

"The Times"

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It is quite misleading to speak of the "Phantasy" as a new musical form. The term has merely been applied recently by the Worshipful Company of Musicians to certain compositions for string quartet of smaller dimensions and more free structure than the form which in classical times was invariably connected with this combination of instruments. The name refers to the old English form of the "Fancy" for sets of viols; but the allusion is not a very happy one, since, if report speak true, the "Fancy" betokened no very high level of English art. However, a very generous prize was offered for the best composition of this type, and if the experiment has not produced anything very significant from a formal aspect, it has called forth some very good music from a number of young Englishmen. Six examples, to all of which prizes had been awarded, were played at Bechstein-hall last night, and well played, by the Saunders Quartette. The first prize was gained by a "Phantasy in A" by the late W. Y. Hartstone. Needless to say, this work received a particularly sympathetic hearing in view of the sad circumstances of the recent death of the composer; but apart from this, it commands attention as a beautiful piece of music. Especially its dignified and Bach-like opening marks it as head and shoulders above its fellows. The only composition not a Phantasy performed was the same composer's song "The Blind Boy," which shares with the former work the qualities of thoughtfulness and repose. The other Phantasies performed were by Frank Bridge, Haydn Wood, Josef Holbrooke, Waldo Warner, and James Friskin. All show merit of a kind, generally in the direction of a certain poetic charm of idea rather weakly developed. Some are marred by "scratchy" passages, the result of an imperfect mastery of the technique of the string quartet, and almost all are really written in a sort of compressed, we had almost said mutilated, sonata form, as if, after all, the composers were not very willing to accept this much-vaulted freedom. The most distinctive are those by Josef Holbrooke and James Friskin. Something, perhaps the delicate nature of the string quartet, has led the former to discard much of his eccentricity and crude mannerism, and his real earnestness of purpose becomes apparent. There is real beauty in the adagio. James Friskin's work has the saving grace of humour, the lack of which made one or two of the others rather heavy. It appears to have been the absence of the same blessed quality which killed the English "Fancy" of the 17th century.