

BBC Young Musician 2020

Clive Fairbairn attended the category finals in March



Hearty congratulations are due for the oboist Ewan Millar (see DRN125), who has won the Woodwind Final of this highly prestigious competition. This puts him amongst the five category winners competing in the semi-final and final. The semi-final reduces the five instrumentalists to three; each will then compete by playing a concerto with the BBC Philharmonic to discover the overall winner of the competition. The BBC hopes to transmit these last stages in the autumn.

This was a huge achievement for 18-year old Ewan who is in his first year reading music at St Hilda's College, Oxford. Now studying with Melanie Ragge, he was a pupil of Nicky Fairbairn at Berkshire Maestros in Reading, Berkshire from the age of 8 until he left school last summer.

The category finals for all instruments were held in Cardiff at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama during March, just before lockdown intervened, causing a disappointing delay for performers and audiences alike. Nevertheless, the BBC re-scheduled all the category finals and showed these on Sunday evenings throughout May on BBC Four, the woodwind final being on 10th May.

Should Ewan Millar reach the Final it will be tremendously exciting for the double-reed fraternity. By winning overall he would join a very select group of two! Nicholas Daniel is the only other oboe winner (1980) in the history of the competition which has been running since 1978. No pressure! Watch out for further announcements from the BBC during the summer/autumn.

Barbirolli Oboe Festival and Competition

Like many other events this year, the Barbirolli competition will not be taking place. It has been postponed until 27th March 2021. Further details at www.erinartscentre.com/oboe.html

The Virtual Oboe Competition

from Michael Britton

Howarth of London is pleased to announce that it is one of the sponsors of the Virtual Oboe Competition just established by Claire Brazeau of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. Many students will have been practising for the Barbirolli Oboe Competition and the IDRS Oboe Competition so, as these have had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, Claire thought it would be a good idea to set up a virtual competition instead. She has put together an excellent panel of international judges.

A website has been set up: www.virtualoboe.com and more information is being added day by day. Please tell all the young oboists you know or teach; it should help motivate their practise during these difficult times!

Laurence Perkins' mammoth response to lockdown



Photo: Christos Baimpakis

Not to be cowed by a mere virus, the irrepressible Laurence Perkins decided on yet another new bassoon project, one which would occupy him during the predicted period of social restraint and self-distancing. His large library of personal performance recordings provided him with a basis to which he added further material to create no fewer than 61 items to put on his website – one for each of the days of April and May.

For those who missed them, these daily postings consisted of short items (generally up to 10-minutes long) from all musical periods, many unaccompanied, some enhanced by visuals, and broadcast in daily themes. As well as building up an enormous variety of new material to enjoy each day, they revealed some of Laurence's other interests including poetry, a love of remote countrysides, and photography. Inspiration for this last one is traced back to his father, Frank Perkins, a professional photographer: in Programme 40 (10th May) Laurence played an aural backdrop to footage of gardens and flowers filmed by his father in the 1960s.

It is to be hoped that these 61 performances were enjoyed not only by BDRS members but by a wider audience, as a precursor to un-Lockdown, when musical and much other 'normal' life can begin to return.

Three Premieres and a Recording of new works for oboe in 2019

from Sarah Roper



Luke Styles

Neon Highway, a new concerto for oboe and 11 instruments, was written in 2019 by British/Australian composer, Luke Styles and published by Schirmer; it was first premiered on 25th October 2019.

The work is dedicated to the oboist Ben Opie and was given the world premiere by Ben himself and the Arcko Symphonic Ensemble in Melbourne, Australia. Due to international collaboration between contemporary music festivals and ensembles in Australia, Scotland and Spain over a period

of four months, the concerto received three premieres in three countries involving three different oboe soloists.

