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# Double Reed NEWS

The magazine of the British Double Reed Society

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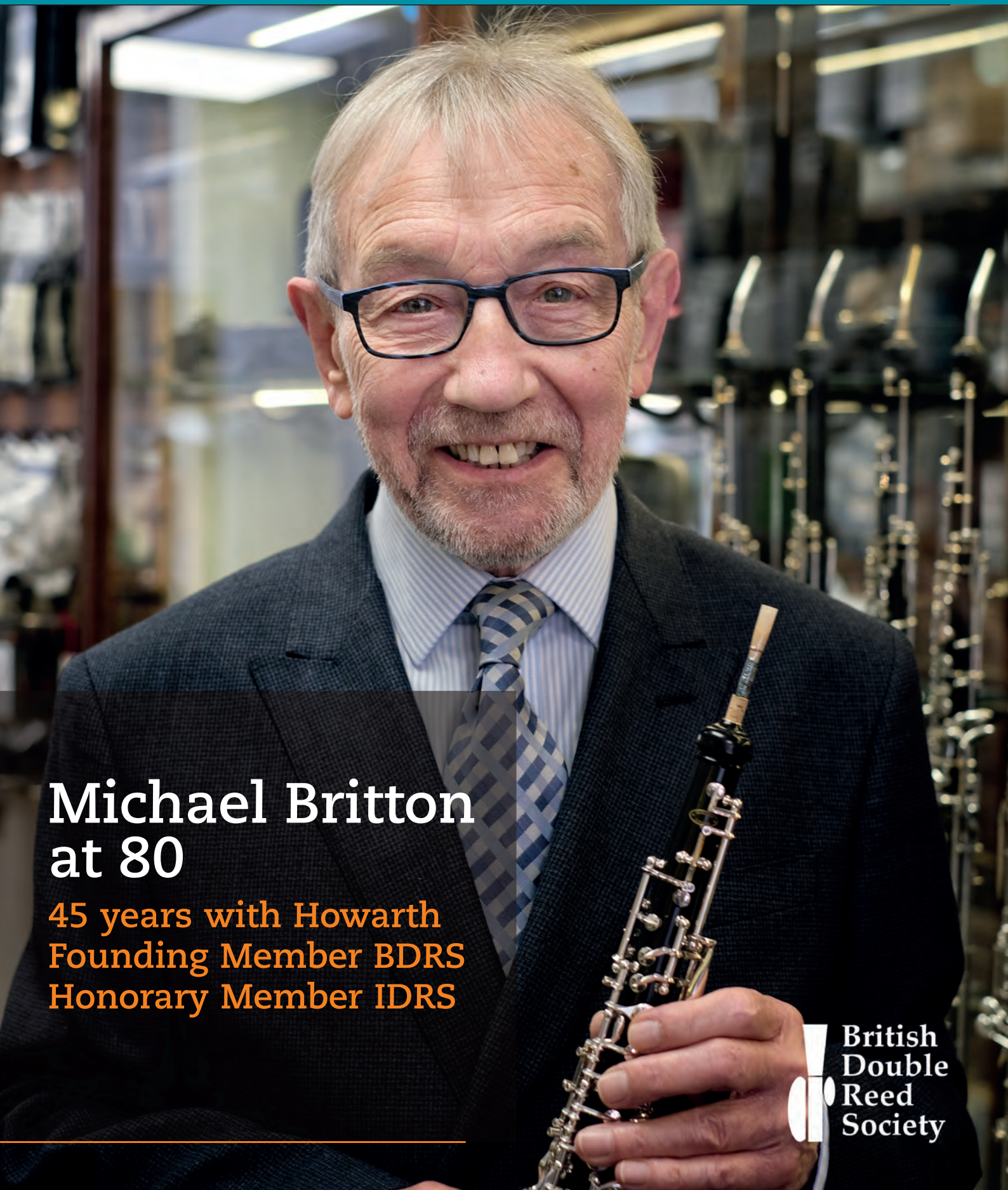

## Michael Britton at 80

### 45 years with Howarth
### Founding Member BDRS
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British Double Reed Society


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# Notes from the Chair

## James Turnbull

Welcome to the second issue of DRN for 2023! At the time of writing, the BDRS committee has been working hard to put the finishing touches to the Double Reed Festival in partnership with our hosts Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. On behalf of the BDRS, I would like to thank all the many people who have been so kind and generous in helping the festival to come to fruition. It has taken many hours of work by volunteers, traders and individuals who have supported artists and sessions on the day. This is a key part of what BDRS offers its members and I know, from speaking to people after BDRS events, that the impact can be considerable for those at all stages of their musical journey.

This year marks a milestone birthday for Howarth of London and we hope you enjoy the specially curated supplement as part of these celebrations. The role Howarth has played in establishing and developing the BDRS has been truly significant. I would like, on behalf of BDRS, to thank all at Howarth for their support over the years. As you will read in George Caird's wonderful article about the relationship between Howarth and BDRS, Michael Britton and his successors have played a crucial part in the history of this Society. This 75th birthday is a special moment and I'm sure so many BDRS members will have their own fond memories of their instruments, shop and staff. From a personal point of view, I remember very fondly as a primary school pupil, the first time I entered the shop on Chiltern Street and met Michael Britton. The warmth and kindness he showed in helping me choose my first oboe is something I have never forgotten.


Behind the scenes at BDRS the committee has been working hard implementing new safeguarding policies – ensuring the governance of the Society is updated in accordance with best practice – and embarking on the development of a new Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy. We will be looking in the coming months at how we can hone our approach to reach as many double reed players as possible. It is not always straightforward to see the many barriers that might be in place, but as a committee we are exploring ways that develop the society further to assist all double reed players in the UK. In the coming months, BDRS will be becoming more proactive in supporting music education and this will happen through several new initiatives to be announced in the next magazine later this year.

Looking ahead, we hope to see you at our next event held at the Royal Academy of Music on 29th October. As ever, do please get in touch if you would like to become more involved in the BDRS by joining the committee or helping in other ways. Contact us if there is an aspect you think BDRS can develop further. I wish you all plenty of happy music-making in the months ahead!

# In this Issue...

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# Editor's Comment

## Clive Fairbairn


Every birthday or anniversary is by definition a special event and Howarth's 75th celebrates a fine achievement. More impressive still since the company was forged at an extremely difficult time when Britain was still struggling with post-war austerity and rationing. Whilst by 1948 the lid may already have been lifted on five wartime years of repressed enterprise, life would not become easier for a decade or more. Music in the broadest sense and the music industry in particular was not impervious to this. Against this backdrop, the courage of a certain Mr T W Howarth and his friends George Ingram and Fred Mooney to establish an oboe-making company in London now seems remarkable to say the least. That the then Principal Oboe of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Edward Selwyn, should buy their very first oboe there must have been the most tremendous boost to the trio, still working from their tiny workshop.

The inserted supplement, produced by Howarth, explores that genesis; but its inclusion in this edition of DRN also recognises Howarth's support and encouragement of BDRS since its inception, as explained in our opening article by George Caird, one of the society's founders.

Moving on through this edition you will also find Andrea Ridilla recommending an item called an OboFit, James Kopp shedding light on a nineteenth-century contrabassoon and Jacqueline Leclair's paean to the cor anglais writing of the much missed and widely admired Oliver Knussen.

On a lighter note, Nicholas Daniel asks two professional women colleagues ten searching questions! And, whilst on the subject of women musicians, Martin Ludlow inquires, thought-provokingly: Are Women Bassoonists Equally Represented? Past and future BDRS events are also covered and there is a good crop of reviews.

In the next edition: Julian Roberts, the searchable index, and a birthday interview with Michael Britton.

### Instrumental Loan Scheme (ILS) at Benslow Music

Following the article about the ILS in the last edition, we have been asked to point out that ILS has its own website which is as follows: *www.benslowmusic-ils.org*

# Happy 75th Birthday Howarth! from a grateful BDRS

## George Caird

George, co-founder of the British Double Reed Society, reflects on its enduring association with Howarth of London.

As Howarth of London celebrates its 75th birthday this summer, it is important to note the close relationship that this celebrated company has had with the BDRS over the 35 years since we were founded. In fact, Howarth helped to enable the founding of the society, as is noted in the first edition of Double Reed News, produced by William Waterhouse (Editorial Adviser) and Peter Munro (Publication Manager) in September 1987. The cost of producing DRN No.1 and the subsequent four issues that came out by desktop publishing – before the first fully published issue No.6 – was noted in the editorial as being borne by oboe-makers, T W Howarth & Co Ltd, together with Fox agents, Sanderson & Taylor, and the Royal Northern College of Music which hosted the IDRS Conference in October that year.

This supportive approach has been a hallmark of Howarth's involvement in so many events and activities for oboes, bassoons and all woodwinds over the years. Their approach has been collaborative and constructive in promoting the interests of our 'endangered species' as they have been called when comparative numbers with other instruments have been cited. Howarth has been present at all BDRS events over the years, at IDRS conferences including the Manchester one in 1987, and then Birmingham in 2009 when Nigel Clarke and Michael Britton worked tirelessly to ensure the ideal location for the 100+ traders that came to serve the 1000+ delegates and performers.

Howarth features in all of the first five editions of Double Reed News but perhaps the most significant connection can be found in a 'Stop Press' on the last page of DRN No.5 in November 1988: 'At a meeting held in London on 15th November to consider further the setting up of a British Double Reed Society, a steering committee was formed under the chairmanship of Anthony Allcock. Committee members include William Waterhouse, Graham Salter, Peta MacRae, George Caird and Michael Britton.'

So, Michael Britton of Howarth of London was in at the inception of the Society and Howarth's involvement and guidance, ever-present thereafter. It was through Michael that so much was learned in how to establish and run the society, to involve the widest community of members and to succeed as a business. Acting as a link with Nigel Clarke and Howarth as a whole, Michael contributed his far-reaching knowledge of professional, amateur and educational woodwind playing and manufacture both in the UK and abroad. Michael always supported the BDRS's open collaborations with all instrument manufacturers and traders too, ensuring that whilst Howarth's unstinting support for the society was ever-present, it was always balanced, fair and inclusive.

BDRS and Double Reed News are therefore proud to be congratulating Howarth of London on its 75 years and wish them all well for many years to come. We thank Howarth for the many contributions made to our society both corporate and individual and especially to Michael Britton who, as he approaches his 80th birthday in June, should look back on our 35 years of creative collaboration – that has brought so much to BDRS and all its members – with great satisfaction.

# The Brilliant Cor Anglais Writing of Oliver Knussen

Jacqueline Leclair

This article is reprinted by kind permission of the International Double Reed Society.

Photo: Shoshana Klein

***Jacqueline**, Associate Professor of Oboe at McGill University and author of 'Oboe Secrets: 75 Performance Strategies', focuses on Knussen's music which she describes as some of the most inspiring and rewarding to play.*

*(Excerpts from Oliver Knussen's compositions are reproduced with the permission of Faber Music.)*

British composer Oliver Knussen (1952–2018) wrote some of the most extraordinary and beautiful cor anglais music I have encountered. He has been a favourite composer since the 1990s, when I started collecting his CDs and listening to his music. Four of his chamber works, in particular, have spectacular cor anglais parts: *Hums and Songs of Winnie the Pooh Op.6* (1970/1983), *Ophelia Dances Book 1, Op.13* (1975), *Elegiac Arabesques Op.26a* (1991), and *Songs Without Voices Op.26* (1992). I have performed all of these over the years, and each piece is extraordinarily inspiring and rewarding to play.

