

SCORE REVIEW

**George Bridgetower, *Two Quintets for Flute and Strings*,
edited by Mark Ferraguto and Nicole Cherry. A-R Special
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The first association most readers are likely to make in the case of violinist George Bridgetower (1778–1860) will be with Beethoven, as he partnered with the composer to give the premiere of the Violin Sonata Op. 47 in 1803. Not long after that, there seems to have been a falling-out between the two which led Beethoven to withdraw his dedication of the sonata to Bridgetower, and the work is now known after its eventual dedicatee, Rodolphe Kreutzer. But Bridgetower, in fact, had stronger and more lasting connections with Haydn. His West Indian father worked in Prince Nicolaus Esterházy's establishment for around six years from 1779, and although his son had at that time only just been born, he soon emerged as a musical prodigy. There must have been sufficient contact and encouragement during that time for Bridgetower – or at least his father – to take subsequent advantage of the connection. In 1789 he moved with his father to London, where he was to enjoy prolonged success, and in that same year an entry in the diary of Charlotte Papendiek (lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte) noted that Bridgetower performed before their majesties 'a concerto of Viotti's and a quartet of Haydn's, whose pupil he called himself'.¹ He also featured in many of the concerts in which Haydn was involved during his London years, for instance at a Hanover Square concert of 15 April 1791, at which Haydn's Symphony No. 92 was played; a report commented that 'Little Bridgetower's violin concerto was a masterly performance'.² He would have been twelve years old at the time.

Royal favour along with public acclaim continued as Bridgetower grew older. He served, for instance, as leader of the Prince of Wales's private orchestra from 1795 to 1809. Testifying to the royal connection is *Jubilee*, the first of two works featured in this edition by Mark Ferraguto and Nicole Cherry. It was written in 1809 to mark King George III's fiftieth year on the throne, with an introduction that provides a setting of 'Rule, Britannia' followed by a set of four variations on 'God Save the King'. The other work featured is an arrangement, for the same forces of flute and string quartet, of Cherubini's overture to his opera *Lodoïska*. It cannot be securely dated, but the editors plausibly suggest that the arrangement was inspired by the London Philharmonic Society's performances of Cherubini's works and commissioning of new ones during the period 1813–1815.

Little further trace remains of Bridgetower's compositional activity, the other two publications being a ballad, *Henry*, and a curious set of etudes for the piano, *Diatonica Armonica* (London: Birchall, 1812), 'Dedicated to His Students'. The curiosity lies in this evidence

¹ Cited in H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, volume 3: *Haydn in England: 1791–1795* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976): 67.

² Cited in Landon, *Haydn in England: 1791–1795*: 66.

that Bridgetower had become a keyboard teacher, though the explanation may lie in the burgeoning nature of the amateur (and predominantly female) market for piano music. Bridgetower clearly entered this market with no intention of competing with the technically and musically much more ambitious publications in the genre of the etude that were a growth industry in their own right. His studies cater to less advanced players, and seem intended to enliven the practising of scales. Scales in a selection of keys are given for the hands to play an octave, third, sixth and tenth apart, on each occasion preceded by paired pieces in which one hand plays a scale while the other takes on either a melodic or an accompanimental role. Many of these are in the nature of character studies, featuring styles or affects such as polonaise, siciliano, march, waltz, tempo di minuetto, risoluto, agitato, 'impassionato' and cantabile.

Bridgetower brings the same variety of affect to his variations on 'God Save the King'. After the theme has been given with the expected full flourish, the first variation is reduced to two violins, and the dynamic from *forte* to *piano dolce*. The editors make the intriguing suggestion that this mirrors what Haydn had done in his celebrated variations on 'Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser' in the String Quartet Op. 76 No. 3 (which had, after all, been published only a decade before). Indeed, Haydn's first variation features the same immediate reduction in timbral mass and texture, with first violin playing the tune while second violin spins an accompanimental web. Bridgetower, though, finishes his section by replaying the second half of the tune in its original strong tutti guise. Variation 2 continues such textural and dynamic contrasts, but in accelerated and less predictable form: the three lower parts alone, playing predominantly in fauxbourdon harmonies, alternate with less gentle tutti interjections. Variation 3 counterbalances that in several respects; it is in A minor, for the top three parts only, and soft and *dolce sostenuto* throughout. It is also the only place where the respective ranges of flute and first violin come together; elsewhere the flute, consistently playing in its highest register, tends to be pitched an octave above the first violin.

