York Bowen's Viola Music Reconsidered within the Context of the English Musical Renaissance (1860-1940)

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YORK BOWEN’S VIOLA MUSIC RECONSIDERED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE
ENGLISH MUSICAL RENAISSANCE (1860-1940)

By

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To the late English violist and scholar John White (1938-2013), whose critical editions of Bowen, extensive publications on Lionel Tertis, and passion for the viola formed a great part of my research and served as an inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

The period in English musical history referred to as the English Musical Renaissance, stretching roughly from 1860-1940, is generally acknowledged as an era marked by a large resurgence of both musical and cultural activity. During this time, scholars, composers, performers, and philanthropists contributed to the growth of a new repertoire of English compositions that in turn strengthened England’s burgeoning nationalistic identity. Despite this flourishing cultural climate, the era was rife with controversy, revealing a complex web of musical and sociopolitical factors, some deliberately constructed, that led to the privileging of certain English composers and repertoire at the expense of others. As such, the era remains a fertile one for musicological exploration and debate.

Nevertheless, English composers made great strides during this era, producing an astonishing amount of significant repertoire in a variety of genres. Contributions to string chamber music literature, with a new emphasis on the viola, were a notable product of this period and helped define the transition from Germanic, late-romanticism to early English modernism. The principal purpose of this treatise is to re-examine the viola music of the relatively neglected composer York Bowen within both the context of the English Musical Renaissance and the development of the English viola repertoire.

After a brief introduction, Chapter 1 gives an historical overview of the English Musical Renaissance, including a survey of the fundamental musicological texts and resources focusing on the complex construction of the era. Chapter 2 presents a biographical sketch of York Bowen as a performer and composer, highlighting his initial meeting and collaboration with the English violist Lionel Tertis and many of his noteworthy compositions. This leads to a more in-depth examination, in Chapter 3, of Bowen’s most significant works for the viola: the Sonatas for viola...
and piano, the Viola Concerto, and the Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas, all composed between 1905 and 1907 and a product of the partnership between Bowen and Tertis. Chapter 4 discusses factors and obstacles that prevented Bowen from achieving a more lasting fame and re-examines his legacy and the importance of his role within the development of English viola literature. Chapter 5 concludes the body of this treatise by exploring the current revival of interest in Bowen’s music and the growing prominence of his compositions in the core of viola repertoire as evidenced by a variety of new recordings, critical editions, scholarship, and pedagogy.

After the final chapter of this treatise, two appendices are attached. The first lists a general catalogue of Bowen’s viola music, including categories for those compositions featuring the viola in a solo role and those using viola in a larger chamber ensemble context. Also included are the dates of composition and any publishing information available. The second appendix is a current discography of Bowen’s viola music. The treatise concludes with a detailed bibliography of resources used in the preparation of this project.
INTRODUCTION

In 1984, the publication of Monica Watson’s book “York Bowen: a Centenary Tribute,” along with the celebratory concert organized by London’s Royal Academy of Music to honor their alumnus and professor, helped awaken a new interest in the compositions of English composer and pianist York Bowen (1884-1961). Though his name is hardly recognized outside the sphere of English music, even a cursory perusal of Bowen’s catalog of musical compositions reveals a prolific artist who composed expertly and extensively for a wide variety of instruments across multiple genres. During the first half of the twentieth century, Bowen was hailed as a dynamic soloist and gifted collaborator whose compositions for piano (his primary performing instrument) and those featuring the viola are particularly noteworthy, due to both his own prodigious talents as a performer and his unique musical partnership with the great English violist Lionel Tertis (1876-1975). Together, Bowen and Tertis performed and toured England and continental Europe during the first decade of the twentieth century, premiering many of Bowen’s compositions as well as countless other original works by contemporary English composers. In its entirety, the music that Bowen composed for Tertis not only forms a substantial portion of the English repertoire for the viola but also functions as a welcome stylistic bridge between late-nineteenth-century German romanticism and twentieth-century modernism. Taken as such, Bowen’s music is essential to the trajectory of English music during this transitional era frequently referred to as the English Musical Renaissance.

Despite an incredibly active and lengthy career as a performer, composer and pedagogue, Bowen never achieved the lasting recognition befitting a musician of his stature. The accolades he received in his lifetime appear to have done little to cement his reputation, and the vast majority of his compositions languished out-of-print, with few commercial or archival recordings
to keep them alive for listeners and historians. A survey of the cultural politics at play during the English Musical Renaissance, however, reveals a complex web of forces that dramatically influenced the development of English music, helping the careers of some composers and hindering others. This treatise examines the music of York Bowen in the context of the larger cultural environment in England, with emphasis on his significant contributions to the established viola repertoire of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

An exploration of Bowen’s viola repertoire centers around four significant works, the Sonata in C Minor, Op. 18, for viola and piano, the Sonata in F Major, Op. 22, for viola and piano, the Viola Concerto in C minor, Op. 25, and the Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas, Op. 41, all composed from 1905 to 1907 during a particularly fruitful period of collaboration with Tertis. Bowen’s work is then examined through the lens of the English Musical Renaissance in an effort to discern what outside elements may have presented obstacles to his career and success as a composer in his lifetime. Finally, this treatise surveys the mounting evidence supporting the contention that now, fifty years after the composer’s death, Bowen’s music is indeed receiving much deserved attention and recognition, both within the context of viola repertoire and the development of English music.

In spite of this new interest, surprisingly little has been written about York Bowen’s career, compositions, or role within the English Musical Renaissance, save for Monica Watson’s book and a handful of academic dissertations focusing on particular aspects of the composer’s work. This is perhaps attributable to the scarcity of available sources that mention or document Bowen’s career in his lifetime as well as the limited availability of archival materials or personal artifacts directly related to the composer. Though this project has benefitted from relatively new publications of musical scores and critical editions, the parameters of this study of Bowen’s
contributions to the viola repertoire are limited somewhat by the scope of the project (as a performance treatise) and even more so by the slimness of published resources and the lack of opportunities for physically exploring the York Bowen archives housed by the Special Collections of London’s Royal Academy of Music Library. Clearly, there is a need for more serious Bowen scholarship. This treatise aims to be a starting point for further exploration of York Bowen’s music, with abundant avenues open for more musicologically related topics, theoretical analyses, and pedagogical observations. Moreover, these new opportunities for future Bowen scholarship may prompt a re-evaluation of the development of the English viola repertoire and the cultural events that helped shape our interpretation of the English Musical Renaissance.
CHAPTER 1

THE ENGLISH MUSICAL RENAISSANCE: CONSTRUCTION OF AN ERA

There is a natural tendency to name, organize, and define significant periods of time or groups of artists, using terms and labels to help distinguish events, figures, and cultural trends. But the practice of labeling a historical period of time or an artistic movement is often contentious and fraught with difficulty. In fact, it can be virtually impossible to define the precise duration and scope of an era, particularly with regard to broader musical and cultural periods such as the Renaissance, Baroque or Classical eras, each comprised of a dense mixture of historical events, aesthetics, and overlapping stylistic traits. To further complicate matters, it is often debatable whether the catalyst for a given artistic movement or cultural climate is intrinsic, indicative of a collective unity of purpose and intent, or if it is the product of external forces and influences. The very existence of a distinct musical movement may be questioned altogether, and deemed instead a convenient grouping of artists with similar styles and aesthetics. Nevertheless, we need to organize our knowledge and experience through such categories, despite the challenges and imprecision, and we continue to use terms to help limit and define our subjects.

The term “English Musical Renaissance,” which is often used to refer to the period of 1860-1940 in English musical history, is not without its share of controversy. It is generally acknowledged that this era was marked by a large resurgence of musical and cultural activity during which scholars, composers, performers, and even philanthropists contributed to the growth of an English nationalistic identity and a new repertoire of English works. Indeed, the rise to national prominence of numerous English musicians and the renewed emphasis and appreciation given to art-music served as a stimulus to the larger cultural climate. But is this
better described as a “renaissance,” in the sense of a naturally occurring reawakening of creativity, or rather as a deliberately constructed sociopolitical movement that strengthened England’s cultural environment? Despite the complexity of this issue, the use of the phrase “English Musical Renaissance” has persisted.

The first reference to a “renaissance” of English music appeared in an article by critic Joseph Bennett (1831-1911) in London’s *The Daily Telegraph*, 1882. Bennett, reviewing Hubert Parry’s *Symphony No. 1*, wrote that the work gave “capital proof that English music has arrived at a renaissance period.”¹ Bennett further elaborated on this “renaissance” theme, as did *The Times* music critic Francis Heuffer and his successor J. A. Fuller-Maitland, in the following years. (In fact, Fuller-Maitland’s 1902 book entitled *English Music in the Nineteenth Century* is neatly subdivided into two parts: "Book I: Before the Renaissance (1801–1850)", and "Book II: The Renaissance (1851–1900).") Many journalists and academicians, including Fuller-Maitland, regarded Parry (1848-1918) and his fellow composers Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) and Alexander Mackenzie (1847-1935) as the most prominent musical figures during the late-Victorian era in England. All three were highly educated composers, with positions inside academia, who earned considerable accolades and distinction from the press. Though Parry was the only native born composer of the three (Stanford and Mackenzie being of Irish and Scottish descent, respectively), as a group they were viewed by many to be most likely to resurrect the “cause” of English national music, which had been largely dormant since the time of Henry Purcell.

The impetus for this new quest for an English national music was a deep-set skepticism and criticism about the state of English classical music during the nineteenth century that was not

confined to England alone. In 1904, the German writer Oscar Schmitz famously declared that England was “Das Land Ohne Musik,” (the land without music). Schmitz’s book, entitled *Das Land ohne Musik: englische Gesellschaftsprobleme* (The Land without Music: problems of English society), was both an assertion of Germany’s cultural superiority and an examination of the alleged collapse of English music under the weight of European titans like Brahms, Schumann, and Wagner. Admittedly, for most of the nineteenth century, England did seem to suffer from a sort of inferiority complex about its composers and their music. This was evident in the continual parade of would-be composers who left to study with pedagogues on the continent to learn the musical traditions of Germany and France, despite opportunities to study music in England at institutions such as London’s Royal Academy of Music and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Moreover, there was a discernable absence of English composers and their works being programmed and performed on the international scene. In particular, critics observed a dearth of substantial English chamber music compositions that could stand alongside those of Brahms, Beethoven, and others. England responded to this perceived deficiency by promoting English music and cultural values. The encouragement of English homegrown talent that could rival that of their continental counterparts was central to this effort.

Whether or not the term “renaissance” is accurate, it is difficult to argue against the existence of this creative, prolific period when faced with such a vast and substantial body of English compositions produced during this eighty-year period, written by English composers, and performed mostly by English musicians. Whatever the catalyst or quality of the results, musicians rose to the challenge of creating music that could stand alongside that of the European masters by building upon the English traditions that had begun to emerge by the end of the nineteenth century. Early on, Parry, Stanford, and Mackenzie, the so-called forefathers of the
English Musical Renaissance, showed that they were capable of producing works modeled on established compositional forms and techniques, mainly from the Germanic tradition. As a group they appeared to reject modernism in music, instead favoring a more conservative compositional style that arguably would resonate more with commonly held ideas of an English national character such as tradition, order, and restraint. Spurred on by these ideals and a new climate of creativity, the generation of English composers that followed was one of the most prolific in all of English musical history.

Nearly a century after its first appearance, the term “English Musical Renaissance” was still in use. By the mid-1960s, the notion of a “renaissance” still had substantial support from many mainstream critics and scholars. Historian Frank Howes was the first to publish a book dealing specifically with this era in English musical history, even going so far as to call the English Musical Renaissance a “historical fact.” Howes, intent on fully exploring the idea of a “musical renaissance,” divided the era (and his book) into three sections: Gestation, Birth, and Growth, but gave most attention to the early foundational years and the roles of composers such as Mackenzie, Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900), and Parry, whom he called “the catalyst for the future.” Significantly, he broadened the concept of the English Musical Renaissance, making many observations regarding the outside cultural and social factors that contributed to the greater artistic climate of the era. Howes specifically names three professional movements (the Bach revival, the renewed investigation of English Tudor music and counterpoint, and the national interest in English folk music), and three popular ones (the Tonic sol-fa or “moveable-do” system of singing, the formation of regional and local performing brass bands, and the establishment of competitive instrumental and choral festivals) that served to strengthen the

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campaign for a homegrown English Musical culture. Historian Peter Pirie, in his 1979 work also entitled *The English Musical Renaissance*, agrees with Howes’s assessment, and adds to it insightful observations regarding the role of politics (World War I, the rise of anti-German sentiment, and English isolation, among others) in shaping, or in some cases hindering, both the progress of individual composers and the free exchange of ideas and culture between England and continental Europe.

As a large-scale national sociocultural movement, it is clear that many cultural events paralleled and supported the strides made by English composers and performers in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Notably, 1871 heralded the construction of London’s Royal Albert Hall. This new concert venue helped bring classical music to the English public through the Promenade (“Proms”) concert series and fostered a sense of national artistic pride. 1879 brought about the publication of Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the first English-language work of its kind. This monumental undertaking soon became internationally renowned and the foundation of English musicological scholarship. George Grove (1820-1900) went on to become one of the leading musical figures of the era.

Many new colleges and musical academies were also founded in England during the late nineteenth century. London’s Guildhall School of Music and Drama was founded in 1880, followed by the Royal College of Music in 1883 (at the instigation of George Grove, its first director, and with financial support from the Royal Family). The latter institution came to play a central role in the larger cultural movement, particularly in contrast to the older, more conservative Royal Academy of Music, which had been established in 1822 but was plagued with financial and political difficulties, making its environment decidedly less progressive. The founding of other institutions such as the Trinity College of Music (1874), the Birmingham and
Midland Institute School of Music (1886), and the Royal Manchester College of Music (1893), strengthened the quality and importance of music in higher education. Likewise, the establishment of musical societies such as the Royal Musical Association (1874), which was dedicated to the investigation and discussion of all subjects related to music, further legitimized and solidified the role of music in society. Collectively, these events among others provided a broad framework for the rebirth and construction of English musical culture.

