

Entry on Thomas Dunhill (by Marion Scott) in

Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music

(London: Oxford University Press, 1929)

DUNHILL, THOMAS FREDERICK, b. 1877, English composer

Phantasy, str quartet	47	1906	J.B. Cramer & Co., 1923.
Pleasantries, 2 v, vla	63	1923	J.B. Cramer & Co., 1925.
Quintet, pf, v, vc, cl, horn, E flat	3	1898	Rudall Carte, 1913.
Quartet, pf, v, vla, vc, b mi	16	1903	Novello, 1908.
Phantasy-trio, pf, v, vla, E flat	36	1911	S. & B., 1912.
Sonata, pf, v, d mi	27	1908	" , 1911.
Sonata, pf, v, F	50	1916-17	Augener, 1920.
Variations on an original	18	c.1905	Curwen (Goodwin & Tabb).
Theme, pf, cv, G			

Throughout his career, Dunhill's services to chamber music have been manifold, and of so much value that he holds a unique position among British composers in relation to it. Not only has he written a number of chamber works distinguished by their pure style, attractively fresh ideas, and admirable suitability for their purpose, but he has also brought to performance a great number of new works by other composers. The Dunhill chamber concerts, initiated by him in 1907, were carried on for twelve years in London, and had as their principal object the production or second performance of new works by contemporary British composers. Furthermore, Dunhill has written a book on chamber music for students (Macmillan & Co., 1913), which has become a standard work on the subject. In his ensemble classes and composition lessons at the R.C.M., in his lectures, in his adjudication at competitions, and in his own performances as an ensemble player, he has consistently inculcated the best and highest principles of the art. It is therefore appropriate that he should have been the first recipient of the Cobbett Chamber Music Medal (1924).

Though a chamber music expert, Dunhill is not exclusively a chamber musician. His all-round abilities enable him to write with success in almost every form of composition. His chamber works have come at intervals among compositions of other kinds. As those which are published constitute a good proportion of his output, they may be considered typical of the whole.

THE QUINTET, op. 3, was composed while Dunhill was still a student at the R.C.M. It opens with a theme and variations; the second movement is a graceful and rather formal allegretto, combining the functions of a lyrical movement with a minuet and trio, whilst the finale cleverly unites the characteristics of a scherzo with glimpses of a gigue. The quintet show certain traces of immature workmanship:- e.g. an occasional loose knitting of the instrumental parts and an over-carefulness to demonstrate harmonic progressions that are already perfectly understandable. In the main, however, the music goes through with melodious good sense, simple but very effective devices, and an easy command of charming tone effects.

THE QUARTET, op. 16, won the Lesley Alexander Prize. Here the music is still tinged with Brahmsian influence, but otherwise shows its composer as mature. The craftsmanship is clear and firm, the material equally grateful to play or hear.

In the opening allegro, pensively emotional in character, the charming themes are continuously to the fore, and unfold themselves naturally. The second movement (adagio non troppo) touches deeper springs of emotion, engaging sympathetic interest throughout. It is a real cantabile movement, where the instruments sing forth in their sweetest tones. The scherzo and trio are full of good tunes. The finale, with an introduction (molto lento e serio) and a broadly treated allegro, is the most closely packed, intellectual section of the work, and solves with mellow wisdom the philosophic doubts postulated in the first movement.

THE VARIATIONS, op. 18, are in genuine concertante style; yet they are almost as useful for solo purposes as the later set of Capricious Variations for 'cello and orchestra (alternatively available in an arrangement with piano since both are written with scrupulous regard for the true nature of the 'cello and its tonal balance with the piano part.

THE PHANTASY TRIO, op. 36, forming one of the series of Cobbett commissions, has proved itself most useful and welcome. Designed a short continuous work, it nevertheless passes through phrases that imply the larger scope cyclic form. Here, as in kindred examples, Dunhill shows the British gift for effecting happy compromise between differing administrative systems. Other points to note in the phantasy are the admirable adaptation of the material to the medium employed, the delicacy of the colouring, and the great discretion with which the piano part is written.

Both the phantasy string quartet, op. 47, and the *Pleasantries*, op. 63, are short works of moderate difficulty. The phantasy is pleasing and unaffected, tinged with the idiom of folk-song, and modal in colour. The *Pleasantries* are neatly described by their name, and certainly constitute very useful additions to the limited repertory for two violins and viola.

Of the two sonatas for violin and piano may be said that they stand a little apart from the rest of Dunhill's chamber music, since he seems to have found in this flexible, sensitive medium, the freest expression for his most intimate ideas.