The work was commissioned jointly by an anonymous donor, Red Note Ensemble and Aberdeen's 2019 *soundfestival*, Ben Opie and Timothy Phillips. The composition of the work was assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

This was a very exciting project as it involved so many players in different parts of the world, all focused on the same work. The performances were received very well by the public and we expect to hear this fantastic new work for oboe being performed again in the near future. The full details of the performances:



World Premiere in Melbourne, Australia

Ben Opie (oboe), Arcko Symphonic Ensemble with Timothy Phillips
25th October 2019 in St Stephen's Anglican Church, Richmond, Melbourne, Australia

Nicholas Daniel (oboe), Red Note Ensemble and Any Enemy with Simon Proust
1st November 2019 at the *soundfestival*, Aberdeen, Scotland.

Sarah Roper (oboe), Taller Sonoro Ensemble with Timothy Phillips
24th January 2020 "Encuentros Sonoros", IX International Contemporary Music Festival, Espacio Turina, Sevilla, Spain.

www.lukestyles.com

Cuarteto con Oboe by Jesús Torres was composed back in 2009, but the audio recording was made at the end of 2019 by Cuarteto Emispherio with Oboe Classics. This is a world premiere digital (only) audio and video recording and has already received excellent reviews from Jeremy Polmear and the composer himself.

For links to download the audio recording and programme notes written by Sarah Roper go to www.oboeclassics.com/digital
The video was published on Youtube at the same time:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5wW8uNTIRE
Trailer: youtu.be/TKRtGyWv5r8

Further reviews will appear on the Cuarteto Emispherio website:
www.cuartetoemispherio.wordpress.com/reviews

Reviews

CD REVIEWS

Oboe Sonatas

Works by Arnold Cooke, Richard Elfyn Jones and

Catherine Tanner Williams

Catherine Tanner Williams, oboe

Christopher Williams, piano

Willowhayne Records (2020)

www.willowhaynerecords.com



This is the second commercial recording released by Catherine Tanner Williams and Christopher Williams through Willowhayne Records and once again this duo has contributed greatly to the double reed world. Their first disc with Willowhayne Records featured premiere recordings of new arrangements of works by R. Strauss, Glinka

and Mozart for oboe and piano (see David Cowley's review in the DRN121, 2018), and this new recording is a fantastic compilation of hardly known British works for oboe and piano. This disc is thoughtfully put together with strong historical and geographical links between each piece: all three composers are connected through the premiere performance of each other's works. First we hear two sonatas by Arnold Cooke (1906 – 2005) – last recorded for radio by Evelyn Rothwell and Sarah Francis in the 1980s – followed by world premiere recordings of the sonata by Richard Elfyn Jones (b.1944) and two short pieces by Catherine herself.

The sonatas for oboe and piano by Arnold Cooke, a student of Hindemith during the 1930s, are conventional in structure and similar in style and material. In particular, one is drawn to the obvious influence of his teacher, heard very clearly in the harmonies and baroque-style dotted rhythms. The *Sonata for Oboe* and harpsichord or piano (1962), dedicated to Evelyn Rothwell (Lady Barbirolli) and Vera Aveling, is performed here with piano; Catherine justifies this in her programme notes with the need to be able to sustain long held chords and to realise the 'symphonic textures and orchestral power'. I agree and the performance is very convincing; but I am, however, curious to hear the same work played with a shorter articulated and lighter harpsichord accompaniment underneath the legato oboe phrases. The *Sonata for Oboe and Piano* (1957), dedicated to Léon Goossens, begins with a wonderful Andante – Allegro vivace. The opening lines played expressively by both musicians captivate the listener into wanting to hear and discover more. The piece switches between varied material and minor and major keys throughout the sonata, concluding with the same beautiful opening theme from the first movement.