After Knussen's death in July 2018, I wanted to develop a better understanding of how he came to write his unique music for the cor anglais, to bring into focus the place these compositions occupy in the repertoire and to share what I learned. This article sketches a biography of Knussen and then hypothesises how he developed his original ideas for cor anglais. I will examine excerpts from the four chamber works above and offer some conclusions.

Knussen was one of the international music community's most celebrated and beloved composers and conductors. He was precocious in his early life, composing sophisticated, mature music while still in his teens. His father, Stuart Knussen, was principal bassist of the London Symphony Orchestra, so 'Olly,' as he was known, grew up surrounded by music, with access to esteemed musicians. On one famous occasion, when he was fifteen years of age, his *Symphony No.1* was scheduled to be performed by the London Symphony Orchestra. The conductor, István Kertész, fell ill at the last minute and young Knussen stood in, conducting the premiere of his symphony to great acclaim.

Benjamin Britten met Knussen while he was still a youngster and mentored him for many years. Oboist Nicholas Daniel recalls: 'Britten was incredibly kind to Knussen. I've heard this from so many people about Britten… I think Olly learned a lot from Britten.'[1]

Despite Knussen's extraordinary abilities and achievements at a very early age, he often said, 'I don't like all this prodigy rubbish. I just started early.'[2]

## The Conductor

Knussen became a highly skilled and active conductor, leading concerts and recordings around the world. He directed the summer Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music in Lenox, Massachusetts from 1986 to 1993. During those years he mentored many young musicians. He was an alumnus of the programme himself, having attended Tanglewood to study with Gunther Schuller in the summers of 1970–73.

As a musical interpreter, Knussen was esteemed for bringing to life a wide range of repertoire. He conducted fine recordings of his own music, as well as compositions by others, such as Hans Abrahamsen, Harrison Birtwistle, Benjamin Britten, Elliott Carter, Hans Werner Henze, Igor Stravinsky and Toru Takemitsu.

I had the good fortune to work with Knussen for two concert projects at Carnegie Hall in New York City. He was incisive and efficient in rehearsal, with an approach that was inspiring and exciting. He was also quite witty, often making everyone smile with a dry remark. Composer Thomas Adès recollects: 'He was wonderful company – charismatic and funny – always ten times more so than anyone else in the room. He was an irresistible person to be around.'[3]

Australian conductor Paul Kildea describes Knussen's conducting as being 'of such small, spare gestures that orchestras would learn to breathe with him rather than respond to his short physical commands… [He] produced a performance from the inside out. In rehearsal he could hear anything – like Pierre Boulez, like Thomas Adès – and would tell a beleaguered horn player in a

complex new work that he was off by a semitone in the middle of some muddy texture.'[4]

Conductor and composer Brad Lubman met Knussen in 1988 and served as Knussen's assistant conductor for the Tanglewood Music Center Festival of Contemporary Music 1989–93. Lubman remained close to Knussen for the rest of his life, both professionally and personally. Ensemble Signal, a group led by Lubman, with whom I often collaborate, has presented concerts of Knussen's music on several occasions. I remember one afternoon, as we rehearsed *Songs Without Voices*, hearing Knussen's voice from the back of the hall shout during a pause: 'Piano! Measure 71, E♭ please!' The pianist examined the highly chromatic chord, and realised he'd misread the note and learned it incorrectly. How Knussen detected the error in such a dense and chromatic context is a wonder. But it was typical for him. Composer Mark Anthony Turnage tells us: 'Olly was the greatest musician I've ever known. He was a major British composer and conductor – by far the best of his generation, with ears even better than Boulez's.'[5]

## The Composer

Knussen established his mature compositional voice at an unusually young age and garnered a great deal of early success and attention. He composed the music for the Maurice Sendak operas *Where the Wild Things Are* (1979–83) and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* (1984–85), both of which have been performed many times all over the world and recorded in both audio and video formats.

Knussen was drawn to miniature forms and ideas, and he was extremely thorough and precise. His scores and parts are marvels of invention, poetic specificity and dazzling colour. Paul Kildea observes: 'Whereas Gustav Mahler disguised his intricacy amidst vast orchestral textures, Knussen laid out everything in plain view, each component precarious, vulnerable, exposed. In *Ophelia Dances* (1975) he created from just nine players the most perfect pen sketch of Polonius's poor, broken daughter as she spirals into radiant madness following her father's murder.'[6]

As a contemporary music connoisseur, I collected recordings of Knussen's music and listened to them avidly starting in the 1990s. But, it was through my work with Ensemble Signal that I had the opportunity to rehearse and perform several Knussen works, begin to know his music from the inside and fully appreciate its richness and colour.

## Oboists

As I contemplated writing about Knussen, I knew I would want to speak with the British oboist Nicholas Daniel. He was acquainted with Knussen, premiered his works and is a great source of knowledge, especially regarding British music. On 10th September 2019, he and I spoke on the phone for the better part of an hour, discussing Knussen and related topics. The edited transcript of Nicola Daniel's comments is in the Appendix. He shared with me many inspiring details of Knussen who was both a friend and a colleague. A particularly hair-raising account was of how Knussen faxed the just-completed score of the cor anglais and clarinet duo *Elegiac Arabesques* to Nicholas Daniel at 2.00am, the night before the premiere. He then called on the telephone and asked him and his wife, Joy Farrall, to play through the duo for him right then, in the middle of the night, over the phone!

Nicholas Daniel was not the only oboist Knussen heard, worked with and found inspiring. I think especially of Janet Craxton (1929-1981), who died unexpectedly at the age of fifty-two. At that time, Knussen was twenty-eight and he knew her well. He had written his oboe quartet *Cantata* for her just a few years earlier, in 1977. Janet Craxton was one of Nicholas Daniel's oboe teachers and, in my conversation with him, he told me how avidly enthusiastic she was about contemporary music. She performed it frequently, advocated for it, and commissioned many new works. Knussen must have been inspired to write his remarkable cor anglais parts because he knew that

Janet Craxton, Nicholas Daniel, and other fine contemporary-music oboists would do his music justice. The importance of fine cor anglais players who are capable of performing new music convincingly cannot be overstated in terms of the confidence it gives composers to write for the instrument.

## Twentieth-Century Cor Anglais Repertoire

The following list presents a selection of compositions that make innovative and varied use of the cor anglais, with a wide spectrum of colours and moods, expanded range, articulations, dynamics, and characters such as playful, comical, rude and stormy.

Claude Debussy, *Prélude à 'L'Après-midi d'un Faune'* (1894)
Claude Debussy, *La Mer* (1905)
Maurice Ravel, *Rhapsodie Espagnole* (1907–08)
Igor Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (1911)
Claude Debussy, *Images* (1905–12)
Claude Debussy, *Jeux* (1913)
Igor Stravinsky, *Sacre de Printemps* (1913)
Igor Stravinsky, *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1920)
Igor Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms* (1930)
Igor Stravinsky, *Mass* (1948)
Jean Françaix, *Quartet for Cor Anglais and Strings* (1971) (composed for Janet Craxton)

Reviewing these influential works for the modern form and reputation of the cor anglais, the music of Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky seem to be Knussen's principal precursors. They cast the cor anglais in lively, colourful solo passages that have the instrument portray a variety of moods and colours. According to Nicholas Daniel: 'Debussy's chosen alternative instrument, when he was in trouble with the commissioner of the saxophone *Rhapsodie*, was cor anglais.'[7] This was in 1901 and 1902, so we know that, at that point, Debussy was already thinking of the cor anglais as a viable solo instrument.

As we will see in Knussen's cor anglais writing, he did occasionally write a melancholy cor anglais phrase; but most of his music presents the instrument more fully developed, ranging into many musical languages and temperaments. To my ear and imagination, Knussen took the path first struck by Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky – especially Stravinsky – and forged even further into new territories.

The traditional use of cor anglais by British composers such as Vaughan Williams and Britten must also be considered influential, as Knussen inherited their legacy more directly than that of Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky. Vaughan Williams and Britten cast the cor anglais in conventional lyrical, plaintive and melancholy roles. Their compositions, however, are also stunningly beautiful and quintessentially British. Knussen was certainly aware of their music throughout his life, especially the compositions of Britten.

The music of Berlioz also seems to have occupied a prominent place in Knussen's imagination. Brad Lubman mentioned to me: 'Olly was a big fan of Berlioz.'[8] An interesting detail to note is that conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner engaged Knussen to orchestrate the second prologue from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* for performances in Europe in October 1995.[9] So on the one hand Knussen was a fan of Berlioz – the composer and author who typecast the cor anglais in its circumscribed role as a melancholy voice – on the other hand, in his own compositions, Knussen threw off the restraints of tradition and forged new expressive ground.

Ultimately, Knussen's cor anglais inheritance was two-pronged: the traditional affinity for the pastoral and plaintive handed down through tradition, and the extravagant, modernist creativity of Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky.

## Examples of Knussen's Writing for Cor Anglais

The following are examples from four Knussen compositions that contain remarkable cor anglais writing. Many of Knussen's other works also contain cor anglais, but the four I discuss here feature the instrument most clearly as a principal voice. In these compositions, Knussen has the cor anglais play primary roles with rhythmic variety and precise expressive requirements. For the music to work, all of the detailed rhythmic and expressive relationships, as well as the gestural shapes, must be in place. Observing the detailed musical characteristics of the compositions reveals the great demands they make. To learn and perform these works requires suitable rhythmic and instrumental nimbleness and a deep understanding of the musical language.

Knussen writes indications such as tenuto, staccato, accents, dynamics, small tempo shifts and so on in such exacting detail that simply learning to play precisely what he indicates – no small accomplishment – results in beautiful interpretations. Depending on one's experience, the passages below might seem at first to be unusually complex and challenging. For musicians, however, who have played this style of music extensively, it feels familiar and natural.