Variation 4 is the grand peroration. It is the first of the variations to start at a *forte* dynamic level, and contains its own internal level of variation, with each half of the tune heard twice. The first half is given tutti, with busy sextuplet figuration in the violins, and then repeated *piano*, with first violin alone playing sextuplet figures entirely on the G string. The same texture continues as the second half of the tune returns, with solo violin ascending into much higher realms, and the section is then rounded off by a tutti *fortissimo* rendition of that second half, which completes the piece. Thus the variation finds a new way of mediating between the few and the many, the strong and the gentle – arguably Bridgetower's compositional 'theme' in this theme-and-variations set.

One matter the editors might have considered further involves the join between the 'Rule, Britannia' introduction and the theme. The source (Clementi & Co.) gives no indication of whether the crotchet pulse of the former is to be maintained into the crotchet pulse of the latter, and this edition does not intervene. The notion that the same pulse should govern both (♩ = ♩) might seem hard to credit, especially since Bridgetower does direct 'Rule, Britannia' to be played *Allegro maestoso*, suggesting a relatively deliberate pulse that could make the subsequent 'God Save the King' sound fairly funereal. Perhaps there was no need to give any indication for the latter with respect either to speed or to pulse, since everyone would have known 'how the tune goes'. Alternatively, the speed to which we have become accustomed today may simply be quicker. Also to be considered are the quicker rhythmic diminutions that will prevail in Variation 1 (semiquavers) and, later on, Variation 4 (sextuplet semiquavers), which may necessitate a steady speed at the outset. That could, however, make the intervening sections – the final part of Variation 1, and all of Variations

2 and 3, which revert to slower values – rather pedestrian for a celebratory work of this kind.

Another matter of interest in this edition of *Jubilee* arises in Variation 1, where the editors have adjusted the exact placement of several turn figures in the first-violin part as it plays ‘God Save the King’ by itself against that second-violin accompaniment. These turns all embellish the rhythm dotted crotchet–quaver–crotchet as heard, for example, in the second bar of the tune. The source places the first of these ornaments, in bar 30, well after the first note, while in the next two cases the turn indication is in fact placed ahead of the equivalent note (the downbeats of bars 36 and 38). The editors place all three ornaments squarely over the first note of the bar, which seems a reasonable and not very momentous bit of tidying-up. Yet I suspect the varying placements found in the source can work very well as they stand. The first turn in bar 30 would thus be played so as to finish on the second beat of its bar, and this in fact matches what Bridgetower explicitly writes for the following, melodically matching two-bar incise, by means of a fully notated inverted turn (beginning with lower neighbour) attached to the second beat of the bar. The next two ornaments marked at bars 36 and 38, on the other hand, should be completed by the time the downbeat falls. These would in turn match two further written-out inverted turns placed before beats two and three of the bar that falls in between them (bar 37). (The full notation of these three ornaments must reflect the lack at that time of a widely agreed shorthand for an inverted-turn figure.)

While both works given in this edition are dubbed quintets, *Jubilee* should in fact be played by six performers. As the editors point out, the bass part is labelled ‘Violoncello e Basso’, implying that both cello and double bass should participate. In the case of Bridgetower’s arrangement for flute and strings of Cherubini’s *Lodoïska* overture there is no indication to augment the cello line by similar means. One might suggest, though, that there is even more need of such support here, for instance in the case of the drum-bass figure that opens the Allegro section. This busily repeated pedal note helps to propel melodic lines that rise both in pitch and dynamic intensity over the course of a long phrase, from *piano* up to a *fortissimo* climax – what I have dubbed the overture schema.³ Possibly relevant to this question are two subsequent passages in the edition featuring long stretches of bass pizzicato that punctuate the accompaniment to a long-breathed tune (at bars 96–130 and 212–227), but these are not in fact so marked in the source. Ferraguto and Cherry add pizzicato (then cancelling arco) indications by analogy with Cherubini’s orchestral version of the overture. Assuming this was not an oversight and that Bridgetower meant what the original edition shows, he may have felt that a lengthy series of mainly downbeat pizzicato crotchets from a single cello would not provide enough bottom to the texture. All the more reason, perhaps, to add a double bass. On the other hand, the arrangement was clearly meant for a domestic setting, so a strengthening of the bass line might have been neither necessary nor logistically likely (how many double-bass players were readily available for one’s drawing-room?). Such a setting, in a space no doubt much smaller and less resonant than an opera house, could provide another perspective on the original absence of pizzicato indications.

While this publication does not provide heavyweight fare, the editors in their Introduction place its contents into perfect final perspective:

In the face of racial and social barriers that were generally considered insurmountable, Bridgetower’s accomplishments were extensive. He associated closely with

³ See W. Dean Sutcliffe, “Topics in Chamber Music”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 137.

many leading artists and composers of his day, and he sustained a remarkable career as a violinist in Europe's most essential music centers. While composing and arranging were likely never at the forefront of his activities, these quintets provide evidence that he was able to translate his talents as a violinist and chamber musician to the written page. (p. v)

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