The *Sonata for Oboe and Piano – Viva Altea!* by Richard Elfyn Jones, a versatile and prolific composer, was premiered by Catherine and Christopher in Newport in March 2019. The title of the work derives from the name of a charming Spanish old

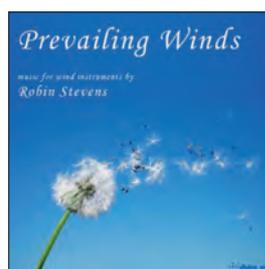
white town in Alicante, on the Costa Blanca where he spent time to write parts of the piece. I do not detect any obvious Spanish influence in the music, despite the title and names of each movement. Jones does explain in the notes, however, that his 'compositional process is fundamentally an abstract one'. Catherine and Christopher offer a fresh and energetic interpretation of *Viva Altea*. They depict the playfulness in the *Fiesta en la playa* perfectly, and sensitively portray the opening melancholic melody in the pastoral *Meditación*. The *Barullo!*, dominated by a cakewalk rhythm, closes with a grandiose cantabile section where the Williams duo really triumphs in homogeneity of sound.

Both pieces by Catherine Tanner Williams (b.1973) are great additions to the oboe repertoire and perfect for including in an oboe and piano recital programme. *Luminous*, is a delightful 6-minute insect piece, picturing fireflies in a forest at moonlight with intricate fast and staccato dialogues, mixed with contrasting slow singing material. The 10-minute *Darkness Falling with Birdsong* is a peaceful, pastoral piece based on the scene of Stackpole Quay, Pembrokeshire in a wooded valley. Catherine eloquently plays the cantabile lines with wide legato leaps and, along with Christopher, closes the recital with a sense of relaxation and completeness.

The ensemble playing between both players is extremely good and this is not surprising, since the duo has been making music together for the past 27 years. Both musicians also shine individually: Christopher's excellent accompanying is sensitive and attentive and Catherine's singing oboe tone, good control of high notes and rich sounding lower register stand out. Recorded in Wyastone Concert Hall, the overall sound of the disc is very appealing to the ear with a lovely natural and balanced concert hall feel. Catherine proves herself to be a talented oboist, composer, artist (the artwork of the CD cover is hers), and an avid writer and supporter of new music for the oboe. I congratulate her on her work and thank her for sharing her passion with us.

Sarah Roper

Prevailing Winds
Music for oboe, bassoon etc
by Robin Stevens
Divine Art DDA 25194



This collection of miniatures for wind instruments is an absolute treat! Discovering a composer for the first time is so often an enjoyable experience, and within these 25 tracks (spread across two discs) there was so much variety to savour. The performances by all musicians featured were full of energy and

character and my hope is that several of these pieces will find their way into oboe and bassoon recitals in the coming years, as well as perhaps the various exam syllabi.

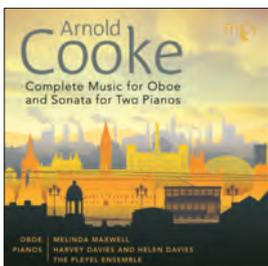
The recording opens with *Oceanic Lullaby* which is beautifully lyrical, and played with such sensitivity by husband and wife team Richard (oboe) and Janet (piano) Simpson. Then two works featured for solo oboe create an entirely different atmosphere. There are three very contrasting character pieces for bassoon and piano called *Three Epigrams* which are short but particularly engaging, and it struck me that Robin Stevens' approach to writing for bassoon is always full of energy and humour. Helen Peller has demonstrated this to great effect. *Concert Rondo* for oboe and piano is another work that certainly deserves performances in the future. For those seeking wind quintet repertoire the collection draws to a close with *Sweet Soufflé* which provides such a great way to round off this recording, full of contrast and intrigue.

I must admit I had not previously heard Robin Stevens' music, but this disc was an admirable introduction, with more of his works being released in the near future. This recording is particularly effective in showing the clear characters depicted in each miniature. I was left contemplating the way in which these works might fit into recital repertoire. I'm drawn to the way in which oboists such as Léon Goossens would feature many short pieces within a concert rather than two or three substantial sonatas. The music featured here would certainly suit concerts following this approach; but they could also perhaps find a home in chamber recitals where wind groups wish to break up concerts with short pieces featuring solo instruments.

Reviewing this disc during COVID-induced lockdown meant sharing some listening to it with two of my children nearby, who immediately sprung into dance and engaged with the performances in a way that was really refreshing to see. It made me realise the potential for Robin Stevens' music to be heard by audiences of all ages and stages. Congratulations go to the composer, performers and production team for this wonderful recording!