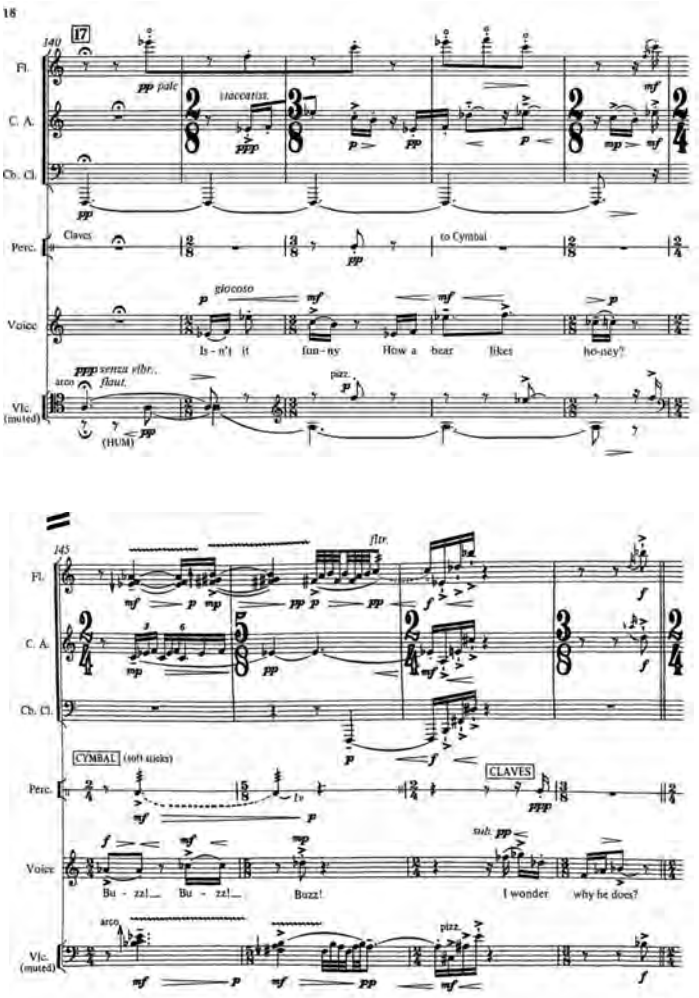


*Figure 1. Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh, op. 6*
*NB: the cor anglais is written in concert pitch in the score.*

*Hums and Songs of Winnie the Pooh Op.6* (1970/1983) for soprano, flute, cor anglais, clarinet, percussion and cello. This funny, charming piece makes imaginative use of all the instruments and the voice, with text painting throughout.

*Ophelia Dances Book 1, Op.13* (1975) for flute, cor anglais, clarinet, horn, piano, celesta and string trio. In this nonet, the flute, cor anglais and clarinet function at times as a trio, as in the following example. The passage is, overall, a cor anglais solo; but the flute and clarinet are companion voices, actively and energetically conversing with the solo. The horn is tacet, the strings provide a sustained harmonic accompaniment, and the piano makes occasional short interjections.

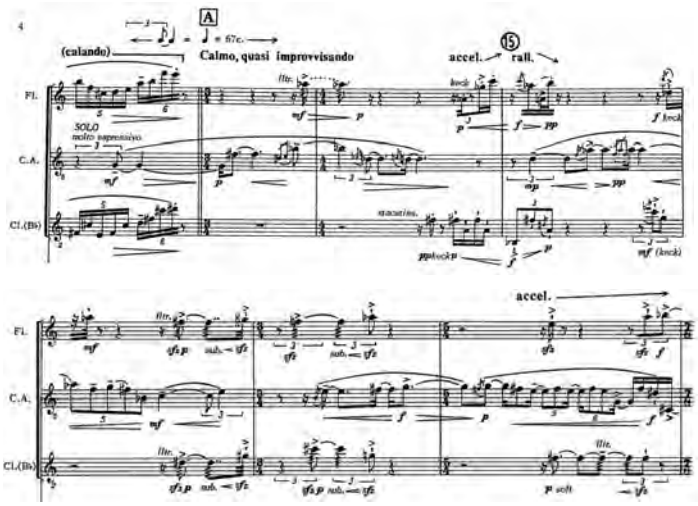


*Figure 2. Ophelia Dances Book I, op. 13*
*(The cor anglais is notated a fifth above sounding pitch.)*

*Songs Without Voices, Op.26* and *Elegiac Arabesques Op.26a* are closely linked. The cor anglais and clarinet parts are nearly identical in both pieces. However, in performance the two pieces – one a duo, one a conducted octet – are distinctly different experiences. From the opus numbers, one might infer that the octet was completed first. That is not the case, however. Knussen completed the duo and then returned to his work on the octet, finishing it five months later. (*Elegiac Arabesques* is dedicated to Nicholas Daniel, Joy Farrall, and to the memory of Andrzej Panufnik.)

Knussen writes of the duo, *Elegiac Arabesques:* 'This short piece, a little over three minutes long, was written in response to Nicholas Daniel's request for something to commemorate his teacher Janet Craxton, whom I had known since childhood and for whom I wrote my oboe *Cantata*. Just as I was wondering how to begin, I heard that Andrzej Panufnik, whose music and personality I admired a lot, had died. I began to sketch a melody for cor anglais, which quickly sprouted a canonic part for clarinet (Joy Farrall – Mrs Daniel at the time). Some months later, this in turn sprouted the final movement of my octet *Songs Without Voices*, which so transformed the character of the original that I decided to let the duo stand intact as a separate piece.'[10]

*Elegiac Arabesques Op.26a* (1991) for cor anglais and clarinet. In the opening (Fig.3a), Knussen writes a true elegy, with the cor anglais in its traditional melancholy role, richly nuanced. The espressivo, rubato opening evolves gradually into wails and shouts, and eventually whispers and murmurs at the conclusion. In Fig. 3b (contrasting passages from interior sections of the pieces) the cor anglais plays in a fast tempo, pesante with accents and fortississimo in unison with the clarinet.

Nicholas Daniel tells us: '*Elegiac Arabesques* is kind of "cor anglais with an acoustic," the clarinet being the acoustic in it… I still have to pinch myself when I look at the manuscript of *Elegiac Arabesques*, that he wrote so quickly, and it came out in that way, fully developed. In the cor anglais part there is no holding back on dynamic or technique. I mean, he didn't write slower music for the cor anglais, it's a real part… I never spoke to him about why he wrote it for cor anglais. I think it's partly because of Janet's playing, I mean her voice. She had a particularly deep speaking voice. When she played the cor anglais it was an absolutely amazing sound. You can hear her in the recording she made of Elisabeth Lutyens' *O Absalom*.[11] It's a wonderful oboe quartet; there's a point in the middle of it where the oboist has to take the cor anglais rather quickly. In her recording of it, the cor anglais sounds so rich, so beautiful. I think that, to an extent, some composers wrote for Janet for the cor anglaise because the cor anglais sounded a bit like her own voice.'[12]

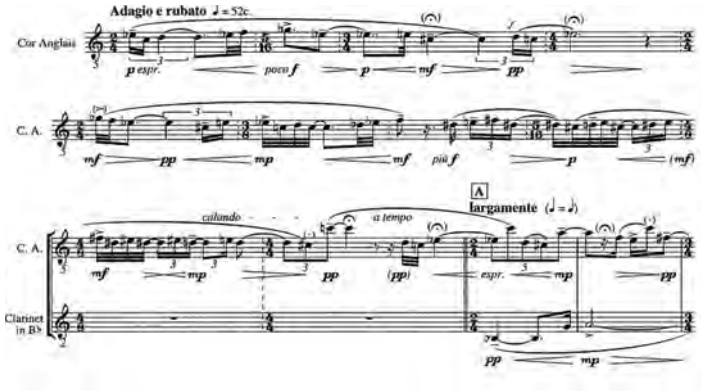


*Figure 3a. Elegiac Arabesques, op. 26a*

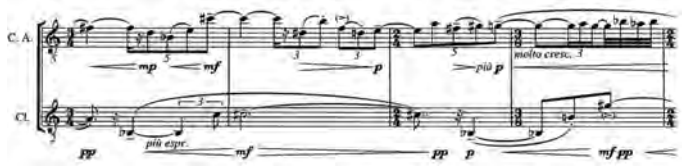


*Figure 3b. Elegiac Arabesques, op. 26a*

The idea of 'a composed acoustic' may have come from Britten. Daniel recalled Knussen using the expression to describe the cor anglais variation of Britten's *Prince of the Pagodas Op.57* (a work Knussen rescued from obscurity and recorded) and again in regard to both his own *Elegiac Arabesques* and *Songs Without Voices*.[13]

*Songs Without Voices Op.26* (1991–2) for flute, cor anglais, clarinet, piano, and string trio (Fig. 4a and 4b).

Differences Between Op.26 and Op.26a. As mentioned above, the cor anglais and clarinet parts of *Songs Without Voices Op.26* and *Elegiac Arabesques Op.26a* are nearly identical. (Compare Figures 3a and 4a; 3b and 4b.) There are some significant differences, however. *Elegiac Arabesques* has 66 bars while *Songs Without Voices* contains 76 bars. This is because in *Songs Without Voices*, Knussen adds material between rehearsal letters B and C; and before rehearsal D, he adds seven new bars of music (from rehearsal C2 to D).

There are also differences between the two pieces in details of articulations, tempo and expressive indications. The tempo indications in *Songs Without Voices* are generally the same but slower than in the duo. In terms of pitches, the cor anglais part of *Songs Without Voices* contains one additional note compared with

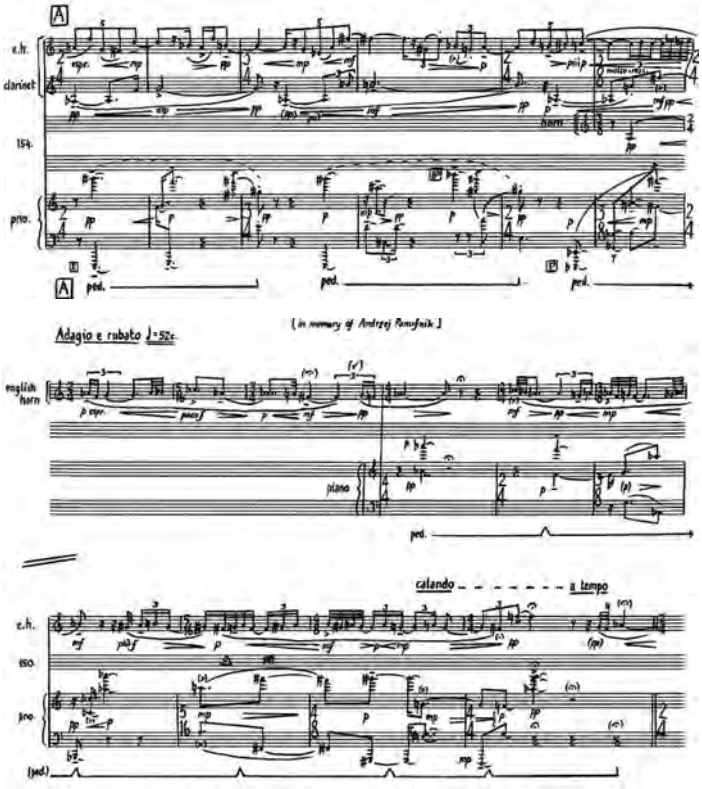


*Figure 4a. Songs Without Voices, op. 26*
*(NB The cor anglais is notated at concert pitch.)*

