigorous') has a dancelike feel, with some regular-length phrases in triple time. Much is based on a scalar pattern, rising or falling (crotchet, tied to four semiquavers) spanning a fifth. The slower coda ('Emphatically') begins by stating rather than outlining a rising fifth and goes on to reveal – serendipity? – the start of a favourite melody of mine ('Lobe den Herren', originally from *Praxis Pietatis Melica* of 1668).

Hugh Benham

Biography

Hugh Benham is a graduate of the University of Southampton (BA and PhD) and an ARCO. He is organist and choir director at an Anglican church nearby, and editor of 'Laudate', a church music magazine. He has written books and articles on Tudor music, notably the works of John Taverner, and textbooks for A-Level Music. Most of his sacred choral music was recorded by Convivium Records (CR011 and CR050) in the 2010s. He has since diversified, beginning with a collection of solo piano music in 2021 (CR061 – *For Piano*). Music for piano duet and for two pianos has followed, together with the solo songs recorded on CR112, and chamber music (for solo instruments and piano, and for string quartet). The compositions referred to above, and those recorded here are published by UMP (United Music Publishing Limited).

www.hughbenham.co.uk





Biography

The **Tippett Quartet** has performed and broadcast throughout the UK, Europe, Canada and Mexico, and its broad and diverse repertoire highlights the ensemble's unique versatility. It has an impressive catalogue of recordings and has given numerous world and UK premieres.

In 2011 the quartet celebrated the anniversary of the iconic film composer Bernard Herrmann with a series of concerts and radio broadcasts, and can be heard as featured artist on the films *Knives Out* and *Glass Onion*.

In 2023 it celebrated its 25th anniversary with the release of the complete *Korngold Quartets* to great acclaim. It was Chamber CD of the Month in *BBC Music Magazine* and also included in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* Top 10 Classical Recordings of the Year.

www.tippetquartet.co.uk

Credits

HUGH BENHAM

String Quartets

Tippett Quartet

John Mills (Violin 1) **Jeremy Isaac** (Violin 2)

Vicci Wardman (Viola) **Bozidar Vukotic** (Cello)

Recorded

12-13 May 2026, All Saints' Church, East Finchley, London

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Engineer

Adaq Khan

Producer & Editor

Jim Unwin



Design

Mike Cooter

Executive Producer

Adrian Green

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