

William Henry
Reed

String Quartets

Quartet no. 4 in C major

Légende for String Quartet

String Quartet no. 5 in A minor

THE CIRRUS STRING QUARTET

Martin Smith | Suzanne Loze | Morgan Goff | David Burrowes

1	1st mvt: Allegro moderato	8:01
2	2nd mvt: Ritornello (Lento ma non troppo)	8:12
3	3rd mvt: Allegretto (tranquillamente) - Presto	5:00
4	4th mvt: Adagio con espressione - Allegro moderato	8:22

W.H. Reed: Légende for String Quartet

5	1: Andante con moto - Tempo di Valse Lente (non troppo Allegro)	6:40
6	2: Allegro (moderato)	4:14

W.H. Reed String Quartet no. 5 in A minor

pub. Cary & Co. London 1916

7	1st mvt: Allegro con brio	6:49
8	2nd mvt: Vivace ma non troppo Presto	4:33
9	3rd mvt: Adagio (Quasi recitativo)	7:42
10	4th mvt: Finale Andante misterioso - Allegro moderato	7:27

Total Playing Time: 67:20

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In May 1916 composer Cyril Scott was quoted as observing that each of the leading string quartets in London at the time had what he called a “tame” composer – a member who also wrote. The Philharmonic had Eugene Goossens, now remembered as a conductor; the English had Frank Bridge; while the London boasted two – Albert Sammons and Waldo Warner. The British String Quartet, which had been formed only the previous year, also had a resident composer: its leader, “Billy” Reed.

William Henry Reed (1875-1942) was born in Frome, Somerset, the second son of an Internal Revenue Officer. After a few years there and some in Cardiff the family moved to Lambeth, then in Surrey. As an adult he moved south to Croydon, where he remained. He entered the Royal Academy of Music to study violin and composition, his teachers being Émile Sauret and Ebenezer Prout. He joined Henry Wood’s Queen’s Hall Orchestra, and had several of his early orchestral works performed by them at the Promenade Concerts; it was during this time that he first met Elgar, asking him after a rehearsal if he gave lessons in harmony and counterpoint. (Elgar’s characteristic reply was “My dear boy, I don’t know anything about those things”.) In 1904 Reed was among the players who broke away to form the London Symphony Orchestra (at which point Wood stopped programming his music at the Proms). He became the orchestra’s leader in 1912, holding the position for 23 years, and after stepping down continued as the LSO’s chairman until his death. From 1910 he was also orchestra leader for the Three Choirs Festival, having begun playing and teaching in the area as early as 1902, and in 1920 was responsible for the LSO becoming the Festival’s “house orchestra” for a number of years; he continued to lead for the Festival until it was suspended during the Second World War, and in particular became a good friend of the

organist of Worcester Cathedral, Sir Ivor Atkins. (Together with Elgar the three men were once described as the Festival’s “brains trust”.) In addition he was active as a conductor, sometimes deputising with the LSO and also appearing with other orchestras; he was extremely active in the amateur music scene, conducting three orchestras in Surrey and Kent for many years, and was much in demand as teacher, adjudicator and examiner. He was appointed to the staff of the Royal College of Music in 1920 and taught there until his death; one of his last pupils was Neville Marriner, later the founder of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. He was awarded the M.V.O. by George V in 1928, a rare gesture of recognition to an orchestral player (normally conductors and soloists walk off with all the honours), and was awarded a D.Mus. in 1939 by the Archbishop of Canterbury in recognition of his contributions to the Three Choirs Festival.



Reed's claim on posterity has perhaps rested hitherto most strongly on his connection with Elgar. Elgar worked closely with the LSO in its early years, and as Reed himself recalled, "he never failed to speak to me...always finding something friendly and encouraging to say." In 1910 Elgar asked the younger man to advise him on technical aspects of the new violin concerto he was writing for Kreisler, and from this grew a remarkable collaboration and a close friendship. Reed not only gave the first private run-through of the concerto to Elgar's friends, but was similarly involved in the gestation of Elgar's great late trilogy of chamber works; in March 1919 he gave the première of the *Violin Sonata*, and that May played second violin (under Albert Sammons) in the premières of the *String Quartet* and *Piano Quintet*. The following year, again with Sammons, he performed the slow movement of the *String Quartet* at Lady Elgar's funeral. He remained close to Elgar until his death; it was to Reed that Elgar entrusted the sketches of his incomplete *Third Symphony*, and it was thanks to Reed's scrupulous preservation of them that the reconstruction (by Anthony Payne) was made possible. Afterwards Reed commemorated the friendship in a beautiful memoir, *Elgar as I knew him*, and also wrote the first and still one of the best biographies of the composer.

