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**WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

**Easley Blackwood & Frank Bridge**  
**CELLO SONATAS**

Kim Scholes, cello  
Easley Blackwood, piano



**CELLO SONATAS BY  
EASLEY BLACKWOOD (b. 1933)  
AND FRANK BRIDGE (1879-1941)**

**1-2** Bridge: Cello Sonata (22:11)

- 1** I. Allegro ben moderato (9:38)
- 2** II. Adagio ma non troppo (12:27)

**3-6** Blackwood: Cello Sonata, Op. 31 (41:56)

- 3** I. Grave – Allegro moderato (11:08)
- 4** II. Lento e mesto (12:09)
- 5** III. Scherzo. Molto allegro (9:39)
- 6** IV. Finale. Allegro (8:42)

Kim Scholes, cello Easley Blackwood, piano TT: (64:22)

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### **Blackwood on Bridge**

Frank Bridge (1879-1941) is an unjustly neglected composer who is best known as Benjamin Britten's teacher. He was an outstanding musician of great versatility -- a fine violist and experienced conductor, as well as a prolific composer.

Bridge's style undergoes a vast metamorphosis from his earliest works, written at the turn of the century, to those composed at the end of his life. At the beginning, his idiom is that of a conservative post-Brahmsian; many of his smaller works composed between 1901 and 1910 are little more than salon music. Shortly after 1910, an impressionistic influence becomes noticeable, suggesting elements of Fauré and Scriabin. But after World

War I, Bridge's style undergoes a radical transformation. His harmonic language no longer suggests keys or tonics, and his forms take on aspects of free association. This development was not favorably received in England, and his music fell into disuse. At present, he is consigned to obscurity.

Bridge's Sonata for Cello and Piano, written between 1913 and 1917, belongs to the end of his first period. Already the form exhibits free elements that take on a quasi-improvised character in unexpected mood changes. For example, the first theme of the first movement is characterized by Romantic introspections, impressionistic murmurings, and agitated outbursts. The songful second theme is in G-flat major, but contains no tonic triad throughout its entire length of twenty-one bars. The stirring climax in D major near the end of the movement is abruptly followed by a hushed echo in the parallel minor. The second movement is an extended fantasy, comprising a number of sharply contrasting elements. Especially noteworthy is the unheralded *agitato* section, coming as it does after an extended meditative opening. Elements from the first movement are recalled near the end, and the work closes succinctly with a fiery climax.

### **Blackwood on Blackwood**

Everyone will immediately notice that my Sonata, completed in 1985, is in an idiom best described as ultra-conservative. Indeed, I have tried to approach, as nearly as possible, the style that I think Schubert would have discovered if he had lived until 1845.

In the final five years of his life, Schubert was evolving an increasingly complex tonal idiom. Some of his most harmonically daring moments are found in the lesser-known songs, especially where the text depicts dislocation, indecision, uncertainty, or where the poet contemplates imponderables and philosophical immensities. Advanced chromatic

progressions are numerous in the works written during the last months of his life (1828). However, such progressions are found in songs written as much as five years earlier. This suggests that Schubert would have developed a harmonic language during the 1840's at least as advanced as that employed by Schumann, Wagner, and Liszt.

My Sonata is one of five works I have written since 1982 that explores older idioms. By this I do not intend to renounce my earlier works, which, by and large, are in a much more modern style. My current interests have been stimulated by a combination of theoretical research and repertoire study. In addition, teaching traditional harmony for over thirty years, while using my own illustrations and exercises, has sharpened my ability to compose within a traditional framework.

