

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

String Quartet in F

(1928)

FABER *ff* MUSIC

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The first performance of the *String Quartet in F* was given by the Sorrel Quartet on BBC Radio 3 on 21 November 1995

The *String Quartet in F* is recorded by the Sorrel Quartet on Chandos CHAN 9664 (CD)

Duration: 22 minutes

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I	Allegro vivace e con brio	1
II	Andante	17
III	Allegro vivace	20
IV	Allegro molto	27

PREFATORY NOTE

BENJAMIN BRITTEN wrote his *String Quartet in F* in April 1928, when he was fourteen years old and a pupil at South Lodge Preparatory School in his home town of Lowestoft. A few months before, he had begun composition lessons with Frank Bridge, and this quartet was apparently written in preparation for the next lessons with his new teacher.

This string quartet was one of five early quartets written before the *String Quartet in D* of 1931, which Britten revised in 1974 (Faber Music, 1975). A number of quartet fragments and movements survive as well, including a piece for two violins, cello and double bass that dates from 1923, and *Three Poems* for String Quartet dated November–December 1927.

Britten began the *String Quartet in F* on 2 April, at the start of his school holidays, and had finished the first movement by 4 April. The next day he began to write a slow movement, but recorded in his diary: 'don't like it. Have decided to transpose the 2nd move. of 3 poems (shown to F. Bridge) into an easier key and use that'. The haunting second movement is indeed a reworking of the second of his *Three Poems*, the tempo marking changed from Allegretto to Andante, the time signature from C to C , the movement transposed down a major third, and, perhaps most importantly, the melody displaced, starting mid-bar to blur metrical sense. By Saturday 7 April, Britten had finished the third movement. He completed the piece on 11 April, the day he received a letter from Bridge arranging his next lessons for 26–30 April.

There are a number of corrections in Bridge's hand on the manuscript score. Most of these have been included in this published edition, prepared by Colin Matthews. Because the quartet was written by a very young composer and was evidently never performed – there are discrepancies in the score which performance would undoubtedly have brought to light – a number of tacit editorial corrections and adjustments have also been made. Phrasing and dynamics have been corrected for consistency and accidentals added where necessary. Bridge's corrections have been incorporated as follows: movement I: bars 92 (cello), 94 (violin I), 203 (violin II and viola), 214–16 (violin II, viola, cello); movement II: the opening first violin phrase; movement III: bars 36–9 (violin II), 114 (viola). Elsewhere, Britten's original idea has been kept in place of Bridge's correction, e.g. movement I, bars 191–4 (cello). In movement I, bar 134, the implied $\text{E}\sharp$ in the violins has been retained from the manuscript, although it is possible that $\text{E}\flat$ may have been intended.

Jenny Doctor
Aldeburgh, November 1998

String Quartet in F

(1928)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913–1976)

I

Allegro vivace e con brio

The musical score is for the first movement of Benjamin Britten's String Quartet in F major, Op. 157. It is marked 'Allegro vivace e con brio'. The score is written for four parts: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature is one flat (F major), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into three systems of four measures each. The first system (measures 1-4) shows the Violin I and II parts starting with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic, while the Viola and Cello parts enter in the second measure with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The second system (measures 5-8) shows the Violin I and II parts playing a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the Viola and Cello parts play a continuous eighth-note pattern. The third system (measures 9-12) shows the Violin I and II parts playing a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the Viola and Cello parts play a continuous eighth-note pattern. The dynamics are marked as mezzo-forte (mf) for measures 1-4, mezzo-forte (mf) for measures 5-8, and piano (p) for measures 9-12. The score is written in a standard musical notation with a grand staff for each part.