In this late-Victorian era England also saw a renewed emphasis on music education in primary and secondary schools, as well as community adult-education classes. Central to this teaching was the Tonic sol-fa or “moveable-do” singing method, invented by the Reverend John Curwen to facilitate teaching group singing classes in the Church. Curwen’s new method spread throughout England, adding to the growth of amateur music-making and resulting in the formation of numerous local singing societies and community bands. This contributed to the establishment of several regional choral festivals, which themselves fostered a keen competitive creative spirit and sense of national pride. In addition to the alleged moral benefits of communal music involvement, the public began to view music as a means for social betterment and a vehicle for upward class mobility.

Toward the end of the era it was clear that England had nurtured and developed a large concert industry. This was fortified by the proliferation of concert booking agencies, the formation of opera companies, the foundation of new halls, concert venues, conservatories, and even music publishing houses, effectively supporting the rise of many English composers and performers. These, in turn, solidified the notion of music and culture as a national enterprise.⁴

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⁴ London had long been a premier destination for international touring musicians, including Haydn, Beethoven, Berlioz, Wagner, and many others, but these new enterprises gave particular support to native English talent.
By the end of World War II in 1945, England had also established a state-funded Arts Council, which aimed to democratize the dissemination of specifically English culture by providing large groups of ordinary citizens, not just the upper-class elite, with a richer cultural education through community classes, BBC radio programs, and (later) television series. This effort ultimately served both to preserve the nation’s artistic and musical traditions and to encourage homegrown creativity, but may have also fostered an insularity that hindered the international recognition of England’s musical achievements. This is not to say that English composers were uninterested in success abroad, but rather, after two world wars in which continental Europe had lost some of its former luster, England’s sense of self-sufficiency and national pride had deepened.

Lastly, it is particularly important to recognize that England’s national musical culture was bolstered by the long-standing English tradition of writing about music, taking the form of criticism, journalism, history, and aesthetics. Dating back to the eighteenth century, English composer and scholar Charles Avison (1709-1770) penned his *Essay on Musical Expression* (1752), the first work of musical criticism published in English. Another early English scholar, the historian Charles Burney (1726-1814), wrote a monumental multi-volume *History of Music* (1776-1789), the first work of its kind published in the English language. A century later, the influential English-German writer Francis Hueffer (1843-1889) published many essays concerning English musical history and culture during the Victorian era. Other English writers and music critics followed Hueffer, such as John Alexander Fuller-Maitland (1856-1936), George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), and the aforementioned George Grove, publishing books and contributing to such notable newspapers and journals as the London *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Athenaeum*, and the *Musical Times* (England’s oldest continuous music periodical). In effect, these writers, along with certain composers themselves, became the
architects of the reception history of new, contemporary English music, validating composers
and their works (or not) and assessing their importance culturally, socially, and politically.

During the English Musical Renaissance the press could promote (or dismiss) English
artists and their activities with the goal of building and protecting a strong national culture.
Indeed, many members of the press, in collusion with England’s musical elite, were responsible
for much of the success of the movement as a whole, inscribing the history as it was occurring.
These same critics and journalists were also essential in constructing and promoting the new,
specifically English body of composers and repertoire. Not surprisingly, their tastes, values, and
allegiances led to the privileging of certain composers over others. The press therefore served as
the bridge between the public, sociocultural aspect of the renaissance movement, and the more
privately engineered academic and artistic facets.

From the beginning, however, not all critics were persuaded that a musical renaissance
was actually taking place in England. George Bernard Shaw was an early and vocal critic of the
idea of a true, organic renaissance, unconvinced as he was by the quality of much of the late
nineteenth-century English music he heard. Instead he viewed the prominent Parry-Stanford-
Mackenzie triumvirate as a virtual “mutual admiration society disconnected from cultural
Renaissance,” \textit{19th-Century Music}, Vol. 34, No.1 (Summer 2010), 90.} wherein each composer praised the others’ work, reinforcing to the public the validity
of their musical opinions and merits of their compositions. In a scathing review of Stanford’s
oratorio \textit{Eden} in 1891, Shaw attacked the notion of a musical renaissance, writing the following:

Who am I that I should be believed to the disparagement of eminent musicians?
If you doubt that \textit{Eden} is a masterpiece, ask Dr. Parry and Dr. Mackenzie, and
they will applaud it to the skies. Surely Dr. Mackenzie’s opinion is conclusive,
for is he not the composer of \textit{Veni Creator}, guaranteed as excellent music by
Professor Stanford and Dr. Parry? You want to know who Parry is? Why, the
composer of *Blest Pair of Sirens*, as to the merits of which you only have to consult Dr. Mackenzie and Dr. Stanford.\(^6\)

Shaw did not doubt that England could theoretically produce a “great composer” to rival those continually produced by continental Europe; he simply doubted that the self-appointed Parry, Stanford, and Mackenzie were worthy of the title.

More contemporary scholars such as Merion Hughes and Robert Stradling have also challenged the validity and the motives of the English Musical Renaissance, drawing into question its artistic achievements and many aspects of the surrounding cultural context.\(^7\) In their controversial and ground-breaking book *The English Musical Renaissance, 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* (1993), Hughes and Stradling continue where Shaw left off. They charge Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie, and a coterie led by writer and music administrator George Grove (1820-1900), with a self-perpetuating elitism, centered around activities at the Royal College of Music, which ultimately led to their unofficial positions as both the architects and arbitrators of the English musical establishment. Composer Sir John Stainer (1840-1901), who had been let go from the Royal College of Music after Parry was made its director, angrily charged that "Parry and Stanford are rapidly getting absolute control of all the music, sacred or secular, in England; and also over our provincial Festivals and Concert societies, and other performing bodies."\(^8\)

While neither side of the debate disputes the existence of an era marked by a resurgence of musical and broader cultural activity that contributed to the development of a new English


nationalistic identity and body of musical literature, the extent to which this renaissance was a genuine, organic movement, as opposed to the manufactured cultural enterprise of a few self-serving principals, is open to question. Contemporary English musicologist Colin Eatock elaborates on the problem of how to define the era in his article on canon formation during the English Musical Renaissance. He asserts:

Today it is tempting to discard the idea of an English Musical Renaissance altogether. Yet it is perhaps more constructive to call attention to the ways in which contemporary critics use the phrase. An examination of the critical literature reveals that there are two distinct phenomena that march under the banner of the English Musical Renaissance. First and foremost, the term invokes a propagandistic enterprise intended to elevate a specific group of nineteenth-century British composers to canonic stature. This project was willfully undertaken by numerous critics, scholars, and performers (not to mention the composers themselves). However, a secondary usage of the term denotes a much broader sociocultural movement for the promulgation of musical education and the dissemination of “art-music” throughout the British Isles. This movement was driven by a variety of forces, including envy of continental culture, and increased disposable income and leisure time among the middle classes.9

Eatock elucidates an important distinction between the two aspects of the English Musical Renaissance. On the one hand, there was a broad sociocultural movement to increase interest in music education in the public at large, with the goal of strengthening England’s national artistic identity and values. On the other hand, a much smaller movement existed, engineered by an elite group of academics, composers, critics, performers, and scholars in the nineteenth century, which aimed to promote from within their ranks specific English composers to serve as homegrown rivals to continental Europe’s canonized composers. The reciprocal nature of these two phenomena is clear, in that the sociocultural movement would have relied on directives from the elite to educate the public in matters of musical taste and validity, which in turn cultivated an

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educated, interested, patriotic public to serve as concert-goers and artistic patrons supporting this burgeoning English Musical Renaissance.

As with any cultural movement, there were “insiders” and “outsiders.” The insiders of the English Musical Renaissance, according to Hughes and Stradling, were "a self-appointed and self-perpetuating oligarchy" based at the Royal College of Music in London.\textsuperscript{10} This helps explain the notable absence of Edward Elgar (1857-1934) from the movement’s roster during its early, foundational years, despite the composer’s admirable international reputation, significant contributions to large-scale English repertoire, and contemporaneity with Parry, Stanford, and Grove. Ironically, Elgar was later widely perceived as England’s first major composer since Henry Purcell, based on the strengths of his symphonic and choral works, though he was an outsider to the Renaissance establishment figures. A Roman Catholic with a lower-middle-class background, Elgar was largely self-taught and as such had no early association with the establishment composers at either the Royal College or the Royal Academy. It was not until his marriage to a woman of higher social class that he began to gain acceptance in London’s musical society, which in turn facilitated success on the international scene. More importantly, Elgar did not view himself as a champion of a specific English cultural cause, and thus did not participate in or promote the English nationalistic goals that had been designed by Parry and company. Collectively, these factors support the contention of Hughes and Stradling that the English Musical Renaissance elite was single-minded to the point of ruthlessness in promoting its

conception of British music, regardless of artistic merit, and marginalizing many native composers who did not conform to its aesthetic views.\textsuperscript{11}

With the Renaissance insiders Parry and Stanford both teaching at the Royal College of Music (having been appointed by Grove), and to a much lesser extent, Mackenzie at the Royal Academy of Music, it is no surprise that most of the next generation of English composers studied with one of those three composers. Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), the first of this young generation and a student of Stanford, took the English cause to heart. In 1904, he discovered the native folk songs and carols of Great Britain and eventually became one of the leaders in the folk song preservation movement. Vaughan Williams looked to these English roots both for compositional inspiration and as a means of re-invigorating England’s new nationalistic music. Another Stanford pupil and life-long friend of Vaughan Williams was Gustav Holst (1874-1934). Though not a native Englishman, Holst shared Vaughan Williams’s interest in exploring and developing the English choral and vocal tradition that had its roots in folk song, madrigals, and church music. Though their music differed immensely, both Vaughan Williams and Holst later became emblematic of the mainstream English Musical Renaissance ideals.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the new generation of English composers that had grown up in England, and benefitted from the advances made in music education, was flourishing. In addition to Vaughan Williams and Holst, this new generation included such composers as Frank Bridge (1879-1941), John Ireland (1879-1962), Arthur Bliss (1891-1975), Herbert Howells (1892-1983), Cecil Forsyth (1870-1941), George Butterworth

(1885-1918), Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979), and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), significantly all pupils of Stanford at the Royal College of Music. Among the composers to come through the Royal Academy of Music, studying with a variety of composition and theory tutors, were Granville Bantock (1868-1946), Arnold Bax (1883-1953), Benjamin Dale (1885-1943), and his life-long friend York Bowen (1884-1961). Still other composers, such as Havergal Brian (1876-1972) and Peter Warlock, the pseudonym of Philip Heseltine (1894-1930), were affiliated with neither institution, placing them on the periphery of the Renaissance movement. Post-World War I composers such as William Walton (1902-1983) and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) were not a part of this early generation but achieved considerable fame on their own without the meddling of the English Musical Renaissance establishment.

Though their works differed greatly in terms of personal style, one element the majority of these composers seemed to share was a keen interest in and talent for writing repertoire for strings, be it solo or chamber music or works for string orchestra. Indeed, many string compositions from this period feature a lush sonic palette, inspired by the romanticization of the English pastoral landscape and influenced by the native folk music revival. The new interest in—and rediscovery of—sixteenth and seventeenth-century English musical literature, particularly the consort music forms and textures from the Tudor era, was also a great influence. String orchestral works such as Elgar’s *Serenade for Strings* and his *Introduction and Allegro* for orchestra and solo string quartet, Vaughan Williams’s *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, Holst’s *St. Paul Suite*, and Peter Warlock’s *Capriol Suite* have all become audience favorites and staples of the modern-day string repertoire; they epitomize this sweeping, English string compositional style.
Over a century later, regardless of its controversial aspects, it is not unreasonable to assert that an English Musical Renaissance did exist, both as a broad-based sociocultural movement engaged in educating the public and promoting national pride in art-music, and as a deliberately constructed enterprise that elevated and promoted specific composers and works, albeit at the expense of others. Furthermore, this does not diminish or negate the existence of the vast body of repertoire produced during this cultural reawakening, both by politically privileged composers and those outside the establishment. While certain aspects of the movement may remain somewhat unclear, any examination of the actual music from this era must surely include a discussion of political and sociocultural dimensions, English national identity, and contemporary reception.

As is typically the case when exploring an earlier musical period like the English Musical Renaissance, the exploration of non-establishment, marginal figures often proves to be of greater interest, illuminating issues omitted in the existing historical record, encouraging new discussion and debate, and shedding light on “new” repertoire or out-of-print compositions. Recent scholarship has begun to address many of these overlooked subjects, such as the role and output of women composers in the Victorian era, the existence of a widespread English chamber music culture comprised of amateur performers and, of course, the work of numerous lesser-known composers, whose contributions to English musical culture and repertoire were as significant, if not greater, than that of their well-known contemporaries. While many neglected composers deserve attention, this treatise examines the work of composer York Bowen; I concentrate on his substantial body of repertoire for the viola and the role he played in the development of English music, with the broad conception of the English Musical Renaissance in mind.
CHAPTER 2

YORK BOWEN: PERFORMER, COMPOSER, COLLABORATOR

Without direct access to archives and other primary source materials, the task of gathering biographical information about York Bowen is inherently challenging. The bulk of material, as it were, giving details of Bowen’s life, work, and personal character comes from Monica Watson’s book “York Bowen: A Centenary Tribute.” Watson’s work, published in 1984 at the urging of the Royal Academy of Music, is essentially a laudatory memoir of Bowen, her former piano teacher, and is substantiated by historical documents from the R.A.M. archives, primary sources such as Bowen’s journals, personal correspondence, and press clippings, and of course, numerous personal recollections and testimonies from Bowen’s contemporary friends and colleagues. Despite its modest size, it remains the only publication of its kind devoted entirely to the composer and has served as the most important biographical record of Bowen’s career and personal life. Watson’s book is, nevertheless, a memoir of the teacher and friend she fondly called “Uncle York,” and as such must be viewed with an awareness of authorial bias.