THE FIRST SONATA, in D minor, starts with dramatic energy. The slow movement, a finely designed romanza, is practically in a [?] form, but with a central episode that represents the scherzo of the sonata. The finale (allegro vivace assai) is an extended movement, which the tunes go with a good swinging lilt. To any one acquainted with the music of Arne or the hornpipe tunes of the eighteenth century, it will be interesting to see how the typically English spirit shines again in the work of this modern composer.

THE SECOND SONATA in F, op. 50, is the most mature of all Dunhill's chamber works. Here the opening allegro swings along as easily as ever, but the links are tightened, the harmonic scheme is fuller. Beyond the direction 'adagio lamentoso' no clue is given to the poetic idea of the second movement in B flat minor; - yet the strong though controlled intensity of utterance, the hint of funeral drums in the accompanying figure, and the heroic qualities of the movement as a whole, link it with the Great War. A paean-like finale makes a brilliant close.

Dunhill's chamber music is English through and through. It has, however, more affinities with the English national songs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than with the folk-song idiom. Every work shows his marked instinct towards orderly and complementary processes, and lucidity in exposition distinguishes both his musical and literary styles. His melodic invention, felicity in statement, and logic in design are notable. From the academic point of view it may be objected that the main substance of almost

every movement is carried forward on predominantly melodic lines, but from the performer's and listener's point of view, the fresh abundance of his melodies is a constant source of delight.

For harmonic texture Dunhill keeps generally to the diatonic style, enriched by normal discords and chromaticisms. This comparative simplicity is united, however, to a gift for getting the fullest value out of every progression, and a happy knack for dovetailed rhythms and unexpected twists of melody. He has also a fondness for setting the simple and compound counterparts of a time value against each other for the first and second subjects of a work, and he usually develops his closest intellectual effort in his finales. Above all, he is considerate and equitable towards his instruments, scores for their best natural tone qualities, and writes for their actual combinations of sound. In string-players' parlance, his effects all 'come off'. His chamber music is as companionable, healthy, and English as the South Downs on a sunny day.

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Note on Walter Willson Cobbett (from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

Walter Willson Cobbett CBE (11 July 1847 – 22 January 1937) was a British businessman and amateur violinist, and editor/author of *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*. He also endowed the Cobbett Medal for services to chamber music. Walter Cobbett was born in 1847 in Blackheath, England. He became an active supporter of music, and commissioned numerous works of chamber music from emerging and leading British composers of his time, including chamber works by Benjamin Britten, Frank Bridge, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, Eugene Goossens. His two-volume encyclopedia of chamber music, published in 1929, is still considered the most comprehensive work on the subject today. His insightful, wry and occasionally caustic style makes for enlightening and delightful reading.

An innovative industrialist and astute businessman, Cobbett was cofounder of Scandinavia Belting Ltd (today BBA Aviation Ltd.), which manufactured a new type of woven belting for machinery.

But Cobbett's heart was in music. "It has been humorously remarked that he has given to commerce what time he could spare from music," said an article in a contemporary edition of *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Cobbett played weekly in an amateur string quartet, was concertmaster of a number of amateur orchestras, and was a prolific writer and publicist for chamber music.

In 1905, Cobbett endowed an annual competition for chamber music composers. The Cobbett Competition was instrumental in advancing the careers of leading composers of the time. Frank Bridge won second prize in the first competition with his *Phantasy for String Quartet*. Other winners included Benjamin Britten and Ralph Vaughan Williams. In addition to granting prizes, Cobbett commissioned works from these and other composers. Cobbett established other prizes as well. In 1920 he started granting annual prizes for chamber music performance for students of the Royal Academy of Music. The Cobbett Medal for services to chamber music was established in 1924. He also encouraged British luthiers by granting prizes for outstanding instruments.

Cobbett started a periodical on Chamber music, called the Chamber Music Supplement. He established a free library of chamber music and started chamber music concert series in working-class neighborhoods of British cities.

Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music was the result of four years of labor. In addition to Cobbett's own extensive contributions, the two-volume survey includes articles by leading musicians and musicologists of the time, including Vincent d'Indy, Donald Tovey, Ralph Vaughan Williams and others.

Cobbett wrote of his own devotion to chamber music that "there opened out before me an enchanted world... I became a humble devotee of this infinitely beautiful art, and so began for me the chamber music life."

Cobbett died in London, England in 1937. His legacy is continued by the Cobbett Association, an organization devoted to rediscovering forgotten works of chamber music.