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Note from the Author

It was quite a few years ago that I had the idea to document the many years I have spent in the music profession, first as an orchestral player but then as a soloist and the founder and leader of the Arditti Quartet. My interest in contemporary music goes back to my early teens and has continued through a celebrated 48 years of quartet playing, working with many of the most interesting contemporary composers.

What started as a keen interest in new music that not many players understood or would dare to approach grew into a vast repertoire of string quartets in the last quarter of the twentieth century and up to the present day. Many of the works written specifically for the Arditti Quartet are masterpieces and now standard repertoire for our ensemble and others.

The idea of this book is to present the information that I learnt working in close collaboration with composers. As many of these composers are no longer with us, the knowledge that I have inherited is perhaps of historical importance. This unique knowledge is not restricted to music for string quartet, as many of these composers have also honoured me with solo pieces and violin concertos.

Some of the scores have benefited from joint collaboration, with an exchange of ideas taking place before the scores became definitive. I will go into considerable detail for some of the scores, explaining performing techniques and specific requests of the composers. It seems important to pass on my knowledge to younger generations of performers interested in the music of our time. When giving master classes with young quartets, I have been surprised how much supplementary information there is to be given beyond the text of the score.

I also want to include many anecdotal stories that cemented my relationships with these composers and provide a clue as to how they thought about themselves and their music, how they treated performers, and what feedback I could expect from each one as to how they wanted their music performed. The book includes many musical examples to clarify the text.

The story starts from my cot as a baby and continues through my early interest in contemporary music, my time at the Royal Academy of Music in London,

and my time with the London Symphony Orchestra. Thereafter, there is a chapter on each composer, dealt with in the chronological order that I worked with them and played their works.

I must apologise to the many composers I have not been able to include who also have had and continue to have a close relationship with myself and the quartet. It was not possible to make the book any longer as I was advised it should be something that people could carry around with them, not a heavy encyclopaedia condemned to remain on the bookshelf. I hope the information in this book will be useful and of interest.

Irvine Arditti