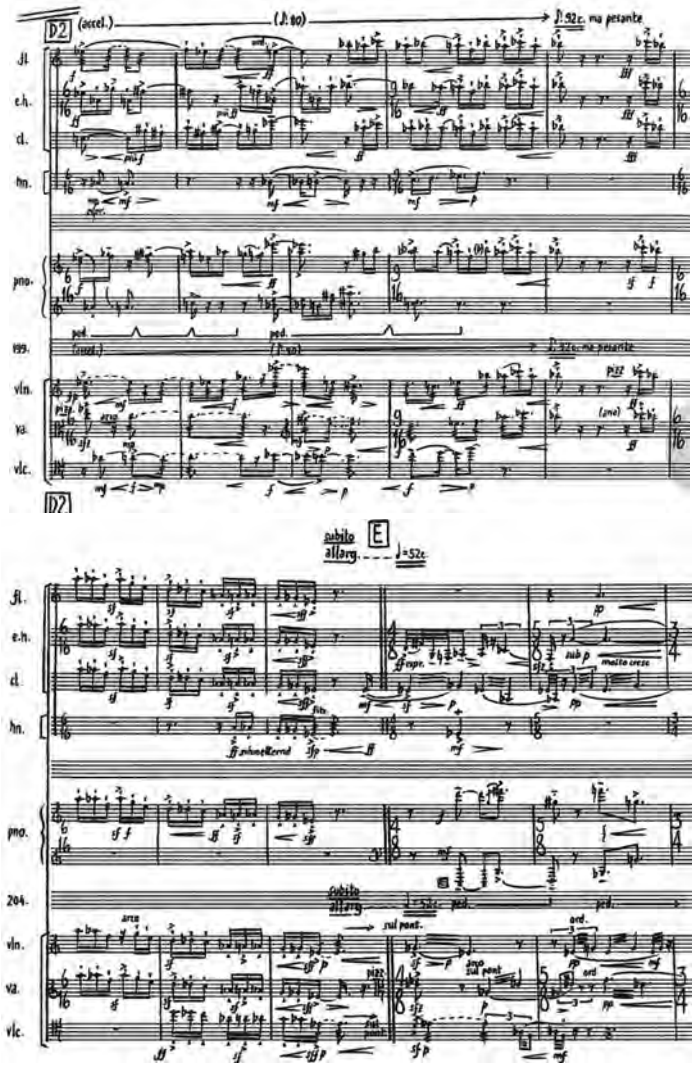


*Figure 4b. Songs Without Voices, op. 26*

*Elegiac Arabesques:* the concert A♭ in the second measure of rehearsal C2. The clarinet part of *Songs Without Voices* loses two short passages compared with *Elegiac Arabesques*, with the flutter tongue note before rehearsal E going to the horn, and the trill, two bars before rehearsal F, assigned to the flute. The only dramatic musical difference between the two compositions is the downbeat of two bars before rehearsal F that is piano/pianissimo in the duo, and fortissimo in the octet. In *Elegiac Arabesques*, both instruments begin the measure quietly. In *Songs Without Voices*, the flute, clarinet, horn and violin play a molto crescendo into two bars before rehearsal F and sforzando on the downbeat, joined by the viola and piano, which also play fortissimo and sforzando on the downbeat. Clearly, while recasting the music as an octet, Knussen decided the narrative needed one more violent explosion before the plaintive, murmuring end.

## Conclusions

Oliver Knussen conducted ensembles and composed exquisite music for over fifty of his sixty-six years of life. He was tremendously attentive to every detail in all his endeavours. He was a passionate and kind mentor to countless aspiring composition and conducting students. Olly was deeply loved and valued by vast numbers of colleagues, friends, students and anyone who knew him and his music.

As a composer, he worked slowly, often missing deadlines. But his certainty and insight into what exactly the piece he was composing needed to become was exceptional. His body of work is not as extensive as some other composers, but each of his compositions is a gem to be cherished and revisited many times. As composer Thomas Adès commented after Knussen's death: 'People have been saying that he didn't write that much, I don't think that matters at all. If you write music of that quality, it's plenty. He's left us with plenty.'[14]

Cor anglais players and composers are especially fortunate to have received from Knussen an advancement of the instrument's expressive vocabulary. His music sets examples for how richly the cor anglais can contribute to chamber music and other compositions. Occasionally, one does find other composers who make impressive, innovative use of the cor anglais. The cor anglais part in Wolfgang Rihm's orchestral piece *Jagden und Formen* (1995–2001), for example, is a thrilling reimagining of the instrument in a virtuosically heroic orchestral role. Compositions like Rihm's and Knussen's are performed relatively seldom, however, compared with standard repertoire. On their own, they may not be sufficient to transform long-standing, commonly-held concepts of what the cor anglais can and cannot do.

Listening to the most adventuresome cor anglais writing, in the works by Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, and Françaix, a few post-modernist visionaries such as Rihm and the brilliant compositions of Knussen, it is easy to imagine the cor anglais coming into its own as an everyday solo instrument. For that to happen though, more musicians need to begin playing cor anglais as a virtuosic solo and chamber music instrument. This would inspire composers to follow in the footsteps of great role models like Knussen, who write for the cor anglais with brilliance, uninhibitedness, and bold imagination.

## Appendix

*An edited transcript of the telephone interview with Nicholas Daniel on 10th September 2019.*

I think you have to look at a bit of the lineage with Olly. Britten was incredibly kind to him. I've heard this from so many people about Britten; people who kept letters, who said Britten was unbelievably kind to them, never forgot their birthdays, and wrote to them with proper advice. Britten was incredibly kind [to Knussen]. I've heard this from so many people about Britten. I think Olly learned a lot from Britten.

I read a Robert Saxton article recently. He's a professor of Composition at Oxford University. He's a very good composer actually, and he talked in that essay about how kind Britten was. I think Olly learned a lot from Britten because Olly was also, as you probably well know, someone who supported and encouraged so many young composers. And he was never ever unkind to them. He was always tender and supportive.

If you go to my recording of the Vaughan Williams concerto, MacMillan concerto and Britten *Suite on Cor Folk Tunes* (Harmonia Mundi, 2015), James McMillan conducted the Britten on that disc and I play the cor anglais solo. It was actually designed so the cor anglais player he wrote it for, James Brown, could stand while playing the solo.[15] It was a melody suggested to Britten by Percy Grainger, so there is a very interesting sort of heritage. And of course the cor anglais solo in *Rape of Lucretia* is one of the most extraordinary and amazing bits of Britten that he wrote. It's incredible.

In [Britten's ballet] *Prince of the Pagodas* (1957), there just happens to be the most exquisite cor anglais solo. I remember playing it for Olly, and those were incredible sessions; because he discovered all sorts of music in the Britten estate that had been cut from the original ballet. So we actually recorded the whole piece for the first time. There is a great oboe solo in it, too. I remember Olly describing that Britten had 'written in acoustic to the piece', and I think that's something that Olly did a lot in his music. He composed acoustics: he composed resonance. In Olly's last piece, *O Hototogisu!* it's very clear there is an extraordinary resonance to it. It is almost like communing with other worlds. I think he learned a lot from Britten. And I think Olly was very aware of his place in history.

I think he learned a lot from Britten. And I think Olly was very aware of his place in history

When my teacher Janet Craxton died, which was in 1981, when she was at the absolute height of her powers, it was a huge shock for all of us; and also because Olly had written this wonderful oboe quartet for her, *Cantata* (1977) which you probably know. The work is a masterpiece. I mean, it's a hard piece. It's not that difficult to play, but it's hard to realise all the details he writes. I've played it probably ten times, but as we were preparing to record *Cantata* recently, we decided to rehearse it for two days solid. I've been playing that piece since 1985 and, actually, I learned a lot in those two days of rehearsing, not things we'd missed but just things about how to really make it speak. It's an amazing piece.

Ten years after Janet Craxton died, I was in a position to ask composers to write pieces in her memory, and we did a huge concert at the BBC. I think I played twelve world premieres. We had pieces by Maxwell Davies, Colin Matthew, David Matthew, Harrison Birtwistle, Simon Bainbridge…it was extraordinary. The night before the concert, the fax machine started going (it was fax in those days) and *Elegiac Arabesques* (the duo for cor anglais and clarinet) came through.

At that time I was married to the excellent clarinetist, Joy Farrall and we'd worked a lot with Olly. He was extremely fond of us and we'd played a lot under him conducting, and got to know him very well. As I said *Elegiac Arabesques* came down the fax machine the night before the world premiere at two in the morning. He rang us and asked us to play it to him! It was amazing working on that piece. And as you know, *Elegiac Arabesques, op. 26a*, is strongly related to the last movement of *Songs Without Voices, Op.26* which followed the duet.

*Elegiac Arabesques* is kind of 'cor anglais with an acoustic,' the clarinet being the acoustic in it… I still have to pinch myself when I look at the manuscript of *Elegiac Arabesques*, that he wrote so quickly, and it came out in that way, fully developed. In the cor anglais part there is no holding back on dynamic or technique. I mean, he didn't write slower music for the cor anglais, it's a real part… I never spoke to him about why he wrote it for cor anglais. I think it's partly because of Janet's playing, I mean her voice. She had a particularly deep speaking voice. When she played the cor anglais it was an absolutely amazing sound. You can hear her in the recording she made of Elisabeth Lutyens' *O Absalom*.[16]

It's a wonderful oboe quartet; there's a point in the middle of it where the oboist has to take the cor anglais rather quickly. In her recording of it, the cor anglais sounds so rich, so beautiful. I think that, to an extent, some composers wrote for Janet for the cor anglais because the cor anglais sounded a bit like her own voice.' For instance, the Jean Françaix *Quartet for Cor Anglais and Strings* (1971) that was written for her. I am convinced that that piece is a sort of portrait of her, actually. Because it's so eccentric and quaint and funny, which is what she seemed like. She was much more than that, but she seemed like that on a first meeting. I think Olly may have thought about the number of times Janet spoke with him. And somehow, in *Elegiac Arabesques*, the cor anglais became her voice, singing.

She had such a low voice that, when I rang and got her husband on the phone, I would say: 'Hello, Janet.' And whenever I rang and got Janet, I would say: 'Hello, Alan!'

Olly was someone who needed family around him. He needed musicians who loved him around him. And Joy and I, we did love him. We miss him appallingly, actually. He was wonderful and very, very funny with us always. Also, he respected very much that we, both of us, take teaching very seriously. We would teach together, the three of us, an incredible course for contemporary performance and composition. He'd have about eight composition students there, and they would write music. Students would play the music, but would also play other pieces, and get coaching with us on those, like Varèse's *Octandre*, Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*, *Tree Line* by Takemitsu, all these things. We would coach them. Olly understood how he had needed support as a young person, which he found rather hard to get, apart from Britten. I think he was determined to be that kind of supportive person to many, many, many great young composers.

I think in a way Olly does have a rather special relationship with the cor anglais, but I think it might be slightly inherited from Britten; because that 'Lord Melbourne' movement of *A Suite on English Folk Tunes Op.90*, that's just a phenomenal movement. (The movement uses the traditional tune 'Lord Melbourne,' collected by Percy Grainger on a wax cylinder in Lincolnshire 1905–06.) And of course, the last section of *The Rape of Lucretia* with the cor anglais, which we did with Olly conducting actually, was an incredible experience.[17] Whenever I worked with him, after rehearsing with Olly, we really knew the music; so we could relax and enjoy the concert.

The oboists inspiring Britten during his career were Peter Graeme, who played in his English Opera group, and Joy Boughton who played in it before; but I think actually Janet Craxton inspired Britten a lot. She certainly worked with him a lot. When she recorded the *Metamorphoses*, Britten was very ill, but he was there in the recording box.[18] So that is interesting to know, because it means that his later thoughts on the piece are recorded by Janet. When I played the piece to her, she was very specific about what Britten wanted. Have you seen that DVD 'Anatomy of a Masterpiece' by George Caird (about the *Metamorphoses*)? The booklet is magnificent.[19]

In the same way that in religion trombones are always associated with death and God, and fear to an extent, I think the cor anglais and the vox humana are always associated with certain pastoral things, also prayer. I think that often we forget that the Romantic composers, when they are talking about nature and nostalgia, they are also talking about themselves, because they consider themselves part of nature. They didn't think of themselves as separate, as we do. And the fact is that the lineage of cor anglais writing right the way from Bach onwards (and oboe d'amore to a certain extent) has an element of earthiness about it. But it also has an element of prayer. I always remember in the St John Passion *Verfliesse mein Herz*, the soprano aria with two flutes and two cors anglais…that's a most phenomenal colour; and it's one of those amazing moments in Bach where you can sit inside one colour together with three totally different sounds.