By comparison, other English composers contemporary with Bowen, such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, and of course Elgar, have been the subject of numerous biographies and scholarly articles and also appear regularly in the vast majority of literature and publications related to the historical era. Despite the tendency of the earlier published biographies to be more conservative records of “great men” and their works, these biographical studies contribute to our developing conception of musicians of the English Musical Renaissance by illuminating common stylistic traits, nationalistic compositional trends, and even unified aesthetic ideologies or collective compositional purpose. In the case of Bowen, a traditional

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exploration of the composer’s life and works is necessary to providing a strong historical foundation, but, as Hughes and Stradling have shown, it is perhaps the “biography” of the English Music Renaissance itself, as a constructed artistic movement, that may prove to be just as relevant, if not more so, to a contextualization of Bowen within the greater cultural milieu.

**Biography**

Edwin Yorke Bowen (1884-1961) began to distinguish himself as a gifted, multi-faceted musician almost from the outset of his training. York Bowen (as he was later known after dropping the “e” from his middle name) was born in the Crouch Hill area of London, the third son of a whiskey-distiller father and musical mother who both encouraged the talents of their young son. Bowen showed great promise as a pianist early on, and by the age of eight was already studying at the local Blackheath Conservatoire. Under the guidance of pianist Alfred Izard, he progressed rapidly and, being touted as something of a musical prodigy, was soon performing publicly. At age fourteen he was granted a prestigious Erard scholarship to London’s Royal Academy of Music, where he studied piano with Tobias Matthay and composition with Frederick Corder, graduating with a wealth of prizes and medals to his credit.

By the time of his graduation, Bowen’s piano playing had been recognized for its artistic excellence – so much so that he was nicknamed the “English Rachmaninoff” of his day. Following his London debut recital in 1904, *The Daily Telegraph* wrote:

> He phrases as only a pianist who is also an artist can, while his expression meets all requirements of varied music and nothing is befogged or degraded by affection or the merely sensational. This is high praise and we mean our words to be so understood. There are pianists of culture and there are others who are merely pianists: Mr. Bowen belongs to the first class.\(^\text{13}\)

By this time, he had also established himself as a formidable composer, frequently performing his own piano concertos as soloist. In the summer of 1905 he appeared in a London Promenade Concert, and in 1906 he appeared as the soloist in his own piano concerto at a performance sponsored by the Philharmonic Society. Although best known as a pianist and composer, Bowen was also an accomplished violist and horn player, performing in various orchestras, bands, and chamber ensembles. His versatility and first-hand knowledge of the techniques of string, wind, and brass instrumental writing made him both a celebrated, sought-after chamber music collaborator and a deft composer of repertoire for an array of instrumental combinations, from solo piano works and technical studies to chamber music to large-scale symphonic works. Bowen would continue his association with the Royal Academy of Music as a professor of piano and composition from 1909 to 1959, an impressive fifty years, during which time he remained active as a performer, teacher, and composer. Despite his documented success as a performer and vast catalogue of compositions, he is given short shrift in even the most recent edition of the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, a mere three brief paragraphs in comparison to the lengthy articles on many of his contemporaries.

Apart from his own talent as a performer, one of the most significant influences on Bowen’s compositional output was his acquaintance with the great English violist Lionel Tertis (1876-1975). Like Mozart and Brahms before him, Bowen is said to have preferred the sound of the viola to that of the violin, perhaps initially spurring his interest in composing for the instrument. However, Bowen’s early collaboration with Tertis led directly to the creation of many large-scale viola compositions dedicated to and inspired by him. Arguably one of the most

14 By the age of twenty, Bowen had already composed his first symphony, as well as a symphonic poem entitled “The Lament of Tasso,” two major piano concerti, and miscellaneous chamber music works.
famous and influential European performers of the time, Tertis was himself a champion of the viola as a worthy and viable solo instrument; it was to this aim that he used his stature as a performer to induce dozens of his contemporary English composers to write works for him which featured the viola either in a solo capacity or in a prominent role within the context of chamber music. In his autobiography, Tertis recalls first meeting Bowen in the early years when he was “a talented boy, still in knickerbockers”\(^{15}\) who was already writing large-scale orchestral compositions as a conservatory student. Eventually, Tertis and Bowen became colleagues at the Royal Academy and frequently performed together on concert stages in England and on the continent.

The decade prior to the First World War proved to be an extremely productive and formative compositional period for Bowen, particularly with regard to viola works. In April of 1905, Bowen and Tertis gave the premiere of his Sonata No.1 in C Minor for viola and piano at London’s Aeolian Hall, which was well received. This Sonata was repeated on November 18, 1907, when the duo performed in Berlin’s Mozart-Saal on their European tour. In 1908, Tertis gave the premiere of Bowen’s monumental Viola Concerto in C Minor to great critical acclaim. In reviewing both the work and the performance, conductor Landon Ronald wrote the following in London’s *Morning Post*:

He [Bowen] appears to have a predilection for the viola, having completed two sonatas for the instrument, also a duet for organ and viola and a quartet for four violas. Very modern in spirit, it is admirably scored, with effects here and there which remind one of Debussy. The solo instrument is throughout treated with great effect and thorough knowledge, and if the first movement seems a little

unduly spun out, the Andante is very expressive and the Finale very quaint and animated. The solo part was superbly played by Lionel Tertis.\textsuperscript{16}

In the coming years Tertis continued to premier and perform many more of Bowen’s viola compositions, including the aforementioned Sonata No.2 in F Major, the Fantasie for viola and organ, and the Fantasy Quartet for Four Violas, as well as the Phantasie Trio for violin, viola, and piano, the Phantasy for Viola and Piano, the Rhapsody for Viola and Piano, and a number of other shorter concert pieces.

In the years preceding the First World War, Bowen also met and married Sylvia Dalton, a classically trained singer and actress in London. Together they presented many joint recitals, performing standard repertoire and new compositions penned by Bowen for his new wife and enhancing his reputation as a versatile composer and stellar pianist. On the occasion of their last collaborative recital before the War, several critics were in attendance and wrote favorably of the performance. A reviewer in \textit{The Queen} stated:

Mr. York Bowen displayed his customary versatility in the course of the recital in which he was joined by Mrs. Sylvia York Bowen at Aeolian Hall on June 16\textsuperscript{th}, for in it he figured as a pianist, composer and accompanist…..As a composer he was represented by a group of songs still in M.S. with the exception of a graceful Lullaby. The others are a trifle wanting in spontaneity but they made pleasant hearing as sung by Mrs. Bowen, the charm and refreshment of whose style was also very favourably shown in Lieder by Brahms, Strauss, Bungurt, and Erich Wolff.\textsuperscript{17}

The arrival of war in 1914 effectively ended this early, productive period of Bowen’s career. He joined the armed services as a member of the Scots Guard and was assigned to play horn in the regimental band, which traveled to the frontlines in France. Not much is known of


\textsuperscript{17} Monica Watson, \textit{York Bowen: A Centenary Tribute} (London: Thames, 1984), 22.
his wartime experience, save that it was an unhappy time, with very little opportunity to continue
composing. While in France, he contracted pneumonia and was sent back to England to
convalesce under the care of his wife who served as an ambulance driver during the war.

Following the war’s end in late 1918, and no longer a young prodigy, Bowen returned to
the concert stage and to a life of teaching and composing at the Royal Academy. Perhaps owing
in part to the financial strain inflicted by the lean wartime years, he entered (and won) a number
of composition competitions, earning him performances of works for solo piano, piano duet, and
orchestra. 1920 brought about the premiere of his Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 33 at a
Promenade Concert, which he conducted himself, and in 1924 the premiere and publication of
his Piano Sonata in F Minor, Op. 72. Bowen was just forty years old and had a large
compositional output to his credit that included over one hundred and fifty works for piano
alone, in addition to two symphonies, three piano concertos, both a violin and viola concerto, and
dozens of smaller chamber works and songs.

During the next few decades, Bowen remained active as a performer and composer and
also was invited to record a number of his works for the Vocalion Company. Notable were
performances of his Rhapsody Trio, Op. 80 for violin, cello and piano with William Primrose (on
violin) and cellist Cedric Sharpe on one occasion (broadcast live on the radio in 1926), and with
May and Beatrice Harrison (violin and cello) on a later date. In 1930, Bowen’s Oboe Sonata was
given the premiere by the famous oboist Leon Goossens and pianist Kathleen Markwell, a rarely
performed work which has nevertheless remained in print. Bowen became increasingly involved
with his teaching at the Royal Academy, taking over some conducting duties and leadership of
the chamber music department at various times. In 1937, Bowen formed a successful two-piano
duo with fellow Royal Academy colleague Harry Isaacs; they concertized and premiered many
of Bowen’s new compositions for two pianos over the following years. In 1947, he composed and premiered a Sonata for Recorder, Op. 121, which he performed with the eminent early music specialist Carl Dolmetsch at London’s Wigmore Hall. Finally, in 1950, Bowen’s comprehensive Twenty-four Preludes in All Major and Minor Keys, Op. 102 for piano was published, a collection of pieces that is today perhaps the best known of all his works.

Bowen continued to teach at the Royal Academy until well past the age of sixty-five, and on March 16th, 1954, a gala concert was arranged at the Academy in honor of his seventieth birthday and lengthy career. Despite his age, Bowen performed many of his own solo piano pieces and was also joined by the violist Winifred Copperwheat, one of Tertis’ most highly esteemed pupils, for his Phantasy for viola and piano, Op. 54. In a review of the concert, music journalist Clinton Gray-Fisk lauded Bowen:

At the end of the evening no doubt could have existed in any reasonably unbiased mind that in the realm of piano music York Bowen’s achievement is unequalled by any British composer: himself a pianist of the first order, he writes for the piano with consummate knowledge and mastery of its possibilities and limitations.

York Bowen’s music is both unashamedly romantic and unambiguously tonal, but in common with composers such as Bax and Ireland, his extensions of diatonic-chromatic harmony are highly personal and seemingly inexhaustible in fertility and resource.

One-composer programmes are notoriously hazardous from the listener’s standpoint, but in this instance, by reason of the wide emotional range, skillfully varied texture and infinite harmonic subtlety, interest was constantly maintained… As for Mr. Bowen’s piano playing, it combines scintillating virtuosity with the most sensitive artistry; such a combination is in any case rare, but coming from a man who recently attained his seventieth birthday it is unique, so far as England is concerned.18

Bowen finally retired from the Royal Academy in 1959, after fifty distinguished years of

teaching. He remained musically active, composing performing, and even recording, until his death in 1961 in London, where his London Times obituary bore the heading “Mr. York Bowen, Composer of Romantic Lyricism.”
CHAPTER 3

YORK BOWEN AND LIONEL TERTIS: HISTORY AND EXPLORATION OF A FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIP

It is only natural that certain composers and performers enjoy a symbiotic relationship. Composers rely upon performers to premier and help promote their compositions, often providing valuable artistic suggestions related to technical issues. Similarly, performers often use their relationships with composers and their works to highlight their versatility in interpreting a broad spectrum of styles, to showcase their own unique strengths as players, or to expand the existing repertoire of a particularly neglected instrument or chamber ensemble configuration. As alluded to in the previous chapter, the great violist Lionel Tertis was a prime example of one such performer who collaborated with numerous composers in an attempt both to expand the existing literature for the viola and to promote his own objective as a soloist on an instrument that had yet to be fully accepted as a mainstream alternative to the violin. In 1901, Tertis was appointed the very first Professor of Viola at the Royal Academy of Music. While there, he came into contact with many English composers, many while they were still students at the R.A.M. At Tertis’ encouragement, composers including Benjamin Dale, Arnold Bax, Arthur Bliss, and Frank Bridge wrote original works for the viola repertoire. However, it was Tertis’ unique collaboration with the young York Bowen, in the role of both performer (pianist) and composer, which resulted in arguably the most substantial contribution to late-Romantic English viola literature by any composer overall.

When viewed in their totality, York Bowen’s compositions for the viola are an impressive corpus of works that provide a crucial addition to the continually expanding catalog of English viola repertoire from the early twentieth century. Bowen’s most significant viola compositions
are the Sonata No.1 in C Minor for viola and piano (1905), the Sonata No.2 in F Major for viola and piano (1906), the Viola Concerto in C Minor (1907), and the Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas (1907); they showcase his versatility in a variety of compositional forms and genres, from collaborative sonata writing to virtuosic solo and orchestral compositions to unique chamber ensemble works. Though his catalog of viola music includes over a dozen other shorter concert pieces for viola with piano or organ and larger chamber ensemble works which feature substantial viola parts, these four major works, all from the densely fruitful period of 1905-1907, form the foundation upon which to reevaluate Bowen’s role in the development of English music for the viola as well as the canon of viola literature as a whole.

It is worth noting that while Tertis sought both to elevate the stature of the viola in classical music and to expand its existing literature, he also aimed to revolutionize the level and quality of sound of viola-playing in England during this time, through the use of larger sizes of violas and virtuosic technique. For decades, the fashion had been to accept the subdued, unattractive sounds of small violas, instruments that had perhaps been cut down from a larger model to achieve better comfort and play-ability. Tertis would go on to help design the Tertis Model Viola with English luthier Arthur Richardson, with the aim of maximizing the viola’s natural dark sonority and resonance while offering superior ease of playing. The new works that Tertis commissioned, with their prominent viola roles, augmented the limited repertoire in existence for that instrument and forever linked the viola both with Tertis’ technical skill and his dark, rich tone; this would become a sort of hallmark of the English string sound. The strength, beauty, and overall quality of Bowen’s numerous viola works is due in no small part to the mutually beneficial partnership between the composer and his esteemed violist colleague. Bowen and Tertis served effectively as cultural ambassadors of the era by performing together many of
Bowen’s own compositions as well as the works of other English Musical Renaissance composers, helping to solidify the English viola repertoire and sound.

