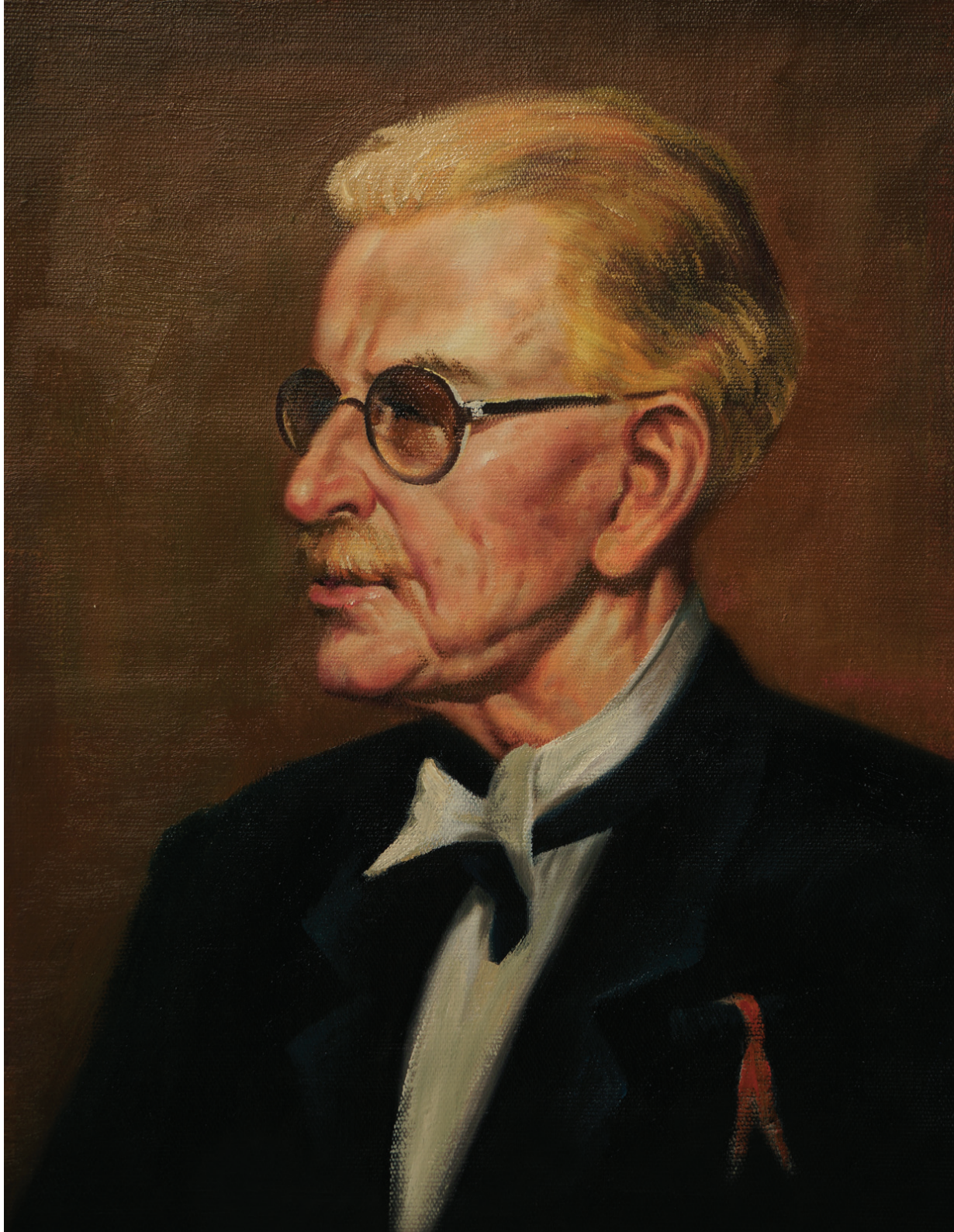


**Alfred
HILL**
(1869–1960)

**String Quartets
Vol. 6**

**Dominion
String Quartet**



Alfred Hill (1869–1960)

String Quartets Vol. 6

While Australian by birth, Hill lived in New Zealand from the age of two until seventeen, principally in Wellington, after which he began studies at the Leipzig Conservatorium, where he encountered Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Strauss and many other luminaries of the era. After completing his studies in violin and piano in 1891 and receiving the prestigious Helbig award for composition, he lived principally in Wellington for almost twenty years with some shorter residencies in Australia. In 1910 he moved to Sydney where he was based for the rest of his life. He was the only significant composer of Australia and New Zealand representing the Late Romantic era. While the influences of his immediate predecessors are clearly obvious in his early works, his style evolved with some absorption of later styles, though he rejected breaking from the long established traditions of Europe. His prolific output included ten operas (some on Maori themes), thirteen symphonies, seventeen string quartets, many choral works, concertos, chamber music, sonatas, songs and short works for a variety of instruments. Researcher and publisher, Allan Stiles, has noted that there are over 2,000 titles attributable to Alfred Hill and of those, many have never been published and relatively few commercially recorded. His use of Maori music and references to Maori culture were enduring and he later developed an interest in the music of the Australian aborigines. Amongst his earliest compositions were the Maori cantatas *Hinemoa* (1895) and *Tawhaki* (1897) and the *Maori Symphony No. 1*. The interest in Maori culture continued in the later operatic scores *Tapu* (1903) and *Teora* (1928). He is fondly remembered by Maori as *Arapeta Hira*.