James Turnbull

Arnold Cooke
The Complete Music for Oboe
and Sonata for Two Pianos
The Pleyel Ensemble
MPR 108
www.mikepurtonrecording.com



Arnold Cooke's music has been making slow but steadily increasing appearances on disc in the last decade or so, not least when buttressed by archive restorations of two of his significant symphonies on Lyrita; but the principal promoter of his music in most recent years has been MPR, which has lavished devotion on the under-

explored arena of Cooke's chamber music. After discs focusing on his violin sonatas and on his piano trio, piano quartet and piano quintet comes this comprehensive look at Cooke's oboe compositions.

The *Sonata for Oboe and Piano* was written in 1957 and dedicated to Léon Goossens. It illustrates Cooke's variety of

means in music of vitality and expressive depth, its slow opening section allowing the oboe to pursue its lyricism, and the faster material to reveal dexterous authority. The rolled chords of the slow movement evoke momentarily the baroque, whilst anticipating a languid sense of tristesse, and the jig-based finale hints at a sublimated folk element in the sonata. This is an exceptionally rewarding work, with rhythmic variety, skittish exchanges between the instruments, plenty of contrasts of tempo, texture and mood, and the confidence to end quietly.

The 1962 sonata that Cooke wrote for Evelyn Rothwell and Valda Aveling is for 'Oboe and Cembalo or Piano'. Given the nature of the dynamic markings and pedalling considerations, this recording chooses the latter option, Harvey Davies once again joining Melinda Maxwell. As before, Cooke prefers a slow introduction followed by excellently articulated faster passages, their rootedness in Hindemith hardly obscuring their brilliant effect. This level of eloquence is sustained in the slow movement in which rolled chords once again feature; and here one feels a bardic harp-like quality to the writing, the oboe singing somewhat aloof, before relenting to prepare for a more vigorous and assertive dramatic contrast. Chromatic and contrapuntal, the finale is joyful and lively.

In years gone by Cooke seems to have gained a reputation as a somewhat dour composer, but this is contradicted at every stage in these works. The long-breathed lyricism of the *Intermezzo* – a 28-bar polyphonic miniature composed in 1987 for the 90th birthday celebration concert for Léon Goossens – is yet more evidence of his rare gifts, here specifically for compression, both of size and feeling. The *Quartet for Oboe and String Trio* is an earlier work dating from 1948. As so often with Cooke, the building blocks are short motifs that are warmly and entertainingly developed. Once again, Goossens is strongly associated with this piece having premiered it with the Carter String Trio; its modality must have strongly appealed to him, as well as its energetic dynamism, the lovely aria at its heart, and the chance to orate in the finale's cadenza.

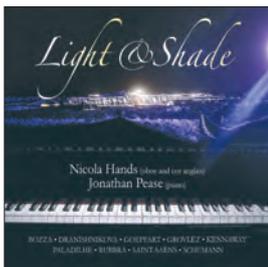
The non-oboe piece is the *Sonata for Two Pianos* of 1936-37, possibly inspired in form by Stravinsky but owing more stylistically to Hindemith. It has real amplitude and sense of direction, buoyant, tart, adroit and encoding a kind of crypto-Shostakovich circus galop in the last movement. Harvey Davies and his mother Helen Davies are the intrepid exponents.

This is the first recording of Cooke's complete oboe works and it offers splendidly fluent and focused performances from members of The Pleyel Ensemble. Melinda Maxwell conveys the wit and the poignancy embedded in the music and remains tonally alluring throughout. The recorded balance is finely judged, the booklet highly informative and the cover art deliciously attractive.

Jonathan Woolf

Copies can be obtained from www.mikepurtonrecording.com, either in physical form or for download, and from all usual dealers.

Light and Shade
Various Composers
Nicola Hands, oboe and cor anglais
with Jonathan Pease, Piano



From a partnership which has several years' experience of performing together across the UK comes *Light and Shade*, a diverse collection of works for the oboe/cor anglais and piano. On this CD well-loved pieces from the oboe repertoire are contrasted with more obscure works, all varying in tone from light-hearted to more serious.

