

# Dull notes, but lovely sounds

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Music Critic

It must be difficult to find appropriate music for brass quartet, but given a talented group such as the Faculty Brass Quartet, the effort is worthwhile. At their best, the group produces a most attractive sound. However, Thursday evening's recital in All Faiths reminded me that I had written in these columns once before about the generation of British composers who were active during the nineteen fifties and how it was my misfortune to have had to listen at the time to so much of their academic musical bloodlessness.

It seems as though after the taking of toast and tea those men and women composed with their legs crossed lest they give way to anything other than a stiff-lipped propriety.

Despite the musical renaissance in that country during so much of this century there just seem to have been a large number of emotionally inhibited composers in Britain, as indeed I am sure there were elsewhere. Composing to academic formulas

was so much safer than exposing both one's lack of original creativity and also one's inner soul — no Mahler's they — and all that compositional activity must have looked good on the resumes of the academic ladder-climbing game-players.

Between Vaughan Williams and Peter Maxwell-Davies the dullness of inspiration of so much of British music is thrown into high relief by the works of Britten and Tippett, but even here one can ask where on earth are the many performances, for example, of *Death in Venice*? Are we so blessed with great compositions that a work of this stature has not become part of the standard repertoire? Or are audiences, or more likely producers, just not ready yet for the subject matter and Britten's searing view of the tormented social outcast?

Strange also that so much of the truly great music of the period lies neglected and unexplored. The marvels of the orchestral works of Havergail Brian and William Alwyn might as well be dead, so deeply are they buried.

None of this is any reflection on the playing of the Faculty Brass Quartet who gave both Gordon Jacobs' undistinguished *Scherzo* and John Addison's inhibited *Divertimento* a more than fair airing however — to respond to the program notes — "understated" is more than accurate, but "free spirited" is not a description I would have used.

The recital had started out with Hindemith also at his least stimulating, so it was up to the Messieurs of the French seventeenth century and the contemporary American, John Boda, to provide the interest.

Indeed, it seemed to me that the Quartet were at their very best during the spirited and well-played *Scherzo* of Boda's interesting tripartite work.

I realize that there must be a problem with finding suitable repertoire for brass quartet, even so, lovely sounds from the Faculty Brass Quartet on Thursday but, for me at least, dull notes from too many of the composers.

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