The form of my Sonata is modeled after Schubert's G-major Quartet, D. 887 (1826), and the major works written at the end of his life -- the last three piano sonatas (D. 958, 959, and 960), the two piano trios (D. 898 and 929), the string quintet (D. 956), and the C-major symphony (D. 944). However, the models for the extended slow introduction that opens the work are the Cello Sonatas of Beethoven (Op. 5, No. 1; Op. 5, No. 2; and Op. 102, No. 1). The first movement's Allegro is a sonata form in which the first theme is in D minor and the second theme is in E-flat major -- a relative key structure that is unique, as far as I know. The development uses elements from both themes, and the long coda serves as a second development. The form of the second movement is A-B-A-B-A; the A sections are tranquil, the B sections agitated. The outer A sections are in B-flat minor, with the central A section in F minor. The first B section begins in A minor and modulates to C minor. The second B section is a variation on the first, but transposed a perfect fourth higher. The third movement is a quick scherzo in D minor, with an extended trio in F-sharp major, followed by a reprise of the scherzo. The last movement is a sonata-rondo of the sort often found in the finales of Beethoven as well as Schubert.

### **A few questions of Blackwood (with James Ginsburg)**

JG: As a composer, you are primarily known for creating atonal, or at least mostly atonal works. Why are you now writing traditional tonal pieces? And why in obviously antiquated styles?

EB: In the late 1970's, I embarked on a project sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities to investigate the harmonic and modal properties of equal tunings from thirteen through twenty-four notes [rather than the standard twelve notes to the octave]. In the process, I wrote a set of electronic pieces designed to illustrate the tonal orderings of each tuning. That project made me aware, for the first time, of the poetic aspects of writing in tonal idioms. Then a guitarist approached me with a commission in the early 1980's. I decided that since non-tonal music is not well suited to solo guitar, I should pick a tonal style. Solo guitar or lute music was popular in the Baroque but then vanished until the late Romantic period. So I decided to fill the gap by composing the piece in a mid-Beethoven style. Now whenever I get a commission, I ask the client what style he would like the piece in, and try to find an idiom that fills a void in the repertoire. The "1845" Cello Sonata, for example, plugs the gap between the classical Cello Sonatas of Beethoven and the late Romantic Sonatas by Brahms.

JG: But why write in obviously older idioms? Why not take advantage of all the advances in tonal musical vocabulary?

EB: I don't see that that is necessarily advantageous. The entire body of altered chords that make up the harmonic vocabulary of tonal music had been discovered by 1905, and I don't think there is anything left to be unearthed. So a composer writing tonally today is

consciously or unconsciously choosing a harmonic style whose vocabulary has been with us for nearly a century. Having taught traditional harmony since 1958, I feel at home in a wide variety of styles and really cannot write without thinking about the idiom in which I am working. Moreover, I am fascinated by the idea of recreating styles, like the one I imagine Schubert would have discovered had he lived until 1845. Of course, I think it would be presumptuous to compose in an idiom where there already exists a large number of successful works. For example, to write a string quartet in the style Beethoven was using around 1800 would really be gilding the lily.

Having chosen a style, my own muse then takes over and the work is very much my own. For example, I conceived of my Fifth Symphony [being premiered by the Chicago Symphony in May 1992] -- which, incidentally, does use the full range of the tonal harmonic vocabulary and even has some non-tonal passages -- as the kind of piece Sibelius would have written in 1915 if had he experimented a bit with the kind of modernism that was prevalent in Europe at that time (he never did). Having recently listened to some of Sibelius's major works, I would have to say that as an imitation of Sibelius my Symphony is not a success. But that is not how it should be judged. The work should be evaluated on its own merits as a new composition written in a carefully chosen style. I just happen to be more interested in working entirely within set idioms than creating Stravinskiesque reflections on older styles.

JG: Despite your history of composing radical atonal works, you now refer to Arnold Schoenberg as the Karl Marx of music. What do you mean by that?

EB: Like Marx, Schoenberg spun out an array of theories that have now been proven historically incorrect. Though not a Marxist, Schoenberg's ideas sprang from the same source as Marx's: Hegelian philosophy. Schoenberg saw the evolution of music as a

combination of theses and syntheses, with each synthesis bringing music to a higher plateau. He believed there would be a liberation from the tyranny of tonality which would bring something akin to a musical utopia, although he doesn't actually use that word. He thought audiences and musicians would come to accept his new dissonant language if they listened to it enough and became familiar with it, and that his music would come to be played at least as often as the music it was intended to supersede. Eighty years after Schoenberg first enunciated these beliefs, it has not happened. This despite considerable efforts by many musicians, composers, and even the Rockefeller Foundation. There is a small body of established, purely non-tonal music which consists almost entirely of dramatic pieces depicting degradation, mayhem, the ravings of a madman, and people cast into grotesque or abnormal roles -- the limit of what atonal music portrays effectively. The number of first-class, large-scale, entirely non-tonal works that are abstractions can be counted on the fingers of one hand. So as with Marx, history has proven Schoenberg wrong.