I think that the twentieth-century history of it is fascinating, too. For instance, in Vaughan Williams' *Symphony No.5* (1938–43), in the slow movement, there is an amazing 'solo' duet for just the oboe and cor anglais. And of course that symphony is dedicated to Sibelius. So his writing for cor anglais is probably linked to *The Swan of Tuonela* (1895). It's death and poetry. Arthur Bliss' *Conversations* (1921) has a soliloquy (Andante tranquillo e motto rubato) for solo cor anglais. So, the more you look around, there really is a kind of heritage of great writing for cor anglais in English music.

I don't think one can ignore Stravinsky, either. *The Rite of Spring* (1913) has to be influential for him, and *Symphony of Psalms* (1930). Something probably Olly would have loved is Stravinsky's *Mass* (1944–8), the oboe is so incredibly important in. And the little *Pastorale*, that's the kind of piece Olly would have given his students to have them look at it (the 1923 version with soprano, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet and bassoon, or 1933 with soprano replaced by violin). He would have loved that.

**Endnotes**

1 Nicholas Daniel, telephone interview, 10th September 2019. For full [edited] transcript, see Appendix.
2 'Oliver Knussen,' BBC Music Magazine 17th July 2020 (par.8). *www.bit.ly/2KGDCgd*
3 Clifton Noble: 'Oliver Knussen to be Feted at Tanglewood,' Mass Live 25th July 2018, (par.11). *www.bit.ly/3fzSFU6*
4 Paul Kildea, 'As Conductor and Composer, Oliver Knussen 1952-2018 Offered Seemingly Out-of-Place Delicacy,' Frieze 13th July 2018 (par.2). *www.bit.ly/2UZb6IF*
5 'British composer and conductor, Oliver Knussen, known for composing *Where the Wild Things Are* Dies at 66.' First Post 10th July 2018 (par.2). *www.bit.ly/367pchn*
6 Kildea, op. cit. (par.1).
7 Nicholas Daniel, email, August 25, 2020.
8 Brad Lubman, telephone interview, August 11, 2020.
9 Stephen Johnson, 'Review of Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliet*.' (par. 2). *www.bit.ly/3l3S1iV*
10 Faber Music. *www.bit.ly/33dnWaH*
11 *O Absalom*, op. 122, 1977.
12 Nicholas Daniel, telephone interview.
13 Nicholas Daniel, email. Knussen's 1989 recording of *Prince of the Pagodas* with the London Sinfonietta (the group with which Janet Craxton was for many years associated) was released on Virgin Classics. (Editor's note.)
14 Clifton Noble, (par. 12).
15 The first performance took place in Aldeburgh in 1975 with the English Chamber Orchestra, of which Brown was the second oboist and cor anglais player. (Editor's note.)
16 Craxton recorded the work for the BBC, released on The Art of Janet Craxton (BBC, 1987). (Editor's note.)
17 The recording with Knussen conducting the Aldeburgh Festival Ensemble is available on Virgin (2013). (Editor's note.)
18 Craxton's recording was issued on Decca (ZAL 15584, 1965); re-released as part of Britten: The Complete Works (Decca, 2013, CD55). (Editor's note.)
19 Oboe Classics, CC2017.

# 2021 BDRS Composition Competition

The premiere of the new work commissioned from Pongtorn Techaboonakho – winner of the BDRS-Leitzinger Open Prize for Bassoon Composition – will be given by Amy Harman at the Double Reed Day on 29th October 2023 at the Royal Academy of Music.

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The Emerson Edition publications of the works commissioned from the winners of the two oboe prizes, Robin Haigh and Pernille Faye, are reviewed on Page 27. Printed copies of these 2023 publications attracted much interest at the recent BDRS Double Reed Festival held at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

***Alison Wathey***

*Pongtorn Techaboonakho*

# Save the Date!

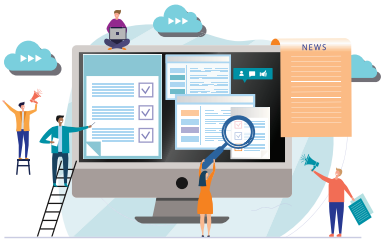
*By **James Turnbull***

ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Following the success of the Double Reed Day last year at the Royal Academy of Music, London, we're pleased to announce we'll be holding a similar event this year on Sunday 29th October.

We're again excited to be working with Fraser Gordon (RAM Head of Woodwind), planning a full day's activities, including performance classes, recitals – including the premiere of one of our Composing Competition commissions, reed workshops, ensembles, and more! Featuring the RAM's amazing faculty and students, the day promises to be another very special event. There will of course be double reed businesses there too with instruments and accessories, etc. More information and registration details will be released in due course, but in the meantime please put the date in your diary!

*Fraser Gordon*



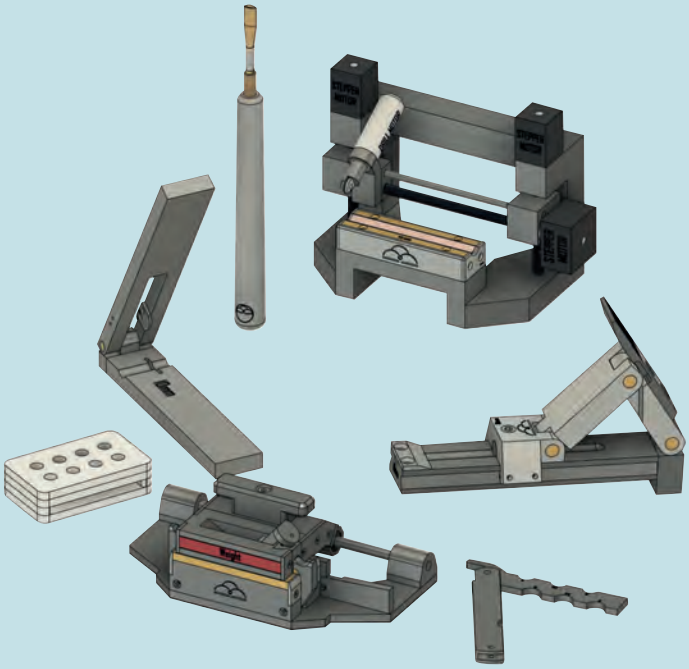

# Final Projects At Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

*An introduction by **Jenni Phillips**, Head of Woodwind*

Final Projects season at RBC is something I look forward to with eager anticipation every year. Every student in their fourth year can choose a project about anything, so long as it is connected with music. Many projects over the years have stood out. One year we had the premiere of a full-length bassoon concerto that was designed to work as a complete staged ballet: it was duly choreographed fantastically by the self-same student who also took the solo part. On another occasion, an oboist arranged *Hänsel und Gretel* for wind quintet, and then narrated and directed a 'pop-up' style opera performance in the upstairs of the local pub! A great joy is that every year brings something novel that no-one else has thought of before.

In the next edition of Double Reed News, I will feature three of our double reed students who have recently amazed us with their personal take on this wonderful opportunity.

- Ben Chilton designed an oboe reed-gouging machine with the use of Computer Aided Design and 3D printing.
- Archie Auger played Jolivet's *Bassoon Concerto* with the RBC Final Projects Orchestra.
- Rebecca Taylor (oboist) designed a schools' project called My Musical Mission in which she went into schools, workshopped her story, and then brought 200 children into RBC for an hour of musical fun and games.



*Ben Chilton's oboe reed-gouging machine*

It all goes to show that the BMus course at RBC really encourages confidence and individuality, enabling every student to play to their strengths.

*Archie Auger with the RBC Final Projects Orchestra*


*Rebecca Taylor's project; My Musical Mission*

British Double Reed Society

# Double Reed Festival

*A report by **Liam Fleet***

Catering for oboists and bassoonists of all ages and abilities, the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC) hosted a BDRS Double Reed Day on 14th May, featuring classes, ensembles and concerts led by RBC tutors Emmet Byrne, George Caird, Margaret Cookhorn, Anna Cooper, Melinda Maxwell, Nikolaj Henriques and Jenni Philipps. The diverse array of activities included instrument-specific classes with aforementioned specialists and mixed sessions suitable for all double reed players.

The event had a fantastic turnout of circa 80 attendees who had travelled from all over the country to participate. There was a wonderful atmosphere at RBC throughout the whole day, with everybody enjoying and benefitting from the group sessions, and of course trying all the instruments and double reed paraphernalia at the trade stands representing companies from the UK and further afield. These also covered a wide range of interests, including reed makers, publishers, and representatives from the British Armed Forces.

*(l-r) Oliver Ludlow (of Double Reed Ltd), Nikolaj Henriques (bassoon) and Tristan Lambert (of Double Reed Ltd)*

Particular highlights from the day included the numerous performances and playing sessions. The RBC tutors' concert was a wonderful opportunity for everybody in attendance to hear some of the top oboists and bassoonists in the country featured as soloists, showing the full range of what our instruments (and their extended family members) can do. Melinda Maxwell's fascinating lecture-recital about the Aulos was an exceedingly rare chance to hear one of the most ancient ancestors of the double reed family really shine.

*Melinda Maxwell (oboe) and Paul Townsend (The Oboe Shop @ Crowthers)*

Additionally, her own composition – *Crane Dance*, scored for six oboes, two bassoons and contrabassoon – was one of two contemporary works for double reeds performed in the RBC students' concert. This was another unique opportunity as the piece had not been heard since its premier in 2008, so it was fantastic for some modern double reed music to have a revival under the direction of Philip Haworth. This concert concluded with Nikolaj Henriques leading a Bassoon Choir arrangement of Sibelius' *Finlandia*, including some truly virtuoso playing up in the stratosphere by Nikolaj!

Other arrangements heard throughout the day included student performances in the foyer during the lunch break to serenade the participants and traders, featuring the finale of Mozart's

*(l-r) Renaud Patalowski (of Marigaux, Paris), Emmet Byrne (oboe), and Jean Marc (of Marigaux, Paris)*

# 14th May 2023

ROYAL BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE

*George Caird conducting the massed ensemble*

*Gran Partita* for massed oboes, Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* for massed bassoons and Elmer Bernstein's score from *The Magnificent Seven* for all of the above.

To conclude the day, the greatest highlight of them all perhaps was to see all the participants and tutors congregate in the RBC concert hall to play together in one huge massed ensemble under the direction of George Caird. Behind the sea of oboes, cors anglais and bassoons, the line of six contrabassoons of various shapes and sizes on the risers was a magnificent sight to behold! So many double reed players grouped together made a truly unique sound and was the perfect finale to a wonderful day of music-making.

