Turner, K: Rule Britannia!
Theme and Variations for Horn Quartet

Rule Britannia! for Horn Quartet was composed in December of 2002. The work was intended to be a show piece for the American Horn Quartet, who premiered it at the International Horn Society's 35th International Horn Symposium in Bloomington, Indiana. Set in a theme and variations format, this piece, as with other horn quartet works by the composer, runs the gamut of all technical possibilities of four horns in an ensemble.

The theme of Rule Britannia! has long been a favorite of Mr. Turner, who has always considered the melody to be rich in potential for variations. Indeed, it was upon hearing another set of variations on the theme at the "Last Night at the Proms" concert, performed by the BBC Symphony at Royal Albert Hall in London, that the composer first toyed with the idea of creating his own set of variations. After an initial and straightforward rendition of the theme, a fortissimo upward glissando of a 9th launches the listener into Variation 1, which is tempestuous and colorful in character. Variation 2 is played by the alto voice in horn 2, accompanied by the other horns with mutes. In Variation 3, a gust of chromaticism encircles the theme, and by the time we reach Variation 4, which is the longest and most developed of the variations, the theme has transformed into a lyrical melody. There is a fugal bridge section which leads to Variation 5 and to the written key of Bb, which is the ideal key for the extreme virtuosity of this closing section.

Rule Britannia! Can be considered the 4th work in a line of similar works for horns (Farewell to Red Castle, Barbara Allen and Ghosts of Dublin) which have been recorded by the American Horn Quartet and the Horns of the New York Philharmonic.

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