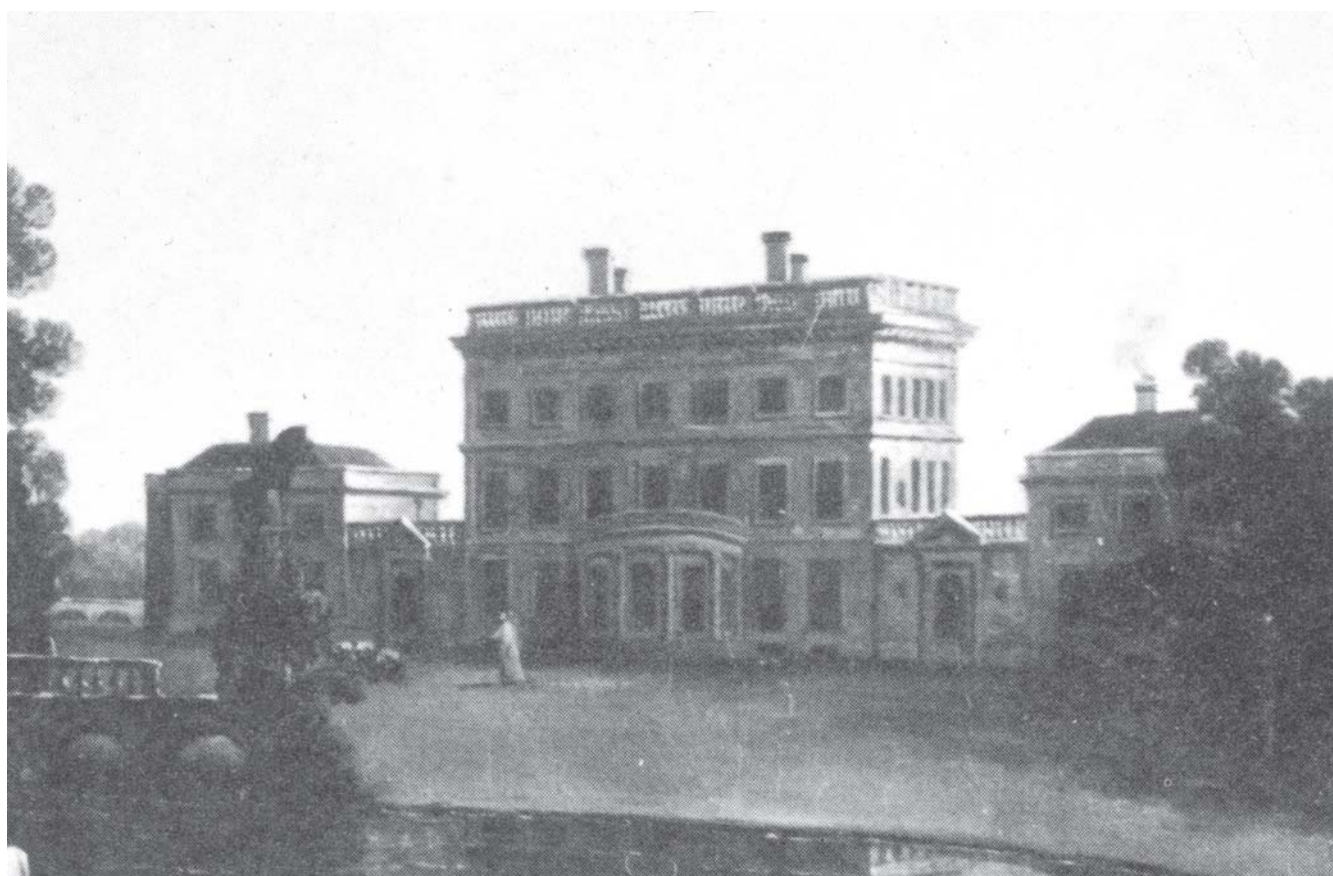


SHUGBOROUGH ECHOES



STRING QUARTET IN A MINOR "ECHOES"

KERRY MILAN 2011.