The general sound quality of the recordings, particularly the reverberation of the oboe, creates the atmosphere of a live performance.

Grovlez's *Sarabande*, in its steady triple metre, is the CD's opening piece, in which Nicola Hands expertly warms the long held notes with vibrato. Although she performs the Allegro with a distinctly contrasting character, both movements are clearly melody-dominated, with Jonathan Pease providing supportive piano accompaniment throughout. Hands then performs *Nicht Schnell* from Schumann's *Drei Romanzen Op.94*, employing a constant variation between contained playing and an open, cantabile sound in passages with louder dynamics. Bookending the CD with popular oboe works, the final piece on *Light and Shade* is Saint-Saëns' *Sonata Op.166*. Hands effectively controls tempo changes throughout the sonata, which are well-followed by Pease, such as in the Ad libitum rubato sections of the Allegretto.

Amidst the aforementioned core works from the oboe repertoire, Goepfart's *Zwei Charakterstücke Op.27* offers something different. The *Mässig schnell, gehend* includes many difficult intervals which Hands plays with secure intonation. Other interesting, lesser-known works are Paladilhe's *Solo pour Hautbois*, which was composed as a conservatoire competition piece in 1898, and Dranishnikova's *Poem*. Hands brings musical sensitivity to both pieces, particularly to their legato phrases, where her playing 'sings out' or draws back as the moods require.

Tracks three and nine, Kennaway's *Watersmeet* and Bozza's *Divertissement* demonstrate the high-quality cor anglais playing for which Hands won the Grimaldi Cor Anglais Scholarship from the Royal Academy of Music during her time as a student. Via her musical phrasing throughout *Watersmeet*, Hands both expresses nostalgia and causes the entire piece to feel like one extended melodic line.

Overall, Nicola Hands' performances across *Light and Shade* are a wonderful demonstration of the diversity of the oboe and cor anglais repertoire. It is easy to see why Jonathan Pease is in great demand as an accompanist as he is very sensitive to Hands' playing throughout the CD's programme. The combination of well-loved light-hearted pieces and more unusual and serious works should make this CD attractive not only to oboists but to a wider audience.

Bethany Craft and Michael Britton

MUSIC REVIEW

ContraDances
by Stewart Green
Phylloscopus Publications PP860
www.phylloscopus.co.uk
www.SpartanPress.co.uk
£3.95

When presented with a solo contrabassoon work, it has traditionally been the wonderful Bass Nightingale of Erwin Schulhoff that we have all grappled with. Now there is a growing repertoire for contrabassoon from composers like Waterhouse and Hansell. Another contribution to the genre from Suffolk double-reed maestro Stewart Green is the entertainingly named *ContraDances*, a delightful set of (as it says) dances for contrabassoon.

ContraDiction sets a spiky strict time section against a free, smooth expressive counter theme. The range in the first movement is perfect. The second movement, *ContraFlow*, does have some challenges when the flowing quavers change into legato crotchets in the upper 'experimental' range of the contra! The top A flat and B flat always provide that added excitement of searching out a fingering that will work. Once mastered, the vivace tempo direction will also add a feeling of great achievement, especially around the e flat and d flat (middle range) finger twisting section. *ContraBand* adds a fantastic finale to the set. It brings together all the technicalities of the preceding movements and adds the extra aspect of swinging the quavers!

It is interesting that the Phylloscopus catalogue lists *ContraDances* as a bassoon solo. *ContraDances* works fine on bassoon: but give it that extra low dimension (especially in these times of isolation) and play it on the contra! Just make sure your building foundations are strong enough!

There is also a complete version for 'low clarinet'. I cannot comment on their technicalities but I am sure this set of delights will be most welcomed by our low clarinet cousins too. When the contrabassoon and contrabass clarinet flashmob occurs I will happily recommend *ContraDances* as one of the pieces to play.

Miles Nipper