Traders attending the event:

- Howarth of London
- The Oboe Shop @ Crowthers
- Marigaux Paris
- Double Reed Ltd
- Nissen Bassoon Crooks
- Oboe Reeds by Lesley
- Universal Edition
- RAF Music
- British Army Music

*Margaret Cookhorn and string quartet*

**Double Reed Ltd** ***supported Nikolaj Henriques***

**Marigaux Paris** ***supported Emmet Byrne***

**The Oboe Shop @ Crowthers** ***supported Melinda Maxwell***

**Billerbeck Oboe Reeds** ***supported the oboe ensemble sessions led by Anna Cooper***

*The trade stands at RBC*

*Bassoons and a very tall contrabassoon*

# Presidential Page

## Nicholas Daniel

Nicholas asks two distinguished colleagues to answer his 10 'searching' but light-hearted questions! Here are their answers.

### Christine Pendrill

*This was quite hard, but these are my instant responses!*

*1. Where is your favourite place in the world to relax and calm down?*
At home!

*2. Favourite LSO moment?*
Too many to choose from, but probably recording *The World's Ransoming* by James MacMillan with Colin Davis conducting.

*3. Dream composer for future commission for the cor?*
Still James MacMillan!

*4. Ideal concert wear?*
Something loose and elegant that will make me look slim!

*5. Perfect meal? Perfect cocktail?*
Oysters in champagne sauce, followed by turbot with puy lentils. 'Balalaika' (Vodka and Cointreau).

*6. Best cor anglais reed-making tip.*
Make the reed easier to play on than you think it should be.

*7. Best recent read?*
Monty Don's 'My Garden World'.

*8. Best recent non-musical cultural experience?*
Cinema: 'A Man Called Otto'.

*9. Favourite choice of 2nd nationality?*
French.

*10. Cat or dog?*
Dog.

### Amy Harman

*1. Where is your favourite place in the world to relax and calm down?*
My bath at home!! But I have 3 children under 5 who like to visit me frequently so it's not always as relaxing as it could be!

*2. Favourite Operatic moment you've played?*
*Tristan*... the first Wagner I played and I cried my eyes out at the end of the dress rehearsal. It's the most extraordinary bassoon writing and I'm fully signed up to the cult.

*3. Dream composer to commission?*
There are so many!! But I'd start with a bassoon concerto by Mark Simpson, a bassoon and string quartet by Adès, a solo piece by Eleanor Alberga.

*4. Ideal concert wear?*
Sequins and jumpsuits. Can't go wrong.

*5. Perfect meal? Perfect cocktail? Perfect restaurant?*
My father-in-law's Sri Lankan curry; a dry gin martini, Llwelyn's in Herne Hill.

*6. How do you keep in such good instrumental shape? i.e., what's your warm up routine?*
Every day I play long notes on every note of the instrument with a metronome and tuner and then play Giampieri *Study No.1*... my teacher was Italian and swore by these studies!

*7. Best recent read?*
*Dear Dolly* by Dolly Alderton... I inhale everything she writes.

*8. Best recent non-musical cultural experience?*
It was a few years ago now as children limit my opportunities for cultural experiences...! But I saw English National Ballet in choreographer Pina Bausch's *Rite of Spring* as part of a triple bill by female choreographers and it's made me hear the piece in an entirely different way. Utter genius!

*9. Favourite choice of 2nd nationality?*
I have an official second nationality as I'm Irish and English, but I'll choose Sri Lankan like my husband's family. It's the most beautiful place I've ever been and the people are kind and generous. And the food...!

*10. Cat or dog? Breed?*
I have a black cat called Cheryl (Chezza for short), and she is the best pet that has ever existed.

# From Vienna to Paris: Contrabassoons by Rorarius and Buffet Crampon

James Kopp

An article by James following his talk at the 2023 Waterhouse Day in April (reported on Page 24).

The Waterhouse Collection includes a contrabassoon signed by August Rorarius (1788–1848), who made brass and woodwind instruments in Vienna. It resembles a giant bassoon of the day, with two exceptions. First, the uppermost part of its wooden wing joint is replaced by a long brass lead-pipe, often called a 'hairpin' type. Second, its lower register extends only to written D2 (sounding D1), rather than the bassoon's written B♭1. By truncating the lower range, the maker saved nearly a metre of height and made the instrument easier to handle. This 'Viennese' format, also made by Theodor Lotz, Kaspar Tauber, Wolfgang Küss and Martin Lempp of Vienna, as well as makers in other Hapsburg cities, was the standard format for contrabassoons in most of Europe from the 1850s until the 1890s.

A similar model made by Christian Gottfried Schuster of Markneukirchen, Germany was used in Parisian orchestras prior to 1849 and perhaps longer. In that year, Frédéric Triebert and his bassoon specialist, Angelo Marzoli, reportedly built a contrabassoon that was used for decades in Paris. The sole example has since disappeared and its details of construction are unknown. The next contrabassoon model in Paris, dating from about 1885, was described by the commentator Constant Pierre.

When an Exposition Universelle was held in Paris in 1889, a new model of contrabassoon by the Parisian firm Evette & Schaeffer was on view. According to Pierre, it stood 2.04 metres tall, projecting over the heads of orchestral performers, 'like a tall factory smokestack towering in the sky'. Until recently, no surviving specimens of this contrabassoon were known.

But three have now come to light: two in the United States and one in France. Ironically, none of these instruments is stamped with the names of Evette & Schaeffer. One is stamped by Buffet Crampon, the leading maker of bassoons in France since about 1877. (Paul Evette and Ernst Schaeffer became owners of the firm in 1885, succeeding their father-in-law, Pierre Goumas.) This model is a recent acquisition by the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix Arizona, USA. Its serial number (904R) dates its manufacture to 1906, according to a published tabulation by bassoon technician Maarten Vonk.

The public display of Buffet Crampon 904R has prompted re-attribution of a second example. This contrabassoon, part of the Crosby Brown Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is nearly identical. Yet it is stamped 'Martin Frères / Paris'. Its serial number, however (371R), is attributable to Buffet Crampon and datable to 1893/4. Martin Frères was a prominent dealer in musical instruments, but not known as a manufacturer of bassoons.

*Figure 1. Contrabassoon descending to written D2 by Augustin Rorarius, Vienna, second quarter of the nineteenth century. Finger- and thumb-side views. A replacement lead-pipe is inserted; the original is shown at left. Waterhouse Collection.*

*Figure 2. Contrabassoon descending to written C2 by Buffet Crampon, Paris. Datable to 1906 by its serial number, 904R. Musical Instrument Museum, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.*

*Figure 3. Contrabassoon descending to written C2 signed by Martin Frères, Paris. Datable to 1893/4 by its serial number, 371R. Crosby Brown Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

The third one is an unstamped prototype in a private collection in France, now incomplete and showing signs of experimentation. These photographs were provided by the owner, François Camboulive. This is evidently a prototype: several holes have been drilled twice in testing for the optimal locations.

*Figure 4. Unstamped prototype, now incomplete and showing signs of experimentation. THICAM Collection, Ivry-la-Bataille, France.*

In contrast to the Viennese pattern, these instruments reach one tone lower, to C1 (written C2), using a mostly covered and chromatic key system. In this composite photograph, we can see that the three instruments are closely similar in construction. Some differences are apparent, however, between the two finished instruments and the prototype.

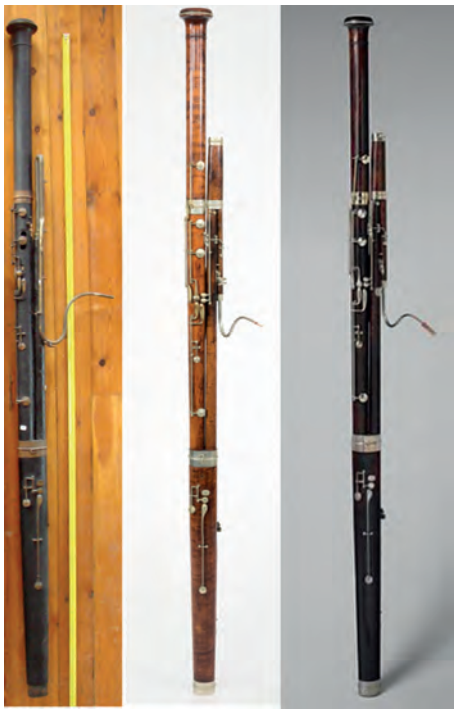


*Figure 5. Composite of figures 2, 3, and 4.*

The prototype has a simple but lengthy metal lead-pipe forming the U-bend. In this detail, we see the pillars and guideposts for two rods, now missing, that once opened vent keys on the lead-pipe to produce overblown notes. The metal lead-pipe has been deformed at some point by rough handling, effectively disabling the vent key mechanisms.

On the two later models, the U-bend is a petite culasse (small boot joint) of wood, as

*Figure 6. Detail of the prototype, showing the damaged lead-pipe and key mounts for register keys, now missing. THICAM Collection, Ivry-la-Bataille, France.*

on the Schuster contra (and exemplars by Lempp, Hórak and other makers). But just below the petite culasse, the Phoenix and New York examples include a novel segment of wooden lead-pipe on which closed-standing register keys are mounted, an improvement on the fragile metal lead-pipe of the prototype. Evette & Schaeffer probably chose the archaic-looking wooden segment for its stability: the two register keys mounted there, operated by the left thumb, are less likely to be damaged in handling.

On the prototype, three left-hand fingerholes are covered by keys, while a key for the left index finger operated a half-hole mechanism. In the two later examples, however, the maker chose to simplify the mechanism: the fingerholes for left-hand fingers one and two are uncovered, and the three tone holes are drilled much closer together.

Who was the maker of this prototype, which bears no maker's stamp? Pierre noted that Evette & Schaeffer had continued the work by M. Goumas, their predecessor, on this model. That would be Pierre Goumas, their father-in-law (1827–1889), who was the proprietor of Buffet Crampon until his retirement in 1885. After that date, the Evette & Schaeffer stamp sometimes appears on their wide range of woodwind and brass instruments, and at other times the traditional Buffet Crampon stamp.

This two-metre contrabassoon is not compact, to state the obvious. If we ask why Goumas, followed by Evette & Schaeffer, turned instead to a much older and more cumbersome format, Pierre provided an answer. He stated that, rather than going to the trouble of a complete redesign, Evette & Schaeffer had preferred to accept the limitations of the upright pattern in order to have an instrument ready to show at the Exposition Universelle of 1889. This need presumably explains the simplification of the left-hand keywork as well.

*Figure 7. At left, detail of the prototype shows three left-hand fingerholes covered by keys, and a half-hole mechanism for the left index finger. At right, detail of the Buffet Crampon exemplar shows two fingerholes uncovered, with a single key for the third finger.*

The Phoenix model, datable by its serial number to 1906, appears to have been a last gasp of the Viennese format. A year earlier, Evette & Schaeffer had introduced a compact model to C2, based acoustically on the Heckel contrabassoon of 1879 and used in the Paris premiere of Strauss's *Salome*. By 1920, the lower range had been extended to written B♭1. This was essentially the French contrabassoon known today.

Acknowledgements: Thanks are due to David Rachor, Phoenix, Arizona; Rich Walter, Museum of Musical Instruments, Phoenix; Bradley Strauchen Scherer, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; François Camboulive, Ivry-la-Bataille, Eure. Photos for Figure 4 & Figure 6 by François Camboulive.