Shugborough's Echoes

Following on from Stafford Music Festival's première of 'Pippa Passes' with Yvonne Howard and the English Piano Trio in 2011 I had a request from Andrew Baker for a string quartet "with some kind of Greek idea behind it, or Shugborough-related theme" to tie in with plans to celebrate Shugborough's importance in the story of the Greek Revival and the 18th century's fascination for all things Asia Minor. A minor, then, for the key! And an Aeolian theme.

Now a National Trust property, with its estate in the care of Staffordshire County Council, Shugborough had been home to the Anson family since 1624, the first Earl of Lichfield being created in 1831. It is a substantial estate on the edge of Cannock Chase, just a few miles from Stafford. It was Thomas Anson who commissioned James "Athenian" Stuart to work on the estate, and it seems The Shepherd's Monument was carved by Scheemakers as part of this grand project. The idea of Arcadia as a kind of earthly paradise with its idealised life-style, with its shepherds, music and dancing and all the pleasures of life on earth is captured in what is a mirror image of Poussin's 'Et in Arcadia Ego' painting; but more than that, the enigmatic code beneath the carving reminds us that hidden meanings and messages have always been part, not just of sculpture and art, but of music too.



We can now only guess at the meaning of the Shugborough inscription; but there is no secret about the F-A-E sonata that Schumann and Brahms collaborated on as a present to the violinist Joachim, "Frei Aber Einsam" (free but lonely) being the celebrated violinist's personal motto.



Another popular device for a musical cryptogram is the use of the musical letters from within a name, the BACH motif ($B = Bb$, $H = B\sharp$ in German notation) being used by hundreds of composers including Bach himself, both as a theme and a bass line. Schumann and Brahms even go so far as to use S for Es (Eb), with Schumann depicting himself SCHA in Carnival, and Brahms using BAHS in his $A\flat$ minor organ fugue. (This, though, is a step too far for me!) Of course the message can be disguised, Bach in his Sinfonia in F minor BWV 795 opening with a transposed version and only later introducing the original.

In keeping with the spirit of the age, then, the first subject of "Echoes", and the motif that permeates the music, is ArCADiA, initially transposed a 5th up to EGAE to suit the Aeolian mood. Although not in Sonata Form the work does have a certain classical symmetry to it and a second subject in the dominant key of E minor which uses the sHuGBorouGH notes for its theme. This is heard later in the recapitulation and then again in the work's dying moments, following a somewhat troubled coda where the Arcadia theme now appears in its 'true' form, reminding us that not everything at Shugborough has always been truly Elysian.



Water has long been a feature of the Shugborough landscape, flowing around, through and even under it. Any reference to the CHASE stream (Schumann-style) is purely accidental; but the stAFForD motif, in its various guises, is central to the rippling background which binds together so much of the music's middle section.

The river Sow flows on from Stafford to join the river Trent immediately before the famous old packhorse bridge crossing at Great Haywood, and against the gently running water you may just make out an echo of the splendid Chinese House which Thomas Anson had constructed nearby following a visit to Canton.



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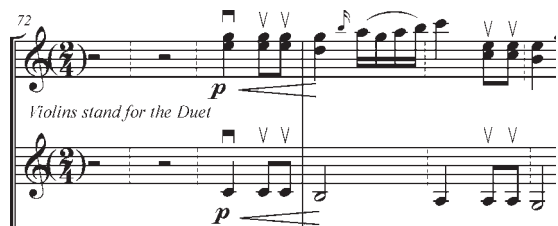


This leads on to an initially *misterioso* introduction to a new liCHFIEID theme, picked up by the first violin, but soon leading to an elegant waltz version introduced by a high, treble-clef 'cello part, partnered by the viola.



Things now get a bit more complicated.

One intention of “Echoes” was to celebrate some of the musicians who have visited Shugborough over the years, and Thomas Anson’s own interest in this field may be illustrated by his friendship with the Bohemian composer and violinist Anton Kammell, well-known in 18th century London and no stranger to Shugborough. Indeed his Six Duos, opus 5, published c. 1768, are dedicated to Anson, and a few years ago a colleague John Dunn and I performed some of these same duos at the House as part of a conference on the Greek Revival, perhaps their first outing in some 240 years.