The Sonatas for Viola and Piano

Bowen’s two sonatas for viola and piano, the Sonata No. 1 in C Minor (1905) and the Sonata No. 2 in F Major (1906), are the earliest works he composed for his duo partner Lionel Tertis. Both works are emblematic of the late-romantic, lyrical style in which Bowen was so compositionally fluent; each also contains elements of the tonal colors of French impressionism and the chromaticism of German progressivism that had so deeply influenced his training. With Bowen’s characteristically idiomatic writing for both the viola and piano, the sonatas are well-balanced both texturally and in their levels of virtuosity, making them an excellent vehicle to showcase the soloistic and collaborative strengths of Bowen and Tertis as performers. Structurally (or organizationally), both works contain three movements and adhere to the traditional sonata allegro form, making them easily accessible to contemporary audiences hearing them for the first time. Likewise, Bowen’s presentation of thematic material is clear and predominantly diatonic, while making use of chromaticism for color. In general, the sonatas as more traditionalist in nature than perhaps other “new music” of the early twentieth century.

Both the Sonata No. 1 in C Minor and the Sonata No. 2 in F Major display many of the stylistic and structural elements characteristic of Bowen’s compositions as a whole. Overall, the writing is highly chromatic, particularly in transitional sections of the accompaniment, where keys and tonalities shift frequently. Bowen’s challenging yet ergonomic writing for both viola and piano makes ample use of all registers of the instruments, constantly alternating between low and high passages. The viola line is frequently embellished with octaves, double-stops, and three
or four note chords, as well as indications for *pizzicato* and *glissando*. Other components, such as the use of large leaps or shifts in register (often on a single string) and rapidly ascending scalar or arpeggio passages, are likewise hallmarks of Bowen’s compositional style. The piano parts are invariably complex and densely textured, yet never overwhelming in terms of balance. With their similarly virtuosic technique and powerful musical presences, Tertis and Bowen would have been equally matched as they performed these works together.

Despite their relatively conservative style, Bowen’s sonatas are important contributions to the body of English viola repertoire, particularly in regard to recital programming. Similar to the two Brahms Sonatas for viola (or clarinet) and piano in the keys of F minor and E-flat major, Bowen’s sonatas are sophisticated, multi-movement works that explore both major and minor tonalities. Unlike many of the shorter, single movement English compositions written for viola and piano, Bowen’s works are substantial enough to anchor one half of a recital program and musically interesting enough to make them a compelling choice. For a modern day violist looking to include an English piece on a recital program, the Bowen sonatas provide comparable alternatives to a work like Rebecca Clarke’s tempestuous Sonata for Viola and Piano (1919) and also may appeal to those looking to avoid an English work of the pastoral or folksong nature, such as the Vaughan Williams Suite for Viola and Orchestra (1933). After hearing many collaborative performances of these works featuring Bowen and Tertis, T.F. Dunhill, an editor of *Cobbett’s Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* (1929), proclaimed Bowen’s sonatas “amongst the most striking works ever composed for the instrument,” –high but deserved praise.19

Sonata No. 1 in C Minor

Movement 1:

The first movement is constructed within a basic sonata allegro framework. The opening section, marked *Allegro moderato*, begins with repeated, swelling chords in the lower register of the piano. Firmly anchored in the key of C minor, the viola entrance in meas. 3 complements the piano’s dark, brooding tonality and makes use of the natural sympathetic resonance of the viola’s C string. Much like the openings of Brahms’ late-Romantic sonatas for viola, there is no lengthy introductory section, but rather, Bowen delves immediately into his melodic material. The exposition contains expected contrasting thematic material, the first idea a turbulent, wide-ranging melody consisting of frequent dotted rhythms in the viola with a strong rhythmic foundation in the piano.

Example 3.1 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 1, mm. 1-10

The second musical idea is a broad, sustained melody in the viola marked *molto espressivo* that is accompanied by simple block chords in the piano.
Example 3.2 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 1, mm. 33-40

The following passage, in E-flat major and marked leggiero in the viola, is lighter and more playful and transitions gracefully to the development. The development employs many of the stylistic and motivic devices of the exposition, again alternating between rapidly ascending and descending dotted rhythms and a more cantabile, melodic lyricism. The music intensifies, increasing dynamically and in technical difficulty. Bowen writes briefly for the viola in fortissimo octaves before contrasting dramatically with a piano dolce passage. Gradually, the viola climbs in register to a characteristically virtuosic passage with a high D marked furioso, followed by full four-note chords, all in triple forte. The final transition to the recapitulation includes a descent spanning three octaves, in typical Bowen fashion.

Example 3.3 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 1, mm. 126-149

In typical sonata form, the recapitulation begins with the primary thematic material in the original key of C minor, almost verbatim. Bowen’s use of chromaticism and diminished harmonies smoothly transitions to the secondary thematic material, this time in E major. The movement concludes much the same way that it began; the original theme in C minor retreats
into the dark tonality and depths of the lower registers in both the viola and piano parts, in keeping with the brooding, passionate character of the movement overall.

**Movement 2:**

The second movement, marked *Poco lento e cantabile*, illustrates Bowen’s talent for crafting a rhythmically simple, sustained lyrical melody. In presenting the theme in the key of A major, the viola line hovers within the middle register of the instrument, calling for a rich, sonorous tone and a generous vibrato to help connect each note to the next and create long *sostenuto* phrases.

![Example 3.4 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 2, mm. 1-10](image)

**Example 3.4 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 2, mm. 1-10**

The middle development section, nominally in the key of A minor, shifts the established duple meter into a lilting 6/8 meter. Here Bowen employs numerous wide, descending intervals slurred together, like a breathless yet graceful sigh, which function as a unifying melodic device throughout this section.

![Example 3.5 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 2, mm. 61-63](image)

**Example 3.5 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 2, mm. 61-63**

The long transitional section before the recapitulation rehearses numerous idiomatic compositional elements in the viola: double-stops, wildly contrasting dynamics, frequent tempo fluctuations (*allargando, accelerando, rubato*), and stylistic markings such as *appassionato, con fuoco* and vibrato molto.
Unsurprisingly, the recapitulation begins with the primary thematic material in the tonic key of A major. In the third phrase, Bowen alters the melodic material, allowing the viola line to ascend dramatically, finally reaching the apex on a high D-sharp. We hear the melodic “sigh” motif, descending in rapid succession, but transformed from earlier iterations by the composer’s markings of *accelerando*, *fff*, and *con fuoco*.

![Example 3.6 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 2, mm. 149-163](image)

A lengthy coda section gradually releases the dramatic tension, while still making use of sharp dynamic contrasts, until the ending *Lento* (marked *dolcissimo*) allows for a relaxation into a satisfying cadence in the tonic.

**Movement 3:**

With its turbulent introductory section, marked by tremolo in the piano and an abundance of contrasting thematic material, the third movement *Finale* of this sonata evokes a pre-Romantic era *Sturm und Drang*. The opening theme in the key of C minor, marked *meno presto*, is rhythmically aggressive and theatrical in nature.

![Example 3.7 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 3, mm. 13-23](image)
Again, Bowen incorporates characteristic techniques such as four-note broken chords played both *arco* and *pizzicato* and rapidly ascending and descending scalar passages, adding drama and variety to the overall texture. Similar to the previous movements, the developmental material, marked a slightly slower *allegro molto*, is lighter and more playful in character, containing accented rhythms in both a straightforward and syncopated manner. The animato section preceding the recapitulation urges the tempo forward, transforming the duple rhythms into faster triplet ones.

Having once again achieved the original *presto a tempo*, the recapitulation presents the primary thematic material from the exposition. This is followed by another transitional section which builds to a virtuosic climax in the highest register of the viola (high F-natural), heraldic double-stops, and a brief *quasi Recit* section marked *ad libitum*.

Example 3.8 Sonata No. 1, mvt. 3, mm. 298-306

The work concludes with a lengthy *presto* coda section with an implied *accelerando*, culminating in one final ascending scale spanning three octaves in the viola and two decisive final chords. With its tumultuous tempos and difficult passagework, this movement, above all others, is the virtuosic “showpiece” of the sonata, designed to illuminate the brilliant technique and showmanship of Tertis and Bowen.

**Sonata No. 2 in F Major**

Despite the rich tonality and gravitas of the C minor sonata, Bowen’s Sonata No.2 in F Major is arguably the stronger work of the two, due in part to the latter’s more substantial second
movement. Generally speaking, the outer movements of the F major sonata are light, almost frolicsome in character, contrasting with the dark seriousness of the earlier C minor sonata. This second sonata is also less chromatic and more traditionally Germanic, perhaps owing to the influence in London music circles of the great Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907). Joachim was himself a fierce supporter of the music of Brahms and Schumann, as opposed to that of Liszt, Wagner, and the rest of the “New German School” of composers. At the same time, one also detects the influence of the Viennese violinist and composer Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), who was making a name for himself in London and on the continent at the beginning of the twentieth century. Bowen’s second viola sonata, with its simple, straightforward melodic material in major keys, evokes some of the grace and whimsy present in many of Kreisler’s own shorter violin compositions. Furthermore, having already toured and performed with Tertis for some time, Bowen would have grown more accustomed to the violinist’s technical command and personal style, allowing him to compose works that showcased his duo partner to the fullest extent.

Movement 1:

Similar to the opening of the Sonata in C Minor, Bowen’s Sonata in F Major loosely adheres to a basic sonata allegro form and begins with a brief two measures of gentle, rippling chords in the piano in ¾ meter. Bowen then introduces the primary thematic material in the viola in the third measure, marked dolce e espressivo. This graceful, sweeping melody meanders amiably up and down the A and D strings of the viola.

Kreisler gave the premiere of Bowen’s violin Suite in D Minor, as well as Elgar’s Violin Concerto in 1910.
Example 3.9 Sonata No. 2, mvt. 1, mm. 1-19

In the second appearance of the main theme, Bowen expertly alters just one pitch (D-natural becomes D-flat), sending a brief shadow over the otherwise sunny character that has been established. In fact throughout the movement, the character seems to vacillate between light-hearted innocence and pensiveness. Bowen then introduces a second theme, narrower in register, and more rhythmic than melodic. In the material leading to the development section, Bowen once again employs technical elements well-suited to Tertis’ skills: large shifts into upper positions on a single string, virtuosic, rapidly ascending arpeggios, an embellished arpeggio passage that reaches a high A (two octaves above the open A string), brilliantly contrasting dynamics, and melodic material that alternates between fleet and showy, and slow and sonorous.

Example 3.10 Sonata No. 2, mvt. 1, mm. 113-136
The lengthy development section continues in the mercurial vein of the exposition. Bowen uses this section to embellish and expand upon both primary and secondary thematic material, interspersing *pizzicato*, double-stops and slurred *tremolando* with the simpler melodic constructions.

Example 3.11 Sonata No. 2, mvt. 1, mm. 197-209

When it finally arrives, the recapitulation is a welcome relief from the breathlessness of the development and its constantly changing dynamics, tempi, and themes. Bowen employs another effective transitional section, an *agitato* in F minor that eventually subsides enough to calmly lead to a final iteration of the theme in the original F major key. The alternating use of D-natural to D-flat (shifting briefly between major and minor tonalities) emphasizes the inconstant, whimsical character of the movement as a whole, before the final cadence in F major.

Movement 2:

The second movement, marked *Grave* and in the key of C-sharp minor, functions as the anchor of this sonata, grounding the work with its weight and depth as it is flanked by the two lighter outer movements. Structurally, the movement can be divided into three large sections, like the sonata allegro form, but with more numerous key changes and a developmental section that introduces more new material than is typical with the traditional form. The movement opens without introduction, the viola presenting the slow and ponderous primary theme. Characteristic of Bowen, this slow-movement theme is a wistful, yearning melody, calling for a generous vibrato, sensuous tone, and long, sustained phrasing.
Example 3.12 Sonata No. 2, mvt. 2, mm. 1-11

Throughout this thematic material, there is a lengthy arch in register, beginning on the lowest notes on the viola, ascending to a high C-sharp on the A string, and returning again to the depths of the register. The second iteration of the theme occurs an octave higher than the original but makes use of the same arch structure, creating a tension and subsequent release.

The middle section is characterized by an extended animato (poco animato to piu mosso e agitato to a true allegro). Here, tension is created through the use of increasing tempos, as opposed to register. Bowen creates opportunities for subtle shifts in color by dictating that the viola be muted throughout a phrase that stays on the A string, necessitating a narrower, more shimmering vibrato. The transitional section following the Allegro, marked piu tranquillo, makes use of motivic material from the exposition and calmly leads out of an agitato and into the a tempo of the recapitulation. This final section is an exact restatement of the primary theme, in the original key of C-sharp minor, before a chromatic transition leading to the ending tranquillo. Bowen finishes the movement with a slowly ascending C-sharp minor scale in the viola (staying sul G string), ponderously articulated, which is finally resolved to a low C-sharp, pulling the music back down to solid ground.

Movement 3:

The third movement Finale of this sonata, marked Allegro giocoso, is brimming with buoyancy and mirth. In both the primary and secondary thematic material, Bowen’s melodic and
rhythmic motives seem to skip and scamper across the page, alternating back and forth between viola and piano and playfully evoking a child’s game of ‘tag.’

Example 3.13 Sonata No. 2, mvt. 3, mm. 1-10

Imitation is used frequently, with one voice answering the other at two-measure intervals, and the tempo is spritely, but with plenty of rubato tugging it to and fro. This jocularity is contrasted by the introduction of a new legato theme in the key of D major, followed by an extended passage of familiar thematic material, now in the key of C major. After these modulations and other numerous shifting tonal centers, Bowen brings the primary theme back in F major, again embellishing the thematic material with harmonics and four-note pizzicati in the viola. This is followed by a passage in which the viola and piano parts seem to be reversed, with the viola playing short, syncopated broken chords, like a typical piano accompaniment, while the piano reiterates the theme. In the Maestoso section, the tempo begins to fluctuate dramatically, moving through a ritard, an accelerando, a Piu allargando, a Large, and a Piu mosso before arriving at the final Animato, all in the space of eighteen short measures, before reaching a triumphant conclusion at the movement’s end. One can easily imagine Bowen and Tertis breathlessly reaching the end of a climactic performance of this work and bowing to thunderous applause.