# Let Freedom Ring... Thanks to OboFit®

Andrea Ridilla

Andrea is not only an oboe professor (Miami University), but also inventor and author, so has taken special interest reviewing this recent device for Double Reed News.

Welcome to the OboFit, an innovative new member of the oboe world that teaches what words fail to express. Italian oboist Lukas Runggaldier from Ortisei in the Bolzano region of Italy has created a twenty-first-century embouchure trainer for developing a more resonant tone.

A beautiful oboe tone is like a creation of nature. It is organic. Just as a crystal resonates from the frequencies of nature, the unencumbered vibrations of an oboe reed metamorphose into the very soul of the instrument. But how difficult it is to let go and 'allow' these vibrations to be unencumbered. And how much more challenging it can be to communicate this to young players. I have always wished: if only there were a device to teach this!

What is a correct embouchure, and is there just one answer? The answer is no; we are all built differently. But there are guidelines. When students come to me with perceived embouchure problems, I first address respiration. One of my former teachers, the late Arnold Jacobs[1] said: 'An ineffective embouchure is frequently the lips reacting to a bad set of circumstances and failing. It is simply cause and effect.'[2] Air is the key. An embouchure starved of air will make any wind player sound bad. But what causes an oboist to be so deprived of air?

The oboe reed must have constant access to air. There may not be enough air due to inadequate breathing or support. Or, perhaps air is not able to reach the reed as a result of biting with the teeth, pinching with tight lips, or stretching the lips into a smile. In all of these cases the reed's vibrations would be compromised. An effective oboe embouchure is one that allows the double reed to vibrate, at the same time permitting the oboist to control the reed opening for the manipulation of several important variables: focus, register changes, dynamics, colour, and micro-pitch adjustments. The embouchure should be neither permissive nor a control freak.

The lips are like acrobats and can take on many shapes and sizes. In embouchure anatomy class we address lips, teeth, bite alignment or misalignment, oral cavity shape, and air. For my preferred embouchure, I teach my students to bring the corners of their lips in towards two imaginary vertical lines descending from the middle of each nostril, and then form a circle around the reed with the lip tissue between these lines. The size of this circle will change depending upon the variables listed above. It is also critical that this circle is flexible. The smaller the circle becomes, the further forward the lips will project. Pinched lip pressure against the reed is bound to stifle vibrations and may even compress the intercellular spaces of the reed.


The teeth are the architecture of the embouchure. They play an important role but they should not support the reed or the pitch. This is called biting and causes the tone instantly to become inorganic. It is the lips – and lips alone – that bring beauty and control to the oboe tone.

OboFit to the Rescue! Lukas Runggaldiers's device is a wish come true for embouchure training. He was inspired to design the OboFit by the well-known Canadian oboist Louise Pellerin, professor at the Zurich University of the Arts. During her studies with Heinz Holliger, Louise had been looking for solutions for a more effective embouchure and had inserted coffee stir sticks into the corners of her mouth as ring muscle reinforcers. Louise's idea of coffee stir sticks are my imaginary lines.

Lukas moved forward with Louise's concept and, after two years of research, came up with the OboFit. He explains that the OboFit also serves as a playing angle optimiser and can correct or prevent posture misconceptions at an early stage. Air refractions on the reed are minimised, having a positive effect on the tone as well as intonation. Strengthening the embouchure ring muscle – the orbicularis oris – is extremely important for oboists. The main functioning muscle of the embouchure, it surrounds the oboe reed like a warm blanket, deftly exhibiting control and allowing freedom of vibration. The OboFit is ideal for enhancing the function of this muscle as well as for releasing the biting muscles.

Due to irregular practice sessions, long rehearsals and other factors, oboists may lose the sensitivity, flexibility and strength of the embouchure muscles. Practising with the OboFit helps to educate the subconscious mind to set these new techniques into automatic function.

This pedagogical device is in the form of a trident, with two wings of wood, or composite material, framing the reed. The reed is inserted at the top of the tube. The length and width adjustment of the OboFit allow for flexibility and the ergonomics may be adjusted to any jaw width or lip-mouth size, independent of the embouchure and the length of a cork staple. The OboFit helps to release the wrong muscles that 'grab' the reed. Lower support muscles instantly begin to do their job.

Professor David Walter at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris has celebrated the invention of the OboFit saying: 'It gives me a new life on oboe as I can really use my power without lip weaknesses!'

Professor Nick Deutsch, Professor of Oboe at the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy University of Music and Theatre in Leipzig says: 'I am confident OboFit will become a vital tool for all oboists wishing to optimise a correct physiological setup, allowing a smooth interaction between the breathing apparatus, the lip muscles, vocal tract, tongue and soft palate, which in turn will maximise the possibility of expression through the instrument.'[3]

The Obofit is available in several models, including professional and student. For more details see: *www.obofit.it*

**Endnotes**

1 Legendary Solo Tuba of the Chicago Symphony and pioneer of respiratory physiology in wind playing.
2 Brian Frederiksen, Arnold Jacobs: Song and Wind (USA: Windsong Press Limited, 1996), 122.
3 Lukas Runggaldier, 'OboFit references,' OBOFIT®, accessed 27th April 2023, *www.obofit.it/?lang=en*.

# Obituary Tribute: Ian Cuthill

## Born 22nd October 1936, died 28th February 2023

**Robin Kennard:** I was saddened to hear of Ian's passing, not least because it reminded me that time just doesn't stand still, and even Ian fulfilled his wonderfully fruitful life on Mother Earth! My memories of Ian go back to school days in Dorset when, as Principal Bassoon in the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, with firstly John Orford and then Felix Warnock as second bassoon, he came to play many times at our school in Sherborne or locally in Yeovil. He was so gracious to young players back then and it left a lasting and inspirational impression. I had just joined the National Youth Orchestra and I remember his joyous playing on his Heckel bassoon in Mozart symphonies among many other pieces. I remember him telling me that buying it nearly broke the bank as it cost all of £500! Much later, when I started playing with the English Chamber Orchestra, he was just so encouraging, although at the same time very practical and realistic in his advice. I also remember an infectious sense of humour. Ian went on to many more freelance activities after leaving the ECO and he cut quite a sight in period costume. Ian was one of those people who made everyone feel good about themselves. There will be many who, I know, will be able to extol his virtues as a teacher. I feel very grateful to have known him.

**Clive Fairbairn:** I have edited obituaries and tributes for many oboists and bassoonists in this magazine. Here, however, I am privileged, yet heavy-hearted, to be adding words of my own because Ian and I (as conductor) have shared the concert platform many times since 1977. At that time I was forming the New Mozart Orchestra and Martin Gatt had agreed to be Principal Bassoon and he requested Ian for Second Bassoon. Seated alongside the likes of Thea King (clarinet) and Janet Craxton (oboe) Ian helped create our truly wonderful woodwind team which became widely admired, and which supported me so generously as my conducting career developed.

Ian not only played in very many of our London concerts during the 1980s, but was also soloist in Vivaldi's *Concerto 'La Notte'* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Jumping forward to 2000 when the orchestra re-positioned its work in the counties of The Chilterns with a strong element of educational outreach, he remained very involved; his demonstrations of the bassoon to children during those concerts became legendary and always equally entertaining to his orchestra colleagues! He was a very fine musician and an encouraging friend.

**Philippa Bambach:** I am an amateur bassoonist and, following a woodwind course where Ian was tutor, I asked him if I could have some lessons with him at the Guildhall School of Music in London. He gave me a trial hearing where I played so badly that I pleaded for him to give me a second chance. I practised day and night and he graciously took me on. I think my attitude amused him but he was always kind, including sending me emergency reeds when mine packed up just before a concert. He had a gentle ironic sense of humour, and sometimes found time to tell me about his unusual water-loving cats!

**Christian Rutherford:** Ian was a wonderful colleague and friend. He was a very warm, kind and unflappable person. My abiding memory is of us looking out of a window in Thea King's house during a break in a wind ensemble rehearsal, to witness his little red Mini with flames leaping from it, having been set alight by some children livening up their walk home from school. We were all quite agitated and urged him


*This trio of beautiful classic motorcars joined their owners – car-enthusiast friends of Ian's – for his funeral and later for the wake held at Whitewebbs Museum of Transport in Enfield, London. They are (l-r) Riley Monaco (1932), Riley Sprite (1937), Talbot 105 Alpine (1933)*

to go out and try to douse the flames, but not Ian. He sighed, took another biscuit and, staring out at the blackening wreck, said: 'It'll still be there when we've finished.'

**Martin Gatt:** I knew Ian from our time at the National Youth Orchestra in the early 1950s; we got on very well together during the various courses and remained mates from then on. Rather later on I asked if he would come and be Second Bassoon in the English Chamber Orchestra; he agreed and in fact lived in my house for about 18 months. He proved to be a great house guest and even took on one of my two dogs which, at the time, were not getting on well together. He was a very good player: musical and with much flair. I will greatly miss his laid-back friendly nature.

**Meyrick Alexander:** When I was at school and Ian was in the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, he was very encouraging when I pestered him after their concerts in Bristol. Later when I played with him in the English Chamber Orchestra he was a very good colleague and a central figure in the profession. He will be much missed.

> He was a very good colleague and a central figure in the profession. He will be much missed

**Pauline Gilbertson:** Ian was one of the nicest and kindest people I ever met, and I am sure dozens of people will have fond memories of him. What follows was printed in English Chamber Orchestra's 1983 Yearbook.

Ian Cuthill has the distinction of being the only member of the English Chamber Orchestra who marched with the King's Own Light Infantry, playing bassoon and – when they marched too fast – cymbals! It was a broadening musical experience, balanced by a degree at Oxford University, a period of post-graduate study at the Royal College of Music, and 18 months as a management trainee for 3M.

It was only after this that he finally succumbed to what he regarded as slightly hazardous, a professional playing career. He spent some time at Sadler's Wells, then with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra before becoming, in 1970, a founder member of the Bournemouth Sinfonietta. He stayed for seven years, notching up an incredible mileage touring Britain. It was a fascinating experience; a new orchestra which depended for its survival on the players, and it was up to the players to make what they wanted of it.

In 1977, however, he felt the need for a change, and accepted the ECO's offer to come to London. It has meant a very different life-style, and Ian tours far more internationally and enjoys playing with leading International figures.

He still finds time to indulge his consuming interest in old cars. He has plucked rusting lumps of metal from scrap heaps and renovated them with skill and devotion to a better state than when they were first sold – and run quite a few back into the ground again! Currently his portfolio includes one 1928 Riley (in bits), a couple of Austin 7s (both over-tops) and a 1967 Midget which he has just returned to performing condition with his 16-year old son, the eldest of his four children. (That inspired his fellow bassoonist, Graham Sheen, to invest in a Midget too.)

He continues to find time, however, to do other research, whether it is background reading for a trip to Salzburg and Vienna, or listening to, playing and reading about baroque performance. He was recently enthralled by a baroque bassoon he tried, and is convinced that baroque performance will play an increasingly important part in the music of the future.