JG: Are there any threads linking your tonal and non-tonal compositions?

EB: No, the two occupy completely distinct universes. Composing atonal music feels like writing prose, whereas composing tonal pieces is like writing poetry. Things must rhyme and scan. Tonal music lends itself to expressive arrangements -- varying lengths of phrases, manipulating the root progression of chords, deciding how firmly or ambiguously to establish tonics -- elements which have no parallel in non-tonal composition.

JG: Are you concerned that some may complain that your "conservative" Cello Sonata lacks "cultural relevance"?

EB: I think the people who believe that music must have cultural relevance are looking at a very narrow aspect of musical expression. What is the cultural relevance of Mozart's cheerful last piano sonata, written during a very turbulent time in Europe? The pieces Beethoven wrote in 1814 and 1815 don't reflect the upheavals of that Napoleonic era. Nor does music become more tranquil between Napoleon's defeat and the revolutions of the 1840's. This notion that music must be culturally relevant is really a post-WW2 phenomenon invented largely, I think, to justify the emerging body of dissonant atonal music. I can't tell you how many times I have heard the argument advanced that because we live in an ugly, decadent age we need ugly, decadent music. As you can see, I don't agree with that. Even in my most radical atonal works my goal was to create something attractive. And, just as with my reactionary Cello Sonata, those works express only musical ideas -- a perfectly legitimate objective for a composer as far as I'm concerned.

Copies of the score of Easley Blackwood's Cello Sonata may be obtained by sending \$35 to Blackwood Enterprises, 5300 South Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60615.

Blackwood's Twelve Microtonal Etudes for Electronic Music Media are available on an LP for \$9.95 (same address).

The Frank Bridge Cello Sonata is published by Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

### **About Easley Blackwood's Cello Sonata**

"I have tried to approach, as nearly as possible, the style that I think Schubert would have discovered if he had lived until 1845," writes Easley Blackwood of his tuneful, Romantic Cello Sonata. Blackwood's career as a composer has been consistent only in its seeming contradictions and strong individuality. Blackwood received his musical training from such legendary figures as Olivier Messiaen, Paul Hindemith (at Yale, where Blackwood earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in 1953 and 1954), and Nadia Boulanger. A modernist who wrote striking atonal compositions before it was fashionable, Blackwood has gone against the grain yet again, by composing tonal, melodic



works since the early 1980's. Blackwood's important investigation of the harmonic and modal properties of microtonal tunings in the late 1970's, and decades-long study of traditional harmony (as a Professor at the University of Chicago since 1958) allows him to compose compelling works in a wide variety of tonal idioms.

### **About the Performers**

First Prize winner at the 1985 Concert Artists Guild International Competition in New York, Kim Scholes has earned consistent critical acclaim for his "beautifully phrased line and sparkling virtuosity" (*Washington Post*). He has performed as soloist throughout the United States and in such far reaches as China and the former Soviet Union. He has also performed regularly with such acclaimed chamber groups as Boston Musica Viva, New England Camerata, and the Chicago Ensemble. Mr. Scholes now makes his home in Chicago where he teaches at Roosevelt University's Chicago Musical College. He recently recorded the complete cello works of Chopin for Titanic Records. This is Scholes' first recording for Cedille. He performs on a Montagnana cello made in 1732.

As a pianist, Easley Blackwood is cited in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* "for his performances of modern works of transcendental difficulty." His recordings on Cedille of music of Alfredo Casella and Karol Szymanowski (CDR 90000 003; "Intelligent, sensitive, masterly playing." -- *High Performance Review*) and sonatas by Ives and Copland (CDR 90000 005; "\*\*\*\*\* A bulls-eye." -- *Cincinnati Enquirer*) have played to rave reviews.