Viola Concerto in C Minor

One of the highest compliments that a virtuoso solo performer can pay a composer is to request the commission of a new concerto. Following the success of their chamber music collaborations and recital tours in London and continental Europe, the fruitful partnership between Lionel Tertis and York Bowen reached an apex in 1907; it was marked by the creation
and subsequent performance of Bowen’s impressive Viola Concerto in C Minor. Tertis gave the
premiere of the concerto on March 26, 1908, under the baton of Landon Ronald, and gave other
performances of it during his career in London and later in Chicago. A complimentary review of
the London debut performance in *The Times* noted the following:

> Unlike some modern composers Mr. Bowen has not aimed merely at orchestral
colouring, but has packed all his movements with melodies, the second subject of
the first movement and the theme of the Andante being very attractive and also
lending themselves easily to development. In these development sections Mr.
Bowen has written with a great deal of fluency and the writing, as might have been
expected from his previous works, has a decided character of its own. The
orchestral colouring and the harmonic progressions are often reminiscent of
Debussy, but it is a case of influence rather than imitation… Mr. Lionel Tertis
played the concerto with remarkable vigour and fine tone, and both he and the
composer were several times recalled.\(^1\)

A massive work remarked upon for its length\(^2\), Bowen’s viola concerto served as an excellent
vehicle with which to showcase Tertis’ technical mastery of the instrument and virtuosity as a
performer, as well as the composer’s colorful orchestration and skillful, idiomatic writing for
individual orchestral instruments.

As mentioned previously, Tertis was a passionate champion of the viola as a viable solo
instrument, a role that the violin and even the cello had long enjoyed. Curiously, while many
Romantic era composers wrote concerti for the violin (Brahms, Mendelssohn, Bruch, Sibelius,
Tchaikovsky, to name a few), the viola literature of that period contains very few comparable
solo works. In fact, the most recognizable Romantic-era “concerto” featuring the viola, Hector
Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy*, is not technically a concerto at all, but rather a “Symphony in four parts

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\(^1\) John White, *Lionel Tertis: The First Great Virtuoso of the Viola* (Woodbridge,
\(^2\) The young English conductor Adrian Boult, present in the audience at the premier, commented
in a journal entry that he had heard “an interesting but long viola concerto well played by Lionel
Tertis.”
with viola obligato.” While significant works for solo viola and orchestra were to follow, such as those of Walton, Hindemith, Bloch, and Vaughan Williams, they exemplify more modernist and nationalist compositional styles, or in the case of Vaughan William’s Suite for Viola, make extensive use of English folk music and forms. Bowen’s viola concerto, by contrast, is a substantial work, firmly rooted in the late romantic style, and as such can stand beside even the great violin concerti of the era. More significantly, for both performers and students of the viola, the Bowen viola concerto can be understood as filling an apparent gap in the viola literature, functioning as a valuable stylistic bridge between the existing romantic and modernist compositions that form the core of viola literature.

Though naturally much larger in scale than his viola sonatas, Bowen’s viola concerto can also be analyzed within the parameters of the basic sonata allegro form. Due in part to the concerto’s length\(^2\) and Bowen’s habit of extending thematic material, it is often difficult to precisely delineate the boundaries between the exposition, development and recapitulation. Further complicating the issue is Bowen’s tendency to use frequently shifting key areas or tonal centers, as opposed to longer, more established segments of thematic material in a single key (a compositional trait also present in his sonata writing). That said, the initial presentation of thematic material remains clear and pronounced, with primary and secondary material contrasting with each other.

Given that Bowen’s writing generally adheres to the expected conventions of Romantic era genre and structure, a strict formal description or analysis of the Viola Concerto would seem

\(^2\) Recent recordings of Bowen’s Viola Concerto by violists Lawrence Power and Helen Callus mark the timing between 33 and 36 minutes, compared to the relatively shorter Walton and Bartok viola concerti, from 21 to 25 minutes in length. Though not outrageously long, Bowen’s work is as dense and technically challenging as those more popular viola concerti, making it more difficult to program.
to be somewhat redundant. The concerto’s overwhelming virtuosity is perhaps its most salient achievement, especially from a performer’s perspective. The following discussion illuminates various virtuosic elements that help distinguish Bowen’s Viola Concerto, particularly in the composed cadenza, while using the romantic treatment of sonata form as a foundation, when appropriate.

**Movement 1:**

The first movement, marked *Allegro assai*, firmly establishes the key of C minor. Structurally, the exposition can be viewed as having two main thematic sections, each containing subsidiary themes. Bowen presents the opening, primary theme of the exposition in characteristic fashion; the viola enters immediately, after a one measure orchestral introduction. This bold, triumphant melody, with its dotted rhythms and frequent intervallic leaps, establishes the main character of the movement, with the soloist in the role of heroic conqueror.

![Example 3.14 Viola Concerto, mvt.1, mm. 2-16](image)

This statement is followed by supporting thematic material that is smoother and more lyrical in nature. Bowen then begins a lengthy, virtuosic section for the viola, employing fragments of thematic material and shifting tonal centers. This virtuosic writing displays a number of elements characteristic of Bowen –rapidly ascending and descending arpeggios, brilliance in the upper registers, and double-stop embellishments- which all build to a *furioso* character and emphatic climax.
As expected, the lengthy developmental section uses much fragmented material from the primary theme, supplemented with new ideas. After a charming grazioso section, during which the viola stays mainly in the upper register, the viola plays an extended passage of sustained, lyrical double-stops, primarily in intervals of sixths and thirds. The music gains momentum again, concluding with a flamboyant trill on a high B-flat resolving to a D-natural before a brief accompanimental interlude.

Example 3.15 Viola Concerto, mvt. 1, mm. 161-176

Contemporary violists may notice here a certain similarity with the Walton Viola Concerto, wherein the viola is given an extended passage of slurred double-stops. Bowen’s Viola Concerto, which pre-dates Walton’s, called for a level of technical superiority rarely found in viola playing or writing up to that point. Tertis was supremely comfortable with the demands of this work, and there is no evidence that he asked the composer to alter any particularly challenging passages, as was customary of many soloists premiering commissioned works.

Bowen then develops the secondary thematic material, having the viola gradually take over the role of the accompaniment, gently winding through scalar and arpeggio passages before reaching a new animato section. Here, the character changes dramatically as the viola once again usurps the role of heroic soloist, with bravura passage work. Bowen’s writing for the viola here is, again, highly demanding and unusual for the instrument. It incorporates rapidly
ascending sixteenth notes, fast broken chords, and a difficult segment of sustained, slurred octaves in the upper register.

Example 3.16 Viola Concerto, mvt. 1, mm. 219-238

The following poco allargando section employs fragmented thematic material, developed and embellished, and functions as an effective transition to the recapitulation. There is little time for the soloist to recover before Bowen delves into this section. After the typical repeated material (briefly augmented by octaves in the viola line), Bowen finally begins a final transition to the coda. An agitato passage leading to an accelerando brings us to the final explosive, section, replete with difficult passage work for the viola. It is a race to the finish line, as Bowen’s writing showcases the viola’s soloistic capabilities in the high register and through the use of flashy broken chords ascending rapidly until the decisive four-note chords of the conclusion.

Movement 2:

In contrast to all of Bowen’s viola compositions and movements prior to this, the concerto’s second movement Andante cantabile does not strictly adhere to a traditional sonata allegro form. Instead, the movement is constructed in sections which explore and develop thematic material and motives, linked together by transitional material. The dark, somber lyricism of this middle movement also contrasts sharply with the triumphant nature of the first
movement and the jocularity of the third movement, allowing both the soloist and audience time to reflect and catch their breath. The movement begins with an orchestral introduction, including a mournful horn solo (an instrument on which Bowen was also highly proficient) which sets the tone of what follows. It uses motivic material that can be heard numerous times within the introduction.

Example 3.17 Viola Concerto, mvt. 2, mm. 1-4

The first section begins in D-flat major with the viola presenting the primary theme in the lowest register of the instrument.

Example 3.18 Viola Concerto, mvt. 2, mm. 16-30

Motivic material is then passed back and forth between the solo and accompaniment, like a plaintive, weary cry.

Unlike the outer movements, the virtuosic elements of this slow movement are less overt. Bowen’s heavy use of chromaticism and colorful tonal palette make secure intonation challenging for the violist. In the current critical edition of this piece, Tertis’ non-traditional fingering suggestions are provided for study. His creative indications for numerous sul G and C string passages and large shifts certainly add color to each phrase, yet make it more difficult for the soloist to feel grounded in any one position (or key). Bowen continues to craft long, passionate melodies in all registers of pitch on the viola; this demands considerable stamina from
the soloist both in terms of phrasing and tone. In addition to his use of chromaticism and register, Bowen creates further dramatic tension through numerous tempo fluctuations and wildly contrasting dynamics, from *tranquillo piano espressivo* passages to *agitato* sections with an *accelerando*, climaxing in *fff*. Clearly written to showcase Tertis’ considerable strengths, this movement calls for a soloist with mature artistry as well as a technical command of the instrument.

**Movement 3:**

The third movement, marked *Allegro scherzando*, is a fitting bookend to Bowen’s Viola Concerto, and arguably the most technically challenging movement for the soloist. Structurally, the movement is best described as a basic sonata allegro form, though a case could be made for a modified rondo, due to the multiple repetitions of thematic material; it also contains a substantial, highly virtuosic cadenza before the final coda. Following the practice of Bowen’s earlier viola sonatas, the character of this movement is decidedly more light-hearted than the preceding movements, though there is an element of instability and apprehension.

Bowen uses five distinguishable themes in the construction of this movement. Beginning firmly in the key of C minor, the opening theme in the viola, with its pointedly articulated dotted rhythms and running sixteenth notes, constantly pushes forward, so that neither soloist nor audience can ever relax for long.

![Example 3.19 Viola Concerto, mvt. 3, mm. 3-21](image-url)
The secondary theme is then presented, employing many of the same rhythmic groupings and scalar patterns previously established as well as introducing new, more light-hearted material. A tertiary theme can also be identified; it involves rapidly ascending glissandi that culminate in a harmonic, thus creating a dramatic effect. A fourth theme appears which contains more lyrical music juxtaposed with the constantly running sixteenth notes of the exposition. Finally, there is an identifiable fifth theme, characterized by large slurred, ascending and descending intervalic leaps. Tonally, Bowen cycles through even more tonal centers than themes, which makes it difficult to feel grounded in any one area.

Bowen continues to push the limits of virtuosic viola technique with two passages of fast consecutive octaves, before the development comes to a thrilling climax.

Example 3.20 Viola Concerto, mvt. 3, mm. 101-105

A transitional section leads to the development, an amalgamation of restated thematic fragments and motives interspersed with new material. The recapitulation begins with a reiteration of the first theme from the exposition, in the original register and key of C minor, as well as the second and third themes. The approach to the final cadenza is marked by a particularly difficult and sustained high register passage in octaves for the viola.

Bowen’s traditional cadenza is one of the most virtuosic ever composed for the viola and possibly the most complex and technically challenging in the viola repertoire up until that date. Written out in its entirety and covering the primary themes of each of the three movements, it still leaves plenty of opportunities for the soloist to personalize it through the numerous rubato and ad libitum markings. Characteristically, Bowen writes a passage of continuous, slurred
double-stops mainly in thirds and sixths, similar to the first movement. The cadenza is rhapsodic and theatrical, with long accelerating scalar or arpeggio passages culminating in rolled pizzicato chords and high harmonics, short phrases with bowed chords and harmonics that seem to interrupt each other, and an extended passage of bariolage. The coda involves brilliant, creative pyrotechnics until the movement’s fiery conclusion is reached.

Example 3.21 Viola Concerto, mvt. 3, mm. 580-599

This movement, of all of Bowen’s virtuosic writing for the viola, would have showcased Tertis’ mastery of the instrument to the fullest, leaving no doubt in the minds of listeners that the viola was indeed a worthy and desirable solo instrument.

**Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas**

One has only to scan a list of Bowen’s viola compositions, and indeed, those of other English composers of the time, to notice the striking number of works bearing the title of “phantasy,” “fantasy,” or “fantasie.” This is no mere coincidence, owing to the unusually strong influence of a philanthropist named Walter Wilson Cobbett (1847-1937) on the creation of English chamber music during the early decades of the twentieth century. Cobbett was a businessman by trade, but his true passion was chamber music. An amateur violinist himself, he
had been inspired by the great violinist Joseph Joachim, and in particular, Joachim’s performance of a Beethoven string quartet in London’s St. James Hall. Due to his considerable financial success, Cobbett was able to retire early from business, at the age of sixty, and completely devote himself to the promotion of English chamber music.

Yet Cobbett was more than just a philanthropist. He was instrumental in developing musical competitions, in commissioning new works, and in writing for music journals and editing the monumental *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* (1929). He also established a free lending-library of chamber music composed of editions that he had helped bring to publication. In 1905, Cobbett was elected to a music society called “The Worshipful Company of Musicians.” This society encouraged him “to do something for music” on behalf of the guild. He proposed a competition for chamber music compositions, specifically, shorter works, which would help to supplement the existing chamber repertoire, which mainly consisted of lengthy, multi-movement works.

An advertisement requesting submissions, from British subjects only, appeared in *The Musical Times* in 1905, which called for the following:

The composition of a short ‘Phantasy’ in the form of a String Quartet for two violins, viola and violoncello. The parts must be of equal importance, and the duration of the piece should not exceed twelve minutes. Though the Phantasy is to be performed without a break, it may consist of different sections varying in tempi and rhythms. Mr. Sternberg’s special prize (£10) will be given “to the competitor whose work offers in the opinion of the judges the best example of an art-form suited for a short piece of chamber music for strings.”