What seems to have been lost to history is Reed's own work as a composer, which despite his many other commitments continued throughout his life. His music includes works for orchestras of all sizes, a good deal for violin (naturally) and viola, a number of songs and a significant quantity of chamber music. A review of his *Variations for Strings* from 1911 refers approvingly to "inventive power, artistic feeling, and resource". A few of the larger works and various of the songs and violin and viola pieces were published, but none of the chamber music with the exception of the *String Quartet no. 5*.

It was with *Quartet no. 5* that Cirrus' journey towards this recording began, when copies of a set of parts from the library of Cambridge University were made available to us. Some of us had never heard of Billy Reed at all; some knew of him through the connection with Elgar; none of us was aware of him as a composer. The more we played the work, the more its qualities grew on us, and on anyone to whom we played it. It became clear that here was a distinctly English voice, drawing certainly on others, but recognisably individual for all that. We determined to try to find more of his music for the genre, but the lack of published material hindered us initially. Eventually a web search revealed that a great number of Reed manuscripts were held by the library of the Royal College of Music; among these were the manuscript scores and parts of the *Quartet no. 4* and the *Légende*, from which the performance material used for this recording has been prepared.

Chamber music was clearly important in the early stages of Billy's development as a composer: the first movement of a *Quartet in F* from 1900 survives in manuscript in the library of Reed's *alma mater* the RAM. A reference to a performance of a further three movements appears in the RAM Club newsletter that year, the players including Reed himself and the great violist Lionel Tertis; but the material for these movements has not yet come to light. We do not know whether this was Reed's *Quartet no. 1*, and Quartets 2 and 3 also remain undiscovered at the time of writing. The RCM Library holds various other works of string chamber music by Reed, written throughout his life, but only one other piece for quartet. This recording thus presents almost all of Billy's work in the genre known to survive.



Elgar with William Henry Reed

always gratefully written. Reed's musical voice is always lyrical, with a willingness to use colouristic harmony rare among English composers of the period. This is music of charm and grace.

Contemporary reviews often allude to Reed's skill in writing for instruments, and attribute this to his work at the LSO and to his being (obviously) a fine instrumentalist. One would certainly expect him to be fully aware of the technical possibilities of his own instrument. Nevertheless, Reed's understanding of the quartet medium is truly superior. His music displays a remarkable grasp of timbres and sonorities, his textures ranging from the most delicate imaginable to a fullness of sound that is well-nigh orchestral, and

Quartet no. 4 in C major

On the first page of the score Reed wrote "Dedicated to the Wessely Quartet". Hans Wessely (1862-1926) was an Austrian violinist who had made his home and career in London, becoming a noted pedagogue at the Royal Academy of Music. For some 20 years from the beginning of the 20th century he led a major string quartet in London, his violist at one time being Tertis (a former violin pupil of his). For several seasons his cellist was B. Patterson Parker, a colleague of Reed's in the LSO.

As was often his practice, Reed signed and dated each movement after it was completed. The first two movements of the quartet were written during March 1913, the remainder of the work in April. The Wesselys performed the work twice that year, on the 22nd and 29th of November, the latter being a private concert at the Royal Academy of Music. One reviewer described the piece as "essentially pleasing and musicianly, marked by refined sentiment rationally expressed and interestingly developed," and the slow movement in particular was widely praised.

The bustling yet relaxed good humour of the work's opening is deceptive; there is more than a little wistful melancholy about the second subject, and an unexpectedly dramatic pitch is reached at the climax of the development. The recapitulation restores the mood, however, and the movement sinks into tranquillity at its close. The slow movement, which Reed ultimately christened *Ritornello*, begins semi-modally, in a mood not unlike a minor version of Vaughan Williams' *Tallis Fantasia* (which Reed knew, having led the première

in Gloucester only three years before). The noble threnody intoned by the viola at the opening dominates the movement, though the second subject over a rocking cello figure offers consolation. The third movement begins in the style of a flowing intermezzo, reminiscent of Brahms, before veering unexpectedly off into a fantastical scherzo section. The darkly portentous opening of the Finale yields to a more light-hearted mood expressed alternately in 5/4 and 3/4 and veering between playfulness and lyricism. After a final triumphant peroration the quartet ends, as the first movement did, in serenity.