Soon after arriving in Sydney in 1910 Hill became a member of the Austral String Quartet and later wrote string quartets for Henri Verbrugghen's quartet and others. In 1916 the New South Wales Conservatorium (now the Sydney Conservatorium) was established and Hill was appointed as its first Professor of Composition. *Quartets Nos. 1–3*, spanning the period 1891–1913, reflect his early "New Zealand" style, with strong influence of Dvořák and

Tchaikovsky. *Quartets Nos. 4–9* span 1916–1935, his tenure at the Conservatorium, and accordingly offer excellent examples of how much his style evolved during this middle period of his output. The influence of impressionism in *Quartets Nos. 7–9* paved the way for more freedom in his own style following his retirement from the Conservatorium in Sydney. While his orchestrations of earlier quartets into symphonies may seem to imply a return to a nineteenth-century idiom, the later quartets demonstrate that in fact his style continued to evolve, and that the symphonies were simply orchestrations of quartets composed earlier. On 27th December, 1934, following a disagreement with the Conservatorium, Hill tendered his resignation, a year before he was due to retire, and founded the Alfred Hill Academy of Music. While this rebellious venture only lasted until 1937, it attracted excellent teachers and students.

One of Hill's dreams, even long after he had taken up permanent residence in Australia, was to establish in New Zealand a full-time national orchestra and a national school of music, to teach western art music and to preserve the traditions of Maori music and culture. To these ends he corresponded initially with Joseph Savage, Prime Minister from 1935–1940, and later with Peter Fraser, Prime Minister from 1940–49. In 1936 Hill wrote to Joseph Savage appealing for a National Conservatorium to be established and received a reply saying that "I have carefully noted all that you say in this connection and shall be pleased to place your suggestion before the Government for consideration." The proposal did receive serious consideration even with Hill as its potential director, and during a visit to Auckland in 1938 he gave an interview on the possibility. World War II intervened, however, and the project was abandoned. One can only ponder how differently musical history might have otherwise unfolded. New Zealand did, though, gain a National Orchestra in the years following the end of the war and while Alfred Hill may not have been directly involved, there is no question that his lobbying for this outcome, since the Christchurch

Exhibition of 1906–07, played a significant role in preparing the way for this eventuality. Of note is an extract from the reply in June 1946 from Peter Fraser, to Hill's offer to support the venture: "An expression of opinion from one of your musical standing and experience is most valuable and you may be assured that your views will carry much weight."

String Quartet No. 15 in A minor (1937)

At the end of the autograph score is written "Sydney 16th December 1937 – my birthday". Unlike many other quartets, this was not orchestrated to create a symphony, although the music of the third movement, Serenade, is the same as Day Dreams for string orchestra dated 1933.

– **Allan Stiles**

The melodies, rhythms and texture of the first movement are reminiscent of Schubert and there is a sense of seriousness and urgency throughout. This gives way to a gentle lilting second movement in which the Aeolian mode on D gives the flavour of an old folk melody. The simplicity of the outer sections is contrasted with more adventurous harmonies in the trio section. The *Serenade* plays with impressionist whole-tone ideas, perhaps reflecting its earlier composition around the time of the *Eighth Quartet*, and features the first violin and cello. The *Finale* returns to the more classical Schubert-like world with a sprightly 6/8 full of syncopated rhythms, though with the sense of seriousness of the first movement.

String Quartet No. 16 in B flat major, 'Celtic' (1938)

The manuscript score is marked '15th February 1938 Sydney'. On the cover of the score it can be clearly seen that the number had initially been '17' but had been altered to '16'. The autograph parts have the title No. 16 (Celtic) Quartet in Bb. Shule Agra is a setting of a seventeenth-century Irish song by Alfred Hill and his second wife Mirrie – their only known joint composition. On the parts is written 'Cadenzas by Mirrie Hill' but in the original version for violin and piano one of the manuscripts assigns bars 1–18, 55–83, and 92–96 to Mirrie. The Irish Jig was also originally an independent work.

– **Allan Stiles**

The first movement *Allegro* section is also in the

character of a *Jig* and the *Finale* contains Scottish snap rhythms and elements reminiscent of Dvořák.