What follows, then, is the two violinists performing part of one of these Kammell duos, a sprightly dance in two-four time, against the graceful waltz time of the lower instruments. It may take the ear a little time to separate out the two strands of music, but hopefully not too long. Fortunately there is a repeat here, so you get two chances!

The viola then leads off into an extended development section, with the Arcadia motif set against a rippling accompaniment and including a new take on the theme presented first by the viola and then by the 'cello, the music eventually winding down after any number of modulations into A minor again, and a brand new *Tranquillo* section.

Local librarian and composer Andrew Baker has long had associations with Shugborough and indeed in 2005 was Composer in Residence there. His ADE BAE motif provides the perfect backdrop to this quiet section which is really a tribute to another famous visitor, the 5th Earl

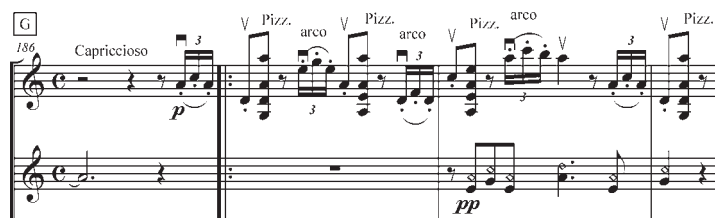


Patrick Lichfield’s great friend Mick Jagger, whose visits will be remembered not least for the occasion when fire (whose cigarette is not clear) damaged the magnificent painted ceiling of one of the House’s most treasured rooms, the Boudoir. Here, then, is Shugborough as Sanctuary, a



quiet haven in the quest for calm and inner satisfaction.

Suddenly the mood changes and we are in a different world, *giocososo capriccioso*. The first violin part (*starting ACADA*) is very difficult, capricious and not for the faint-hearted with its ever-risky flying ricochet bowings and across-the-strings pizzicato. But then, we are now in a high-stakes gambling den!



The second violin part is equally captivating. It is played flute-like with artificial harmonics, the player placing two fingers on the one string to produce a whispering melody based on the Arcadia theme and

built entirely on the Aeolian mode, a scale named after Aeolus, legendary Keeper of the Winds. And of course Arcadia was the land of Pan, so it will be no surprise to learn that we are now arrived at the Tower of the Winds, a reproduction of “The Horlogium of Andronikos Cyrrhestes” in Athens, completed in 1765 by Thomas Trubshaw of Great Haywood. Once used as a dairy, downstairs, the upper floor was for betting rather than butter, revealing an altogether darker side to this refined world.

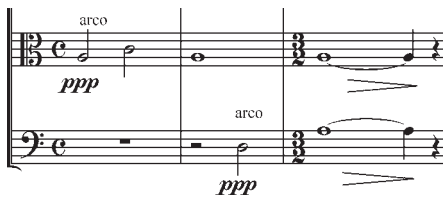




Suddenly, though, it is Sunday and Church, time to assume a more sober aspect. The church of St Stephen, Great Haywood (designed by Trubshaw) is very close to the House; but the old Essex Bridge was narrow and impractical in the days of carriages and so bridges across the



river Trent and the new neighbouring canal were constructed to get the family to prayers. The prayer-like devotional section that now follows (*notice the ACADA bass line shared by viola and 'cello*) is very quiet and meditative; but then, almost



in a flash, we are back to the livelier atmosphere of the Tower of the Winds and living dangerously.

The recapitulation sees both the opening themes again, but leading this time to the ACADA motto's rather turbulent coda, a reminder of the difficult times the estate has on occasion had to weather. At the end, though, all is calm, and even a final plaintive (and disguised) sHuGBoroGH, and a last Jagger-like cry both fade to leave us with a warm, satisfying major chord that hopefully nicely sums up today's Shugborough.



Kerry Milan, September 2011, Stafford.