This first Cobbett Competition for a “Phantasy” string quartet received sixty-seven submissions and was adjudicated the following year. Six prizes were awarded, with the first prize going to William Hurlstone (1876-1906) and the second prize awarded to Frank Bridge (1879-1941). The

second Cobbett Competition, for a Phantasie for violin, cello, and piano, held in 1908, also received 67 submissions. This time, Bridge won the top prize, with James Friskin (1886-1967) and John Ireland (1879-1962) taking second and third, respectively. All in all, the competition was held seven times between 1905 and 1920, not including a hiatus from 1910-1911. During the interim, Cobbett commissioned twelve new phantasies for every combination of instruments found in the typical chamber music program. The competitions generated hundreds of new phantasies and were deemed a resounding success in the promotion of homegrown English chamber music. Writing later in *The Oxford History of English Music*, musicologist John Caldwell referred to this sweeping interest in composition as a “phantasy mania.”

There is some debate over the significance of the various spellings of the word “phantasy” (or “fantasy”/”fantasie”). According to Grove’s *Dictionary of Music*, Cobbett preferred the “ph”-spelling and conceived of this new “phantasy” genre as a sort of ‘modern analogue’ to the viol and viola da gamba fantasias of the Tudor era and other fantasias or “fancies” that had been popular in England and the rest of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While a lengthy, etymological discussion of the origins and spelling of the word is not appropriate here, suffice it to say that Cobbett’s conception of his new “phantasy” genre implied the sentiment of “freedom,” both of convention and form, to which all earlier definitions of the term allude.

Though somewhat vague in the beginning, over time Cobbett attempted to clarify his vision for the phantasy compositions that he hoped the competition would produce. In 1911, Cobbett was quoted in *The Musical Times* offering some observations and conclusions regarding

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the new Phantasy genre. He remarked:

The major number of the Phantasies so far composed have consisted of a sort of condensation of the scope of four movements, treated not less organically than in sonata form. In place of the development section, a movement of slower tempo is sometimes introduced, and this again may embody a movement of a Scherzando type. In any case the music is continuous, and logical connection is maintained. A return to the characteristics of the first part of the movement is made, but not necessarily a definite repetition, and a developed Coda is added, which as regards style and tempo, might suggest the usual Finale of a four-movement work. Thus the essential characteristics of an ordinary chamber work may be embodied in one movement of moderate length.

In 1915, in a published account of a speech he gave at a dinner where some of the winning competition works were performed, Cobbett remarked that “In the earlier days…there were so-called ‘Fancies’ written by English composers for the viols. These phantasies are an evolution from them....” By 1918 (thirteen years after the first competition), he had published an article in The Musical Times that aimed to give a more detailed description of his intentions regarding the phantasy. In it, he states the following three goals:

My object was (1.) To call the attention of native composers to the trend of the British mind towards emotional reticence, and to the value of such a mentality in the composition of chamber music, in which the absence of exaggeration is counted a great merit. Also, to give them, as Dr. Ernest Walker puts it, “an outlet to activities hitherto mainly exercised in orchestral channels.” (2.) To introduce a short form into the chamber music repertoire. (3.) To institute a renaissance of the Fancies of the 17th century, the counterparts of the chamber Quartet and Trio of the present day, free in form and, consequently, in harmony with modern aspirations, besides being identified with English music.

Clearly, the Cobbett Competition provided an opportunity for a great many of the younger generation of English composers; it offered a monetary award and a chance for their compositions to be performed. Composers such as Frank Bridge, John Ireland, and York Bowen won multiple prizes through the competition, and many others, such as Arnold Bax, Benjamin Dale, and Eugene Goossens, though not directly involved, contributed works to the flourishing
phantasy genre. Bowen’s own involvement in the competition took many forms. In 1910-1911, Cobbett commissioned him to write a phantasy for violin and piano as part of the larger group project for commissioned works during that period. In 1917, he sat on the jury (along with Lionel Tertis) for the Cobbett Competition for works based on an English folk-song, and in 1918, he himself was the first-prize winner for a phantasy for viola and piano. The viola repertoire, in particular, benefitted from the Cobbett Competitions, due to the abundance of new chamber music creations that featured the viola in a prominent or leading role.

It is safe to assume that York Bowen, as one of the most active young English composers at the turn of the century, would have been aware of the so-called “phantasy mania” sweeping the country in the early years of the Cobbett Competition. When Bowen and Tertis returned from their successful tour of Germany in 1907, Tertis asked Bowen to write a work for multiple violas. It is likely that Bowen used this opportunity to explore the new phantasy genre, as the resulting composition, the *Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas*, clearly meets all of the general criteria and stipulations set forth in the initial Cobbett Competition. Bowen’s spelling of Phantasy with an “F” may reflect the fact that the new spelling had not yet completely taken root, at least in terms of printed or published material.

The following list of characteristics pertaining to the new phantasy genre (gathered from a variety of sources) is directly applicable to Bowen’s *Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas*.

A Cobbett Phantasy is:

- a chamber work which is a modern analogue of the older English Fancy or Fantasia.

Bowen’s *Fantasie Quartet*, with its unusual instrumentation of four violas, is reminiscent of the consorts of viols or other stringed instruments for which the older English Fancies were written.

- a piece in which all parts (instruments) are equal.
Each of the four viola parts in Bowen’s *Fantasie* is equally important within the overall texture of the work, with frequent use of imitation and passing back and forth of melodic and thematic material.

- a work composed of sections of differing tempi and rhythm, with a continuous flow throughout.

The *Fantasie Quartet* begins with a Grave section, followed by a lengthy Allegro con Spirito section (itself full of many tempo fluctuations such as accelerando, stretto, and allargando). A slower tempo is finally achieved, and the work closes with a Lento section.

- a work that does not exceed 12 minutes in length.

Though each performance and interpretation differs somewhat, Bowen’s *Fantasie Quartet* generally lasts between 11-12 minutes.

- a piece that is essentially free from the conventions of sonata-form.

The overall structure of the *Fantasie Quartet* is free from the traditional sonata-form. Arguably, the structure can be viewed as more of a loosely constructed arch-form than a modified sonata-form, owing to the clear division of contrasting sections and recognizable themes.

The following brief structural outline of the *Fantasie Quartet*, with corresponding measure numbers, illuminates this arch-form structure (ABCBA).

**A Section**: mm.1-19, *Grave*, E minor

**B Section**: mm.20-82 (2nd theme enters m.43), *Allegro con Spirito*, E minor/E major

**C Section**: mm.83-129
   This development-like section contains frequent tempo fluctuations, many harmonic modulations, makes use of all of the themes, and ends with a major climax.

**B Section**: mm.130-152 – (first theme only), *Allegro*, E minor

**A Section**: mm.153-224
   While not an exact repetition of the initial ‘A’ section, it does contain similar melodic material.

**Coda**: mm.225-246, *Lento*, E major
The *Quartet* is written in a romantic style and relies heavily on chromaticism, and melodic and rhythmic imitation. Despite the assumed limitations dictated by the use of four violas, Bowen achieves a remarkable range of register and voicing. The first viola part, written with Tertis in mind, is virtuosic, making frequent use of the upper most registers of the instrument. Overall, Bowen creates a colorful sonic palette that reflects both the implied character of a phantasy and the lush string texture so prevalent in English compositions of this time. In a sense, this work truly captures the spirit of the English Musical Renaissance. What could be more English than a string instrumental work, by an English composer, in the new English phantasy genre promoted by the Cobbett Competition, written for Tertis, one of the most influential English musicians, who helped to promote the viola?

The *Fantasie Quartet* was completed at the end of 1907 and premiered on March 3, 1908, performed by Tertis and some of his advanced students (Eric Coates, James Lockyer, and Phyllis Mitchell) at a musical event arranged by the Society of British Composers. It was repeated on May 25, 1908, at a chamber music concert given at the Royal Academy of Music and received subsequent performances at Tertis’ instigation throughout the better part of the twentieth century, including the concert celebrating Tertis’ own 96th birthday in 1972. Since that time, it has become a favorite of violists, both for its unusual instrumentation and for the high quality of the writing. This work, above all others, has kept Bowen’s viola music alive in later generations and has served as a gateway to the re-discovery of many other neglected English viola compositions of the era.
CHAPTER 4

OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS

At first glance, it would seem that York Bowen had every opportunity to flourish as a composer and performer and to secure a lasting reputation for the future. But despite significant contributions to the areas of piano performance, pedagogy, and in particular, compositions for the viola repertoire, his role in the history and development of twentieth century English music has been ignored or marginalized, at best. Further investigation into the English Musical Renaissance reveals a complex web of cultural, social, and political elements that together shaped the musical culture of late-Victorian England, often privileging and promoting certain composers over others, with little regard to merit, and deliberately excluding or neglecting others who did not strengthen the underlying agenda.\(^{26}\) Bowen appears to have fallen prey to this cultural gerrymandering, as well as to other inhibiting factors, such as stylistic adherence, careerism, and the influence of the Press. This confluence of events led both directly and obliquely to the near exclusion of the composer’s name from the documented history of the era and to a shadowy presence of his compositions in the viola repertoire. The contextualization of York Bowen within the socio-political environment of the English Musical Renaissance helps both to illuminate the interconnectivity of history, society and culture and to situate Bowen with greater parity in relation to many of his respected contemporaries.

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\(^{26}\) The word ‘agenda’ is used here to refer to the unified, collective goal of English musicians, writers, academics, politicians, and Royal figures to create and promote a homegrown, uniquely English classical music, supported by new schools of music, and bolstered by an interested and educated public. These goals, by nature, were nationalistic in origin and were intended to strengthen England’s cultural reputation (as well as its political one) in the years leading up to the First World War. While not overtly malicious in intent, this agenda had the unfortunate effect of sidelining many English musicians and artists who were not viewed as “useful” to the common goals of the English Renaissance movement – sacrifices for the greater good, so to speak.
The ‘Establishment’ and the Brahms-Wagner Controversy

As a young student of modest means in the 1890s, Bowen’s early exposure to and encouragement in music, as well as the availability of monetary awards for conservatory study, reflected the growing importance of music education to a broader cross-section of English society than previously existed. Likewise, the flourishing of musical institutions of higher education such as the Royal College and the Guildhall School, as well as those outside of London, presented more opportunities and choices for further study. Each institution, however, came with its own particular ideologies and academic politics. Bowen’s initial decision to attend the older Royal Academy of Music (and to work with Tobias Matthay and Frederic Corder) set him on a path of study that was inherently more challenging and far less politically advantageous than the Royal College of Music, the new self-proclaimed epicenter of establishment musical-political power. During these formative years, students of the establishment composers Parry and Stanford (and to a lesser extent, Mackenzie) naturally had an advantage through their affiliation with these men who were literally engineering the elitist faction of the Renaissance movement. Naturally, these students stood to benefit from certain goals of their establishment teachers: namely, the promotion from within their ranks of specific new English composers to serve as homegrown rivals to continental Europe’s canonized composers.

In fact, nearly all of the English composers who eventually gained national and international recognition (Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Frank Bridge, George Butterworth, Arthur Bliss, John Ireland, Herbert Howells and others) were trained at the Royal College and steeped in the cultural politics and ideologies espoused by the leaders of the English Musical Renaissance. In 1915, Parry, speaking to a group of Royal College students proclaimed “the Royal College of Music has always been a place with big aims of doing special services to
the nation, and it was organized from the start with a view to their attainment.” This emphasized outright the nationalistic goals of the institution. With the possible exception of Arnold Bax, Royal Academy composers such as Benjamin Dale (Bowen’s life-long friend) and of course Bowen himself, as well as those composers not affiliated with either school (Peter Warlock and Havergal Brian, for example, and other members of the so-called “Frankfurt group”) were not recognized or promoted as potential torchbearers of an English national music. While Bowen achieved much early success as a piano prodigy and composer, his lack of “establishment” affiliation was a critical element which kept him from securing the lasting fame awarded to so many of his Royal College contemporaries.

Whether the actual training that these young musicians received from the Royal College or Academy was distinctive is debatable, but differences in style, influence, and ideology are more demonstrable. To be sure, the composition professors at both institutions had all been trained in the Germanic tradition, with similar approaches to compositional craftsmanship, form and style that followed the trajectory from Bach, to Mozart to Brahms. But by the 1890s, while Brahms was still recognized as a contemporary composer, and one worthy of great admiration, it was Wagner who was seen as the leader of “progressivism” in German music. Accordingly, the Brahms-Wagner controversy had developed in the arena of German music, with Brahms seen as


28 The “Frankfurt Group” was the name given to a particular group of young English speaking composers and friends who left England in the late 1890s to study at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, Germany. Members of the group included Percy Grainger, Roger Quilter, and Cyril Scott, among others.

the traditionalist and Wagner viewed as the progressive.\textsuperscript{30} The debate naturally spread to English musical circles, as well as the larger English public, where musicians and educated concert-goers aligned themselves with either the so-called “Brahmins” or the Wagnerites. Notably, Bowen’s composition teacher at the R.A.M. was Frederic Corder, a progressive Wagnerite whose small group of students was occasionally called the English Wagnerites. It is worth noting that Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the head of the Royal Academy up until the end of World War I, was considered one of the Renaissance establishment. As such, he would not have been supportive of Corder and his students’ efforts to promote an English Wagnerian compositional school (a further unforeseen obstacle to Bowen’s early compositional career). Much later on, after his own appointment to the R.A.M. faculty, Bowen had a serious curricular disagreement over the teaching of French music with Mackenzie, who thought it “immoral” to teach too much of the Impressionists. In public lectures, Mackenzie vocally denounced the “solid lumps of dissonance and the musical exaggerations of the most disgusting kind” of the music of Strauss and the “unscientific, shifting harmonic and ear-torturing progressions” of the French compositional school; he made it abundantly clear which camp he sided with in the Brahms-Wagner debate.\textsuperscript{31}

The Brahms-Wagner controversy presented a thorny problem for the English Musical Renaissance establishment, including Parry, Stanford, and others at the R.C.M. For the most part, they towed the party line as devoted Brahmins in deference to their cohort Sir George Grove, who despised the work of Wagner. Unsurprisingly, the critic George Bernard Shaw, himself an early Wagner supporter, was highly critical of the Renaissance establishment academicians; he

\textsuperscript{30} The origins of this debate stem from the so-called “War of the Romantics,” an aesthetic schism that developed among musicians during the middle of the nineteenth century. The “war” pitted the Leipzig “conservatives” (Brahms, Clara Schumann, Joseph Joachim) against the Weimar “New German School” of progressivists (Liszt, Wagner).

believed they had rejected the progressivism offered by Wagner in favor of the inherent conservatism of Brahms. This controversy also pitted two strong ideological tenets of the English Musical Renaissance, traditionalism and nationalism, against each other. The “Wagner problem,” as it were, highlighted the establishment’s desire to appear grounded in musical tradition (Germanic) while grooming a new group of English composers and music, and to promote a nationalist English music while harboring fervent anti-German nationalist sentiment. Ultimately, theirs was an untenable position, as Wagner quickly became an admired composer internationally, despite Germany’s unsavory politics.

