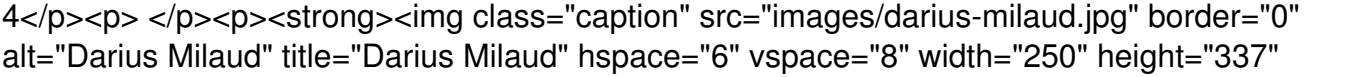
 Fusion Wind Quintet, Lunchtime Concert

Reviewed by Denis Joe ♦ April 2011 at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

Fusion was formed by members of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in the spring of 2002 for a series of quintet and trio concerts in Liverpool, Preston, Derby and Caldy. Since then it has performed regularly at Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool to great acclaim: "They demonstrated a beautifully rounded, sophisticated sound" Glyn M Hughes, Liverpool Daily Post. They also perform regularly at venues throughout the North West and, as well as giving concerts, are very committed to education work. The name Fusion signifies the coming together and blending of the very diverse sounds of the wind section of the orchestra.

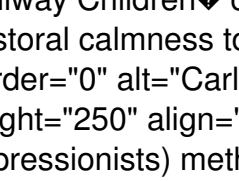
Cormac Henry, flute
Rachael Pankhurst, oboe (Cor Anglais)
Katherine Lacy, clarinet
Timothy Jackson, horn
Sarah Whibley, bassoon
Nielsen Quintet for Winds, Opus. 43
Milhaud La Chemin du Roi Ren Suite for Wind Quintet, Opus. 205
Arnold Three Shanties for Wind Quintet Op. 4

 In 1939 Darius Milhaud, in collaboration with Arthur Honegger and Roger D'ormi, collaborated on the score of the film Cavalcade d'amour, by Raymond Bernard.

The film took a humorous look at the subject of love. It was divided into three parts, set in the periods 1430, 1830 and 1930. Milhaud agreed to set music for the first part, later taking themes from his film score to compose La Chemin du Roi Ren Suite. The suite has seven movements and is based the most famous troubadour court of the Middle Ages, that of Ren Anjou, situated in Aix-en-Provence (Milhaud's birthplace). It captures well that sense of court music of the period, and each movement could almost be a painting of the themes. The final movement will be recognisable to those insomniacs who stay up late listening to Radio 3 Through The Night, as the nocturne is used for the programme's theme music.

Milhaud was a member of Les six, a group of composers who were given the title by the music critic Henri Collet in an article in 1926 - each member having their own style, and as Milhaud put it: [Collet] chose six names absolutely arbitrarily, those of [Georges] Auric, [Louis] Durey, [Arthur] Honegger, [Francis] Poulenc, [Germaine] Tailleferre and me simply because we knew each other and we were pals and appeared on the same musical programmes, no matter if our temperaments and personalities weren't at all the same! Auric and Poulenc followed ideas of Cocteau, Honegger followed German Romanticism, and myself, Mediterranean lyricism! And it is that lyricism that gives much of Milhaud's music a light feel to it. It is very endearing music and never seems to make too many demands on the listener. Although I wouldn't class him as a Great composer, the lightness of his music conceals a serious approach. There is a timeless quality to his music and that is evident in this suite. Now and again you can hear passages that seem to hark back to the Middle Ages court music, yet there is still something decidedly modern about it. The music reminds me of some of the soundtracks to British films of the 1960s and 70s, such as The

Railway Children or Kes. Whilst it has that Mediterranean vibrancy, there is also a pastoral calmness to it.

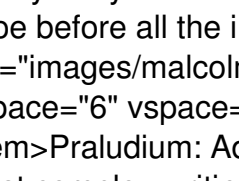
It would not be out of place to use visual artist (particularly the Impressionists) methods when describing Milhaud's approach. Whilst one or two instruments play a theme the same theme is then taken up by the other group members and blends in; rather than imposing another voice. This subtle blending is something that is a feature of Milhaud's music, and is perhaps, what makes it so accessible. My reasons for excluding Milhaud from The Greats is simply that his music never seems to have much to say for itself. But that is not intended to dismiss his work. He was definitely a master craftsman, whose intention may well have been to just entertain. And this piece certainly does that, making it hard not to listen to Milhaud without smiling.

If Milhaud showed the Fusion Quintet working in concord, in Nielsen's *Wind Quintet* we get to experience the individual skill of each player individually as well as collectively.