String Quartet no. 5 in A minor (1915)

Between 1905 and 1919, Walter Willson Cobbett, a wealthy industrialist with a passion for chamber music, sponsored five competitions for new chamber music by British composers. In 1914 he announced the fourth of these, for a new string quartet. Cobbett had previously promoted a new formal structure, the "Phantasy", which he had derived from English renaissance music and thought might be a change from the traditional Germanic four-movement model; but on this occasion the rules allowed that the new work could be in either traditional or Phantasy form. The only stipulation was that the violin parts should be of equal importance, "each being inscribed as follows: 'Violin part, one of two'", and that the other parts should be no less significant. Reed submitted his Quartet no. 5.

Cobbett's method of adjudication is worthy of remark: a number of works would be shortlisted, after which these would be performed before a final decision was taken. In June 1915 four quartets were performed before an audience of fifty string players, who then voted. In the end two first prizes were awarded, one to Albert Sammons and one to Frank Bridge, and Reed received second prize, with Cobbett commenting that his work contained "graceful writing and some striking harmonic effects." Reed performed the work with his own quartet several times the following year; the *Daily Telegraph* observed that the music "never [failed] to show the impress of true musicianship", and praised the slow movement in particular.

Reed must have relished the challenge set by Cobbett. The two violin parts are closely interlinked throughout, and the material is shared between all four parts with consummate skill. The first movement opens on a note of urgent questioning, and though the second subject offers hope of tranquillity the overall mood remains driven and unsatisfied; the movement ends without any true resolution having been found. The second is light on its feet, driving rhythms alternating with light-hearted lyricism. The passionate recitative with which the cello opens the third movement sets the tone for music of remarkable elegiac beauty, depth of feeling and tenderness. The finale opens sombrely and returns to the questioning tone of the first movement, but this time there is light on the horizon; the mood becomes happier and the work ends in triumph.

Légende for String Quartet

On the side of the manuscript score Reed has pencilled himself a note: *Send Thurs night to Miss Jessie Snow, 48 Albert Court, Kensington Gore, S.W.*

Jessie Snow was an old friend and former pupil of Billy's, who had known him since her childhood. He wrote a violin concerto for her in 1918, and in 1919 accompanied her in a recital of Elgar's Violin Sonata, less than a month after he himself had given the first performance. In 1922 she founded her own quartet, which was to run for nearly 30 years. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Reed wrote the *Légende* specifically for her, in order that the new group might have a première to its name early on. The first movement is dated December 1922, and the second February 1923; the Snow Quartet performed the piece on the 4th of April that year. It was praised as showing, "like all Mr. Reed's work,...a refined and sensitive quality of musical thought and considerable ingenuity in quartet writing" by the critic of the *Era* weekly newspaper. The first movement alternates between pastoral idyll, again reminiscent of Vaughan Williams, and a melancholy, nostalgic waltz. The second has a strong flavour of rustic romp, while the middle section in 6/8 sounds rather as though an Irish leprechaun has come face-to-face with Dukas' sorcerer's apprentice. At the end, the music simply skitters away into nothingness.

Billy Reed died unexpectedly in July 1942 while on an examination tour of Scotland. At Ivor Atkins' suggestion his ashes were interred in Worcester Cathedral near the Elgar Memorial Window, whose unveiling he had witnessed only seven years before. At the ceremony the Stratton Quartet, whose leader had succeeded Reed as leader of the LSO, played two slow movements for quartet. One was the Elgar. The other was the Adagio of Reed's own Quartet no. 5.

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Cirrus would like to express our gratitude to the library staff at the Royal College of Music, London, for making Reed's manuscripts available to us; to the library of the Royal Academy of Music, London, for access to useful biographical material; and to all those who through their generosity made this recording possible.

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Cirrus String Quartet

Martin Smith | Suzanne Loze | Morgan Goff | David Burrowes

The members of the Cirrus String Quartet are all leading solo and chamber music performers, and between them, they have worked with most of the top chamber orchestras in Great Britain.

Amongst their CD recordings are music for strings and wind by Mozart, a CD of string quintets by Mozart and Schubert and Tchaikovsky's sextet 'Souvenir de Florence' and, most recently, the two quartets of Leoš Janáček.

Cirrus has been recorded by BBC radio, appeared on ITV, and performed at the Wigmore Hall.



MPR114 William Henry Reed String Quartets.

Artists: The Cirrus String Quartet: Martin Smith and Suzanne Loze (Violins), Morgan Goff (Viola), David Burrowes (Violoncello)

Venue: Pamoja Hall, The Space, Sevenoaks School, Kent, England

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