Opening lyrics of *Shule Agra*:

His hair was black, his eye was blue,
his arm was stout, his word was true.
I wish in my heart, I was with you.
Go thee, thu Mavourneen slaun.
Shule, shule, shule agra,
Only death can cease my woe,
Since the lad of my heart from me did go.
Go thee thu Mavourneen slaun!

String Quartet No. 17 in C major (1938)

This manuscript was dated 18th March 1938, Sydney. No later quartets are known and there is no evidence of the number of this one having been changed. It is atypical in only having three movements and the Introduction and Serenade was originally an independent work for string quartet composed in July 1937. Some time in the 1950s Hill orchestrated this quartet to create the Short Symphony in C major.

– **Allan Stiles**

The brooding and restless *Adagio* of the first movement gives way to a spirited *Allegro* with most of the melodic interest in the first violin and cello. After a compact development section the *Adagio–Allegro* structure is restated and a short coda brings the movement to its conclusion. The second movement opens *Quasi adagio* with the cello and first violin sharing a melody based on the incomplete whole-tone scale of A B C# D# F. In the *Moderato* the first violin introduces a simple melody accompanied by a dotted 6/8 rhythm in A minor, restated by the viola, passed back to first violin and then to the second violin. The tonally ambiguous *Quasi adagio* returns briefly to close the movement. It is poignant that in the *Finale* of his final quartet Hill returns to the inspirations of his youth, producing a movement that at times could easily be mistaken as composed by Dvořák, the brief quotation from the first movement of 'The New World Symphony' in the final seconds of the work clearly being a tribute.

Donald Maurice

Dominion String Quartet

The Dominion String Quartet was formed in 2006, taking its name from the centenary of the creation of the dominion of New Zealand. This event coincided with the Christchurch International Exhibition of 1906–07 at which Alfred Hill was the conductor of the country's first full-time professional orchestra. His seventeen string quartets provided a perfect project for the DSQ as they are not only the first significant examples of the string quartet genre from Australasia, but are also very fine works of international stature. This volume is the final of a series of six recordings which includes all seventeen quartets and which also included on Volume 4 [Naxos 8.572844], Hill's *Life* for piano, string quartet and eight solo singers. **Yury Gezentsvey** (first violin), originally from Ukraine, is a principal first violinist with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, and an acclaimed soloist and chamber musician. **Rosemary Harris** (second violin), previously Associate Concertmaster of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra and a first violinist in the Pittsburgh Symphony, plays regularly with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. **Donald Maurice** (viola) is Professor at the New Zealand School of Music, and has been a regular performer and lecturer at international viola congresses for over two decades. **David Chickering** (cello), originally from the United States where he was a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, is a former principal cellist of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.



From left to right:
Donald Maurice,
David Chickering,
Rosemary Harris,
Yury Gezentsvey

Photo by Lucien Rizos

Alfred Hill was the leading Australian-born composer of the Late Romantic era. During his studies in Leipzig from 1887 to 1891, he encountered luminaries such as Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky and Strauss. His 17 String Quartets, the first significant examples of the genre from Australasia, are beautifully crafted works which draw on the legacy of European chamber music. With their Schubert-like melodies and rhythms, the outer movements of *String Quartet No. 15* frame a pair of harmonically more adventurous movements, *No. 16 'Celtic'* includes a setting of a 17th-century Irish song followed by an Irish Jig, while the poignant *No. 17* concludes with a brief quotation from Dvořák's *'New World Symphony'*. This is the final volume of the Dominion Quartet's acclaimed recordings of the complete Alfred Hill String Quartets.

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String Quartet No. 15 in A minor (1937)		21:56	6 II. Shule Aura: Adagio	7:28
1 I. Adagio – Allegro con spirito	8:46	7 III. Jig		2:53
2 II. Canzona	4:20	8 IV. Finale: Adagio – Allegretto		5:32
3 III. Serenade	3:32	String Quartet No. 17 in C major (1938)		18:13
4 IV. Finale: Allegretto	5:07	9 I. Adagio – Allegro		7:47
String Quartet No. 16 in B flat major, 'Celtic' (1938)		10 II. Introduction and Serenade		5:25
5 I. Adagio – Allegretto	8:07	11 III. Finale		4:56

ALL WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Dominion String Quartet
Yury Gezentsvey, Violin I • Rosemary Harris, Violin II
Donald Maurice, Viola • David Chickering, Cello

Recorded at Park Road Post, Wellington, New Zealand, 5–6 May & 1 September 2014
Producer & Editor: Wayne Laird • Engineers: John Neill, Toby Lloyd • Publisher: Stiles Music Publishers
Booklet notes: Donald Maurice and Allan Stiles • Cover painting of Alfred Hill by Chai Ben-Shan



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64:34



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