The Quintet was originally dedicated to the members of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, who debuted it in 1922, where it was an immediate success. It was a rehearsal by this group of Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante, which Nielsen heard over the telephone, that inspired him to write the work. After composing this, he had planned to write a concerto for each of the five instruments with orchestra. Unfortunately, he only completed two of the five, the flute and clarinet concertos, before his death in 1931.

What makes this piece so endearing is that each of its movements suggest a means to an end rather than a commitment from the outset. In the first movement, *Allegro ben Moderato*, the bassoon plays a statement, in E, which is then taken up by the other wind instrument. The horn takes up the theme in A. There then follows a canonical flow, passing through E minor, G minor, and A minor, before a second theme, in D minor appears, first in the horn, and then from the oboe and bassoon, both times accompanied in snatched triplets by the flute and clarinet leading to a repeat of the first theme before another theme is introduced by the horn. There follows a bout, where each soloist attempts to assert themselves, and the movement closes on a brief coda from the wind instruments.

The Second Movement, *Menuett*, takes us into a more ordered, classical, place. There is very little for the horn to do in this movement, the theme is played by the clarinet and bassoon. A second theme, is brought in, also a duet, by flute and oboe before all the instruments take it up.

The Third Movement (*Praludium: Adagio. Tema con variazioni: Un poco andantino*) is one of Nielsen's most complex writings for chamber music. The grim introduction in C minor is played, initially, by Cor Anglais before being taken up by flute and clarinet. This feels like a workout for the variations on a theme that Nielsen wrote himself. The music is taken from a hymn, written in 1916, called *Min Jesus, Lad Mit Hjerte Faa*. There are eleven variations which call the strengths of the group individually, before they come together in a cheerful modification of the theme to close.

There seems to be a strong feeling of solemnity to this final movement, but somehow it also seems to be self-mocking. What is not in doubt, though, is the seriousness of intent applied to scoring this piece. The music is recognisable as Carl Nielsen, and has that wonderful warmth to it that was peculiar to much of his work. Of all the composers of the early 20th century I would put Nielsen in a high ranking. Alongside his contemporary, Shostakovich, he was a giant whose music speaks to us of humanity; of a

composer who belongs to the World, so much so that even this chamber piece carries much of that feeling with it.

Arnold's Three Shanties were written in 1943 and were based off of three folk songs: *The Drunken Sailor*, *Bonny was a warrior*, and *Johnny come down to Hilo*.

The drunken sailor in the first movement is brilliantly portrayed in various stages of intoxication. He chases his pigtailed in a canon at the minor third, develops hiccoughs, finds himself in a state of remorse, on the shores of South America, dancing the tango to a minor key; but eventually he pulls himself together and reports for duty, presto ben marcato.

Boney was a warrior heads the second movement and, by taking *was* as the operative word, the composer makes this the contrasting movement. The last shanty is based on *Johnny come down to Hilo* and is bursting with humour and boisterousness. The writing for the instruments is brightly coloured throughout. In this type of work Arnold is at his best.

[**Chester-Novello Music Co.**]

British composers, such as Constant Lambert, were taken by the music of Latin America. This is obvious in *The Three Shanties*. However the style suggests the interpretation by US composers rather than the actual music itself. The final movement of *Three Shanties* looks forward to Leonard Bernstein. If I didn't know any better I would swear that the music came straight from *West Side Story*.

I never thought of Arnold as a serious composer; more a skilled populist. Nevertheless, however accessible his music is, the *Three Shanties* make for some quite devilishly difficult playing. This is as near to Paganini-like demands as it gets. It was obviously enjoyable for the Fusion Quintet, particularly Cormac Henry, the flautist, as it allowed each member to show off and it made for an excellent and entertaining end to this concert.

The Fusion Quintet is an outstanding chamber group. Today's programme was an intelligent selection that displayed a level of musicianship that would be hard to equal, coupled with the group's ability to present this music in a serious but also highly engaging manner. They are not returning to the Philharmonic Hall until the end of December but I would recommend that you catch them at the 2011 [Chester Summer Music Festival](http://www.chesterfestivals.co.uk/site/music-festival "Chester Summer Music Festival") on 15 July 2011, at St Mary's Centre where they will be playing Nielsen, Arnold and Norman Hallam's *Dance Suite*.