**Style and Influence**

Due to the scarcity of published biographical and critical material related to the composer, little has been documented of Bowen’s own early compositional influences or aesthetic ideologies, other than his association with his teacher Corder at the Royal Academy. However, during the first decade of the twentieth century, many of the less influential London critics did review some of Bowen’s performances and compositions favorably, noting the influence of certain late-Romantic, “nationalist,” and continental European composers. After a piano recital at London’s St. James Hall, the Standard wrote:

> A pianoforte Sonata in B minor by Mr. Edwin York Bowen may show perhaps the influence of Grieg, but it is a distinctly clever work and the peroration of the final movement is certainly unconventional. Mr. Bowen may be cordially urged to persevere.\(^32\)

Some critics detected a strong influence of Tchaikovsky in Bowen’s orchestral works, while others, such as an anonymous Manchester Guardian critic, likened his grand, sweeping style of orchestration to that of Richard Strauss. As Bowen matured compositionally, he is said to have

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been “uplifted” by Strauss, and even more so, captivated by the Impressionist music of Debussy and Ravel, whose skillful orchestrations, fine piano and chamber music writing, and varied tonal palette he emulated to a certain degree. On February 1, 1912, Bowen’s second symphony was premiered at London’s Queen Hall with the New Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Landon Ronald. The culmination of two years work, this symphony was praised by critics who cited the strong influence of Tchaikovsky and Wagner, as well as Mendelssohn and Schumann. Overall, the critics who did publish reviews of Bowen’s compositions and performances were united in their praise for him. Even the aging French composer Camille Saint-Saens declared upon hearing him: “This is the most remarkable of the young British composers.”

Historically and artistically speaking, Bowen came of age during a transitional period in English musical culture. Despite the accolades of the press, none of the critics praised Bowen for having a particularly unique compositional voice; rather, they viewed his style as an amalgamation of other European composers. Bowen’s music up until World War I, the period during which the bulk of his music for viola was composed, straddles the stylistic boundaries of late-romanticism and early modernism, making it more difficult to categorize. Generally speaking, his music is lyrical and grand, with fairly traditional harmonies and structure, akin to Romantic era composers such as Schumann and Brahms. The influence of French Impressionism can be heard in Bowen’s attention to color, timbre and register, as well as that of Strauss’ rich string texture, sweeping phrases, and virtuosity. Yet, Bowen’s use of chromaticism is also redolent of Wagner (or at least of Corder’s Wagnerian enthusiasm). This liminality, emphasized by the lack of a truly distinct compositional voice, likely hindered the composer’s effort to distinguish himself in areas other than pure craftsmanship.
While it is difficult to identify more precisely the compositional influences on Bowen’s work, what is perhaps most notable is the absence of any use of material from the growing English folk song movement. While composers like Vaughan Williams and Holst made ample use of authentic folk song quotations and more idiomatic writing suggestive of or inspired by folk song material, Bowen does not appear to have been interested in the use of English folk song as a creative compositional resource. Similarly, Bowen’s music contains very little of the modal tonalities used by other contemporary English composers that marked their music as decidedly English and, therefore, nationalistic. While not an end in and of itself, the use of English folksong during this period allowed a composer’s works to be more easily recognized as part of the developing “Historical-Pastoral School” of composition, as well as the larger English cultural movement of the Renaissance. Furthermore, the resultant music was more accessible and recognizable to the receptive audience class of citizens, eager to champion an English nationalist cause.

The years leading up to and encompassing World War I were turbulent both politically and culturally for England as a nation, as well as for those associated with the English Musical Renaissance. Many young male composers, artists, and writers, having enlisted in the army out of a sense of duty, failed to return from the frontlines; this prompted the idea of a “lost generation” of English talent. Of those who returned, many were transformed by the experience, which was reflected in their new, modernist compositional styles and breaks with many of the older traditions. While Bowen himself was affected by his time in the war, the

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33 The term “lost generation” was first used by Gertrude Stein, and later appropriated by Ernest Hemingway, in reference to the young men that had come away from World War I somewhat fragile or damaged. In England, the “lost generation” came to mean those young men who had perished in the war, thus depriving the nation of their talents. The poet Wilfred Owen and composer George Butterworth are two of the most well known English casualties from this generation.
experience did not transfer much to his music. In fact, Bowen’s compositional style evolved little over the course of his lengthy career, making him something of an anomaly in this respect. Over time, this remarkable consistency or homogeneity of style would have caused him to be viewed as a conservative or traditionalist, at best, and outmoded, antiquated or outright passé, at worst.

**Academia**

It is readily apparent that Bowen enjoyed an unusually diverse career as a composer, performer, and pedagogue, all at the highest levels of achievement. Having been recognized early on as a piano prodigy and composer, Bowen immediately entered the ranks of academia after graduation from university. By all accounts, he was a devoted teacher and mentor to his piano and composition students, his commitment to pedagogy and loyalty to the Royal Academy was evident in the fifty long years he was affiliated with that institution. Having come from a modest background, Bowen had none of the desirable financial or society connections that could bolster a career in the arts. Academia was also, for him, a stable job that helped support him as a composer and performer. To this end, Bowen continued to enter national musical competitions that offered monetary awards for compositions well into his career, in lieu of familial connections or patronage, while maintaining an active teaching and performing career. Without financial support or personal connections to help promote his work, Bowen would also have shouldered much of the burden of managing and promoting his own multifaceted career.

While Bowen was a dedicated pedagogue, the Renaissance establishment leaders, by contrast, viewed the realm of academia largely as a base for political power within England’s cultural hierarchy. From their lofty positions as senior professors and administrators, they could survey England’s musical landscape, strategize, and implement their own cultural objectives. Most of these Renaissance insiders, like Grove, Parry, Stanford, and later Vaughan Williams,
came from educated, upper-class families, with ties to the most prestigious London social clubs, societies, and churches, making them comfortable leaders with proximity to many others in positions of power and wealth. This is not to diminish their abilities as pedagogues or musicians, but rather to emphasize the ease they would have had in promoting themselves and their work, as well as affirming their already stellar reputations.

The Viola Repertoire

Despite an overall lack of stylistic evolution, Bowen’s viola compositions are valuable contributions to the repertoire and should be judged on their own considerable strengths. While many English composers wrote for the viola, none were as prolific or wrote in such a variety of genres (sonatas, concerti, chamber ensembles) as Bowen. Very few large-scale works for viola and orchestra exist from this period, and Bowen’s viola concerto was arguably the most significant English viola concerto until the publication of William Walton’s viola concerto later in 1929.\(^{34}\) In hindsight, Bowen’s viola compositions help to fill a gap in the instrument’s repertoire, bridging the stylistic divide between romanticism and modernism and paving the way for later composers to fully utilize the viola in a solo capacity.

Whatever Bowen’s viola compositions may have lacked in progressivism, they more than compensated in sheer virtuosity, making them ideal vehicles for a soloist like Tertis. But as productive as the partnership was between Tertis and Bowen, it is important to remember that Tertis had his own objectives; by commissioning and performing a multitude of new works for the viola, he aimed to elevate the role of the viola as a solo instrument and to in turn raise the level of viola playing in England. Despite their early collaborations, Tertis did not promote any

\(^{34}\) Though Cecil Forsyth’s Viola Concerto in G Minor (1903) pre-dates Bowen’s, it is arguably a less significant and less virtuosic work, and was not a part of Lionel Tertis’ commissioning efforts.
one English composer or work exclusively; instead he worked steadily to commission and play as many different pieces as possible. It is not surprising that very few of these new compositions received multiple performances, let alone enough to make them familiar pieces for audiences. Moreover, until quite recently, none of Bowen’s viola works were recorded professionally and few were even published, making the dissemination of this body of repertoire challenging. Additionally, the skill and level of virtuosity required to play Bowen’s viola concerto, in particular, would have hindered Tertis’ ability to incorporate this work into the curriculum of his viola students at the Royal Academy. Without multiple avenues open for teaching, performance, recording, and publication of scores, or the support of the Renaissance establishment, it would have been overwhelmingly difficult for Bowen’s compositions to take root in the larger viola repertoire.

**Critics and Commentary**

From the start, the founders of the English Musical Renaissance were cognizant of the need to reinforce their ideological agenda through the printed word. This textual documentation took many forms, from their own writings on aesthetic criticism to academic scholarship to concert reviews, all spearheaded by members and supporters of the Renaissance movement. For a young, up and coming English composer such as York Bowen, favorable reviews from critics aligned with the Renaissance group would have helped him secure a significant place in the history of English music in the early twentieth century. However, circumstances worked against Bowen, hindering his reception in the press and rendering his contributions to the era as minor.

As one of the “founding fathers” of the English Musical Renaissance, Sir George Grove was appointed to the directorship of the Royal College of Music in 1882, which allowed him to oversee the development of the movement from that institution and to impose his ideology on a
generation of young music students and professors. Grove’s influential *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, published first in 1879 and continually updated, was one of the earliest English musical reference books that set the stage for the Anglo-centered rhetoric espoused by Renaissance insiders. The earliest edition of the book contains lengthy entries on English Renaissance leaders Stanford, Parry and Mackenzie and, in later editions, shows considerable bias toward composers who had either studied at the Royal College or who demonstrated their allegiance to the movement in other ways, such as the incorporation of English folksong or nationalistic English literature into their music. It is not surprising that at the height of the Renaissance, current editions of Grove’s work made only a brief mention of York Bowen, who had no affiliation with the Royal College or any of its professors of composition.

At Grove’s encouragement, many prominent music journalists and scholars such as Joseph Bennett of *The Daily Telegraph* and Francis Heuffer of *The Times* were recruited to help promote the new renaissance of English music envisioned by Grove and his cohorts Stanford, Parry, and Mackenzie. One of the most formidable supporters of the English Musical Renaissance ideology was John Fuller Maitland, a journalist and scholar. Fuller Maitland served as a music critic for London’s newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Times*, contributed many entries to Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and also published editions of music from Purcell, English virginal music, and English folksong. In his book *English Music in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller Maitland gave credence to the idea of a renaissance in English music (the idea first introduced by Bennett in 1882), separating the century into two distinct halves, with 1950 marking the official beginning of this new renaissance. Fuller Maitland also served as a staunch advocate of the Renaissance in his music journalism, praising the works of Parry and Stanford and crowning them as the new compositional royalty. Likewise, he promoted
composers who had studied at the Royal College or those composers who embraced the English folksong idiom in their music, and was a severe critic of composers who did not conform to his ideals of what was needed in English music. While it is difficult to ascertain whether (or not) Fuller Maitland ever published a review (favorable or not) of York Bowen, it can safely be assumed that the critic would not have helped promote a young composer who was so very far removed from the epicenter of Renaissance establishment activities, unless it was useful to the larger strategy of the movement.

Though there were many critics who did not specifically align themselves with the Renaissance group, the most vocal critic of the Renaissance leaders was the aforementioned George Bernard Shaw. The author of hundreds of reviews and essays on music and cultural criticism, Shaw’s published works are a strong antidote to the pro-Renaissance journalistic propaganda of the time. Shaw despised the overly academic, Renaissance traditionalists, instead favoring the progressivist composers Wagner and Richard Strauss, and later on, the English modernists. Unfortunately, York Bowen did not fit easily into either camp, being neither a Renaissance insider nor a champion of English folksong, and stylistically neither entirely a traditionalist nor a progressive Wagnerite. In addition to the Renaissance elitists at the Royal College of Music, Shaw was also critical of the academic conservatism and lack of creativity that he detected at the Royal Academy of Music. Having been first a student and then professor at the Royal Academy (and not exclusively a Wagnerite), it is possible that Bowen’s talents were inadvertently overlooked, but the fact remains that in his hundreds of pages of criticism, Shaw makes no reference to Bowen whatsoever. It is most likely that for Shaw, Bowen was neither progressive enough to garner interest nor traditionally conservative enough, like the Renaissance proponents, to warrant merit or criticism at the time.
Of the many positive reviews that Bowen did receive, none appear to have identified him as a unique compositional voice in the early days of the English Musical Renaissance, though his talents as a performer were exceptional. As the Renaissance movement progressed, it is likely that had Bowen identified with the Historical-Pastoralists in their quest for a national music based upon English folksong, he would have curried favor with critics who intended to support only those composers affiliated with the Renaissance establishment. Unfortunately, Bowen remained on the fringe of English musical and cultural activity, an outsider to the Renaissance establishment and a conservative to the anti-establishment camp. Retrospectively, Bowen’s compositions should be viewed as an essential step in the development of English music. As styles transitioned from late-romanticism to early modernism and English composers tried to compete on the continental stage, Bowen could have been a model of young English talent, had he the proper backing and support. However, those in power chose instead to promote composers such as Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie, and Granville Bantock, whose music lacked the creativity and passion that Bowen’s works embodied.

