

Frank Bridge (1879-1941) Lamento für zwei Bratschen

Frank Bridge was a prominent figure in English music during the beginning of the 20th century. An outstanding violist and conductor, he studied under Charles Villiers Stanford at the Royal College of Music. Bridge composed in every genre, but chamber music was where he excelled, and he spent most of his life as an active chamber musician, having been a founding member of the English String Quartet. Nowadays, we remember Bridge best as the very famous composer Benjamin Britten's teacher. Britten said of Bridge, "He was most naturally an instrumental composer, and, as a superb viola player, he thought instrumentally... He fought against anything anti-instrumental which is why his own music is so graceful to play."

Bridge composed two viola duets, *Caprice* and *Lament*, in 1911-1912 for a Bechstein (now Wigmore) Hall concert by Lionel Tertis and himself. Unfortunately, the manuscripts for both of these duets are now lost, but sketches for the works are housed at the Royal College of Music. The published version of *Lament*, which is being performed today, was constructed by Paul Hindmarsh, based on an almost complete version of the piece found in the leaves of sketch material. (Sadly, sketches for the other duet, *Caprice*, are not complete enough to be made into a piece that can be performed.) Because of this situation, the first performance of *Lament* took place on 18 March 1912, and the second, which was only able to occur post-reconstruction, was more than 65 years later on 12 February 1980.

The *Lament* is a technically demanding piece for both players. It has a harmonic richness that makes it seem in places as if a whole string quartet is playing. The main key is C minor, the middle section is in E minor, and the reprise begins, strangely, in C-sharp minor, a semitone higher than the opening statement. Then the theme is repeated in C minor, giving tonal cohesion to the piece.

The duo begins with the second viola playing the main theme alone, which is a melancholic melody in the lower range of the instrument. The middle section is in a flowing 6/8, providing contrast with the opening section. The full range of the viola is used in order to create contrast between dramatic pathos and gentle lyricism.

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