By the middle of the twentieth century, after modernism had firmly taken root in England, the press was still divided over how to judge Bowen’s music and how to view his larger role in the development of English music, but many recognized that his contributions had indeed suffered from a lack of attention. In 1956, Jonathan Frank published an appreciation of York Bowen in the journal *Musical Opinion*, remarking on what he saw as the curious neglect of such a prolific composer but also stating that “compared to Elgar and Vaughan Williams, York Bowen is a minor composer.” This statement prompted a response from the critic Clinton Gray-Fisk, of *Musical Opinion*.

Mr. Frank assesses York Bowen as a ‘minor master’ beside such men as Elgar and Vaughan Williams, but I should hesitate to describe as ‘minor’ a composer
whose copious output is of such consistently high quality. If York Bowen is ‘minor’ in comparison with Elgar and Vaughan Williams then he is so, I suggest, only in the sense that Chopin is ‘minor’ beside, say, Beethoven and Brahms.

Mr. Frank also regards York Bowen’s piano works as his main contribution to music and these are probably the best known, yet some of us find his inexcusably neglected chamber and orchestral works of at least equal interest. One of York Bowen’s cardinal assets as a creative artist is his seemingly intuitive understanding of the potentialities of any instrument; he writes effectively in any medium, his scoring is invariably masterly…

Gray-Fisk continues his defense of Bowen by pointing to other “shocking” factors contributing to the composer’s neglect, such as the elimination of many of Bowen’s compositions from the current catalogue of Oxford University Press and the lack of commercial recordings of Bowen’s music, and vociferously proclaiming the following:

    But most scandalous of all is the fact that a musician of York Bowen’s status – as composer, pianist, teacher- should have been completely ignored by every recording company, a state of affairs that could hardly exist in any country save England!

Gray-Fisk’s commentary underscores the necessity of printed concert reviews, criticism, and scores for the dissemination of new music in an era when recordings were not readily available for public consumption.

    In 1957 Gray-Fisk published “Pen Portrait: York Bowen” for the Musical Times, one of a series of retrospective articles showcasing significant English composers of the twentieth century. He recounted Bowen’s impressive record as a performer, composer, and teacher, drawing attention to his numerous accolades and prizes and longevity. Gray-Fisk cited the English conductor Sir Henry Wood as another who recognized Bowen’s unfortunate neglect, quoting the statement in Wood’s autobiography that York Bowen was “a British composer who has never taken the position he deserves.” Hindsight often allows for a wider lens with which to

view the career trajectory of an underappreciated artist, and in this respect, one of Gray-Fisk’s passages is particularly poignant:

…even if we are not temperamentally drawn to the music of a latter-day romantic, we are surely bound to respect his achievement and certainly admire his uncompromising adherence to his own ideals. Judging from the number of York Bowen’s works that have been publicly performed in recent years, however, a reaction has now apparently set in and it seems reasonable to prophesy that audiences will in future become increasingly aware of York Bowen’s true stature as a creative artist. At seventy-three he is still brimful of vitality, busily engaged in his multifarious musical activities and proving—as Walton has done in his Cello Concerto—that a composer of genius can, even now, still contrive to say something new, vital and original within the boundaries of tonality.\(^\text{36}\)

CHAPTER 5

RE-DISCOVERING THE VIOLA MUSIC OF YORK BOWEN

Fortunately, though more than fifty years after the composer’s death, York Bowen’s music appears to be having a renaissance of its own, as evidenced by a surge in new publications, writings, recordings, and performances dedicated to the exploration of his music. Perhaps most important for the dissemination of Bowen’s music, indeed any music, is the availability of published musical scores, many of which have lapsed in print or exist solely in manuscript form. Fortunately for violists, the vast majority of Bowen’s original manuscripts reside in the Special Collections archives at the library of the Royal Academy of Music in London and contain many of Tertis’ own fingerings and bowings. The respected English violist and scholar John White, himself the author of many publications on Tertis, has recently undertaken the hefty task of editing and producing critical editions of all Bowen’s viola works, including numerous chamber works featuring viola, many of which have never been published or performed only rarely since their initial premieres. White, in close collaboration with the R.A.M. library, has perused Bowen’s original manuscripts and created lavish commercial publications, complete with commentary and Tertis’ markings, and printed by the company Josef Weinberger, Ltd. These, along with a handful of other editions published by Schott and Kalmus, form the core of readily available scores for violists to study and perform. Moreover, the ability to now view this repertoire as a unified corpus has strengthened our understanding of Bowen’s place in the realm of late-Romantic English composition while simultaneously heightening the significance of his compositions on the broader historical spectrum of viola repertoire.

Now that more of his music is available, Bowen’s works are gradually being incorporated into the body of standard repertoire for viola through teaching and performance. As discussed
previously, Bowen’s two sonatas for viola and piano are striking and accessible. These works, along with the many other shorter single-movement works for viola and piano, are welcome additions to the repertoire of advanced viola students and professionals and provide alternative and exciting choices for recital programming both within and outside the realm of English viola music. Furthermore, Bowen’s works, with their sophisticated piano parts, present excellent opportunities for serious chamber music collaborations meant to showcase both musicians equally. Similarly, Bowen’s Viola Concerto offers advanced violists and soloists the opportunity to demonstrate superior technique and virtuosity, but also the beauty and expressive powers of the instrument, as well as program a late-Romantic English work with orchestral accompaniment other than the more common works by Vaughan Williams and Walton.

There are many examples of Bowen’s music becoming more mainstream through performance and teaching. As early as 1997, the renowned violist and pedagogue Patricia McCarty cited a number of Bowen’s works in a published “Guide to Romantic Viola Repertoire,” listing them in the category of “difficult concert pieces and sonatas, requiring facility, articulation variety, musical maturity.” More recently, the American violist Christine Rutledge presented a recital program as part of the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland entitled “The Blissful Viola” which featured Bowen’s Phantasy for viola and piano, alongside other lesser known English viola works, to great critical acclaim. Rutledge, Professor of Viola at the University of Iowa, also teaches Bowen’s Viola Concerto as part of her regular studio curriculum, alongside the concerti of Walton, Bartók and Hindemith. Additionally, at the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition in 2013, held on the Isle of Man, acclaimed English violist Sarah-Jane Bradley presented a recital which concluded with a “gorgeous unpublished work by Bowen,” a reminder to all violists in attendance of the beauty of Bowen’s works for their
instrument and the need for further new publications, as well as the fruitful collaboration
between the composer and Tertis. The last and perhaps most significant example of the progress
made in broadening the viola repertoire to include Bowen’s works comes from the Juilliard
School. In dictating the most recent audition requirements and guidelines for graduate violists,
the school lists repertoire suggestions which include Bowen’s viola concerto and sonatas “in the
interest of encouraging exploration of a wider range of repertoire.”

There is also evidence of renewed interest in Bowen’s chamber music as a whole,
particularly those compositions that feature a strong viola part, but also those with other
instrumental combinations. Though Bowen’s Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas has remained in
the performing repertoire since its creation, it has long been regarded as something of a novelty
piece due to its unusual instrumentation. However, there appears to be a growing interest in
ensemble repertoire for multiple violas. Perhaps drawing inspiration from the proliferation of
professional cello quartets and larger university student cello ensembles, similar viola ensembles
are gradually being established, bringing with them the need for substantial viola ensemble
repertoire. Bowen’s Fantasie Quartet remains one of the earliest original works for this
instrumentation and, as such, is at the heart of viola ensemble literature. Having recognized the
growing interest in viola ensembles, a group of professional violists, all university professors,
has established a “Viola Quartet Database” listing all the existing repertoire for this
instrumentation. Bowen’s quartet is an important part of this compilation, as one of the few
original works in this database, as opposed to arrangements or transcriptions.

Outside the realm of viola chamber music lie new explorations of Bowen’s string
chamber music. Last season, the Wall Street Chamber Players, a well known chamber group
based in New Haven, Connecticut gave the United States premiere of Bowen’s unpublished Trio
in Three Movements, Op. 118, in E Minor, for violin, cello and piano (1945). Working from digital copies of Bowen’s original manuscripts provided by the Royal Academy Library, they created their own edition of the work. Initial performances of the trio on the group’s regular concert series were so successful that audiences requested to hear the piece again during the following concert season.

Finally, the importance of these numerous publications, projects, and performances has been strengthened by an increase in recordings featuring Bowen’s music, much of it for the first time. For violists, the most significant contribution to this repertoire is Lawrence Power’s recent recording of Bowen’s “The Complete Works for Viola and Piano.” Power, in collaboration with the Hyperion record label, is also part of a project aiming to record all of the existing late-Romantic and early twentieth century English viola concerti, for which he has already recorded Bowen’s Viola Concerto, among others. Likewise, the Dutton Epoch record label and series in the U.K. is dedicated to championing the unrecorded music of twentieth century British classical composers and to date has published a number of high quality recordings of Bowen’s string chamber music and concerti. Other notable contemporary violists such as Doris Lederer, Helen Callus, and Matthew Jones, of The Bridge Duo, have recently recorded Bowen’s viola sonatas and concerto. Finally, outside the realm of his viola and chamber music works, Bowen’s music was highlighted in the international arena through the 2012 Grammy-nominated recording of Bowen’s Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2, featuring the BBC Philharmonic, under the direction of Andrew Davis. These recordings have further legitimized Bowen as a composer of significant repertoire for the viola and beyond.

In light of these recent trends in performance, pedagogy, recording, and publication of Bowen’s works, as well as the historical re-examination of the English Musical Renaissance, it
appears that the historiography of this era begs for a more substantial reinterpretation. It is this author’s contention that with time and further investigation, York Bowen’s role in the development of early twentieth century English music will be redefined as a crucial bridge from late romanticism to early modernism. Moreover, his contributions to viola literature will be further recognized and incorporated into the standard repertoire of that instrument, broadening our concept of English music. For every new discovery of a composer or the re-discovery of the works of musicians like Bowen, there are undoubtedly many others worthy of attention. Each discovery will enhance our evolving interpretations of the music and cultural politics that formed the foundation of the English Musical Renaissance and the role of English composers within the larger context of early twentieth century classical music in Europe.
APPENDIX A

CATALOGUE OF BOWEN’S VIOLA COMPOSITIONS WITH APPROXIMATE DATE AND PUBLISHER

List of Compositions featuring viola in a solo role:

*Sonata No. 1 in C minor, Op. 18, for viola and piano (1905) – Schott, Kalmus*

*Romance in D-flat major, Op. 21, for viola and piano (1900, arr. 1904) – Weinberger*

*Allegro de concert in D minor, Op. 21 for viola (or cello) and piano (1906) – Weinberger*

*Sonata No. 2 in F major, Op. 22, for viola and piano (1906) – Schott*

*Concerto in C minor, Op. 25, for viola and orchestra (1907) – Weinberger*

*Fantasie Quartet for Four Violas in E minor, Op. 41 No. 1 (1907) – Rarities for Strings*

*Romance in A major, Op. 21 for viola (or cello) and piano (1908) – Weinberger*

*Melody for the G string, Op. 47, for viola and piano (1917) – Weinberger*

*Melody for the C string, Op. 51 No. 2, for viola and piano (1918) – Weinberger*

*Phantasy in F major, Op. 54, for viola and piano (1918) – Weinberger*

*Rhapsody in G Minor for viola and piano (1955) – Weinberger*

*Concert-Allegro for viola (or cello) and piano (1906) – unpublished*

Related Chamber Music:

*String Quartet No. 1 in F Major (1899) – unpublished*

*Fantasia in F major, for viola and organ (1903) – Weinberger*

*Phantasie Trio, Op. 24, for violin, viola (or cello), and piano – unpublished*

*Poem for viola, harp, and organ Op. 27 (1912) – unpublished*

*String Quartet No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 41 (1922?) – Stainer & Bell*

*String Quartet No. 3 in G Major, Op. 46 (1919) – unpublished*

*Rhapsody Trio for violin, cello (or viola) and piano, Op. 80 (1926) – out of print*

*Quintet in C Minor, Op. 85, for horn and strings (1927) – Weinberger*

*Phantasy Quintet, Op. 93, for bass clarinet and strings – Emerson Edit. – out of print*


*Introduction and Allegro in D minor, for viola d’amore and piano (1961) – unpublished*

*Two Duos in B-flat major, for violin and viola – unpublished*

*Two Duos for Two Violas – unpublished*

*Obbligato viola part – Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata in C-sharp minor – unpublished*
APPENDIX B

DISCOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Praised for her versatility and creativity, American violist Renate Falkner enjoys an active career as an orchestral and chamber musician, performing across the U.S. and abroad. Equally at home on both modern and baroque viola, she is a former member of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, and performs frequently with groups such as Boston Baroque, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra New England, and Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra. In Florida, she plays regularly with the Jacksonville Symphony and the Naples Philharmonic, as well as with Opera Tampa and the St. Petersburg Opera Company.

Renate has also collaborated in chamber music performances alongside such artists as violinist Erick Friedman, violist Jesse Levine, harpist Rita Costanzi and oboist Joseph Robinson. She has been heard in chamber collaborations in venues as diverse as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book Library, Carnegie Hall, and Boston’s Jordan Hall. Summer appearances have included the Verbier Festival, Switzerland, the Spoleto Festival, Italy, the Carvalho Festival of Music in Fortaleza, Brazil, and the Bellingham Festival of Music in Washington.

She has recorded for the Chandos, Nimbus and Rezound music labels. Ms. Falkner holds degrees from the Oberlin College and Conservatory, the Yale School of Music, and the Florida State University. Currently, she serves on the faculty of the University of North Florida where she teaches viola and coaches chamber music.