# Waterhouse Bassoon Museum Open Day 2023

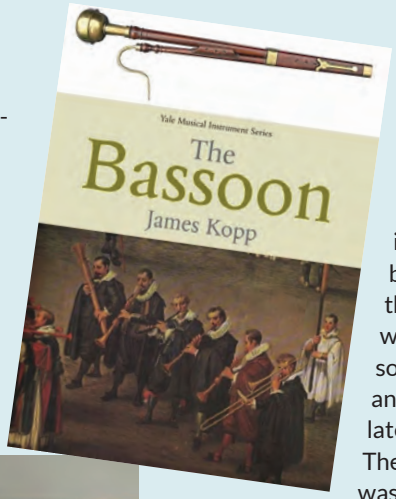
Stephen Fuller

Report and photos by Stephen.

The preponderance of bassoonists attending this Open Day on Sunday 16th April at Whitehall Cottage, Sevenhampton was not surprising since we had all come to immerse ourselves once more in William Waterhouse's unique collection of historical bassoons. Special thanks are due to Simon Payne for organising the day and to Elisabeth Waterhouse, widow of Bill, for making us all welcome. Graham Waterhouse, composer and Bill's son, was on hand too and explained how the building housing the music room, library and instrument collection plus the adjacent cottage, were found and developed by his father.

Three presenters, who have all participated in previous such events, ensured the day was fascinating and full of bassoon-related information and revelations. Roger Birnstingl, Bill Waterhouse's long time friend and professional colleague also contributed his personal experiences of Bill and their parallel careers.

Jim Kopp, author with Bill of *The Bassoon* (ISBN 978-0-300-11829-2) – a book on the instrument's history which draws much from the examples in the collection – spoke with illustrations on 'From Vienna to Paris: A Newly Identified Contrabassoon by Buffet Crampon'. The story began with the contra's first-known appearance in Paris in the form of a c.1830 Viennese instrument attributed to Christian Gottfried Schuster which remained possibly the sole contra-bassoon in the city for many years. This instrument descended only to D. It was followed by a series of similarly structured instruments including, as the talk's title indicates, a number by Buffet Crampon that were developed with increasingly sophisticated keywork and lead-pipes up to the late nineteenth century. The line of development was finally curtailed when Buffet Crampon made an instrument in the format developed by Heckel, albeit with the 'French' keywork that we are familiar with today.




Following a break for lunch, when there was the opportunity to try some of the instruments in the collection, Matthew Dart spoke about the techniques used to make the baroque and classical instruments then and now. He interspersed illustrations of historical woodworking tools and skills with photos and videos of his own workshop showing that, whilst there are now some power tools in use, most of the process is unchanged. It was inspiring to see how he single-handedly makes wonderful reproductions of selected makes, three of

which he had brought, ably demonstrating his expert craftsmanship. The bassoon, with its complexities such as the oval boot joint encompassing two diverging conical bores and angled tone holes is clearly the most challenging woodwind to make.

Meyrick Alexander, another 'regular' gave the final talk about British bassoonists before 1950 and the changeover from the French to German system. We were asked to identify each player in turn from photos he had brought, after which Meyrick spoke about their orchestral careers. He linked the generations through their teaching and, in some cases, the individual instruments that were handed down.
It was interesting to learn for instance that the French bassoon was still being used in film and TV music, such as on many of the *Carry On* films, played by Joseph Castaldini well into the 1970s.

Much of the day's enjoyment came from meeting old friends and making new ones. A conversation with Clare Glenister provided some of her experiences of the inimitable Bill Greenlees, from her early professional work alongside him with the BBC Northern (now Philharmonic). Greenlees was one of Meyrick's subjects and someone who, uniquely, changed from German to French bassoon.

# Are Women Bassoonists Equally Represented?

Martin Ludlow

International Women's Day was on 8th March so Martin of Double Reed Ltd thought it would be revealing to see how well women are represented in the bassoon community.

There are lots of ways of measuring this representation, but we thought we would take two:

1. *the number of girls and women who play the bassoon in the UK compared with men and boys*
2. *the number of women who play the bassoon and contrabassoon in the UK's professional orchestras compared with men*

For the first measure we took our own customer database at Double Reed Ltd and sorted it by first name, only taking into account those names which are unambiguously used in the UK either for women or men. We assume that our customers are broadly representative of the UK bassoon community and I can't think of a reason why this would not be the case.

The percentage split was 57% women and girls and 43% men and boys.

Some of these will have been buying for someone else – generally, in our experience, more women than men buy for someone else other than themselves – but even so, there is a clear verdict: there are more women bassoonists in the UK than men.

Now the next measure: the number of women in professional UK orchestras compared with the number of men. We managed to find the orchestra player lists for 13 professional orchestras in the UK and in total there are currently 32 professional bassoonists and contrabassoonists among these 13 orchestras, with some vacancies. There are undoubtedly many more professional bassoonists in the UK than this number, but as you will see, the verdict is crystal clear and probably won't be changed by finding the definitive number of UK bassoonists.

There are currently, across these 13 orchestras, 23 men and 9 women, again using their names as an indicator where it was unambiguous to do so. (In fact it was unambiguous in all cases.)

This means that 28% of professional orchestral positions in these 13 orchestras are occupied by women and 72% by men.

It would be illuminating to know how the figures for professionals have changed over the years and maybe we should make this an annual survey, but clearly there is a lot of catching up to do.

Anecdotally, we see broadly equal numbers of women and men conservatoire students coming to us to try and buy bassoons, and it would seem that the equal numbers broadly persist until graduation, but the transition from education to professional status seems to be where the problem starts.

It would also be interesting to measure the number of women teachers and professors of bassoon in the UK compared with men to complete the picture, and maybe this is something to look at next year as well.

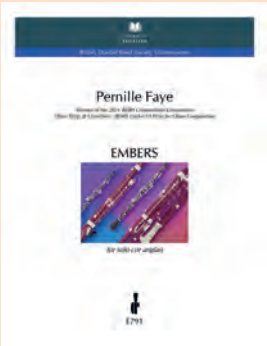
If you have any thoughts on why there is this imbalance at the professional level and what can be done about it, we would love to hear them. If we get enough responses I will write a future article summarising the views expressed.

[Ed. Of parallel interest, see the review of the women-only Tailleferre Ensemble's recording on Page 29]

Endnote from Martin Ludlow: 'Although being neither a woman or indeed a bassoonist, this research is partly motivated by having more granddaughters that I can shake a stick at, and wanting them all to have a fair chance at life's opportunities. (Eight at the last count, but only two grandsons.)'

# Reviews

## **Music** REVIEWS




**Embers for solo cor anglais**
**by Pernille Faye**
**Pub. Emerson Edition E791**
**£5.95**
**A British Double Reed Society commission**
**Available in both print and digital editions c.5 minutes.**
**(Emerson Grade E for difficulty)**

Pernille Faye is a Norwegian/Irish composer based in London. She won the Oboe Shop @ Crowthers – BDRS Under-19 Prize for Oboe in the 2021 Composition Competition. As a result, she was commissioned to write a solo piece for the oboe or cor anglais. She chose to write for the cor anglais, and *Embers* is the result. It was premiered at a BDRS Double Reed Discovery Day by Henry Clay in September 2022.

Pernille describes her thoughts on the piece as depicting the latter stages of a fire as it begins to reduce and die down. It crackles; its blazes ebb and flow, and its warmth persists even as the flames become weak. The music is lyrical and warm throughout, with dramatic episodes and occasional flurries of rapid activity. The range of the instrument is explored to its limits from top E down to low B, but everything lies well.

Henry Clay, who gave the first performance, writes about his preparation: 'The main aspect I had to work on was finding enough resonance in the second octave since there are many expressive passages in that range, and it's easy for the cor anglais to sound strained there. The work also contains a beautiful, reflective section at the end. I wanted a reed that was flexible enough to create that sense of still and ease.'

I must thank Henry both for submitting his thoughts about the piece and for his involvement in the process, as he worked with Pernille, from the first draft to the final product.

Anticipating this review, I played *Embers* on an oboe d'amore, as at the time I was preparing for Easter concerts! It worked well on that instrument. The dusky tones of the d'amore lend a lighter feel, though the additional depth offered by the cor is unmistakable but not unmissable.

This is a lovely addition to the instrument's solo repertoire and would enhance any programme. Evocative – not of death as the cor often presages – but of warm optimism and hope.

Geoffrey Bridge


**Beak and Worm**
**for solo oboe**
**by Robin Haigh**
**pub. Emerson Edition E792**
**£7.95**
**A British Double Reed Society commission**
**Available in both print and digital editions c.6'30"**
**(Emerson Grade E for difficulty)**

Robin Haigh is an Irish/British composer (b.1993) who studied at Goldsmiths College London, the Royal Academy of Music and University of York. He works internationally with leading orchestras and soloists and was awarded the Howarth of London Open Prize for Oboe Composition in the 2021 BDRS Composition Competition. Nicholas Daniel premiered his commissioned work *Beak and Worm* at the BDRS Double Reed Discovery Day in September 2022.

Robin describes the pair of pieces as: '...distinct, each partly influenced by recent encounters with particularly loud and beautiful birdsong. Although not mimicking birdsong directly, these thoughts of a bird's freedom, spontaneity and beauty were at play throughout the writing process. The title of *Beak* is inspired by the visual similarity of a bird's beak and the oboe's exposed reed. The reed is used importantly in pitch bending and vibrato effects. The piece *Worm* uses many of the same techniques but inhabits a different emotional world. *Beak* is a fanciful flight, and *Worm* could be a solemn wish to taste the freedom of flight and music, with which birds are blessed.'

These two pieces complement each other beautifully. The first, *Beak*, is frantic, lively and with almost constant pitch, rhythm and speed bending. *Worm* on the other hand is more reflective and leaves one with a sense of withdrawal and yearning. These are challenging pieces, both rhythmically and in deciphering the score. The initial sight of the score is daunting, but having become used to the style, the music is very approachable if technically demanding. There are clear instructions on how to achieve the effects required. The note bending, use of timbral trills and alternative fingerings are carefully annotated. The result is well worth the effort, as these pieces are in a class of their own. The typesetting by Emerson, the publisher, must have been a challenge!

Nicholas Daniel commented most helpfully on the music: 'Robin Haigh, as I expected he would, has written what I believe to be a completely original piece for solo oboe. I certainly know nothing else quite like it. It uses pitch bending as an important aspect, but I found what he wrote surprisingly natural to process once I got used to it. Lutosłowski in the 3rd movement of his *Double Concerto* employed it to great effect, but Robin's use is far more extensive and a really central part of the piece. Some of it is lip

bending and in *Worm* it's more finger trills in microtones. Robin worked with me a little on the right sort of sounds he wanted and I suggested several fingerings he chose from.

He also uses an arpeggiated downbeat quite regularly to show harmony and that means that you really understand his architecture because of the varying placement of these accented downbeat arpeggios. The development in *Beak* is brilliant, and the feeling of breakdown in *Worm* complements it beautifully. The latter is somehow wonderfully depressed and sad. I say wonderfully because I feel it captures a real sense of feeling sorry for itself and sad.'

In conclusion, I must persuade you to invest in these pieces. You will find them challenging but, for less than the price of a couple of café lattes, it is an investment that will give you much pleasure. A little mental exercise, yes, but you will reap its considerable rewards. A worthy winner of the Open Oboe Prize.

Geoffrey Bridge

## **Concert** REVIEW

**'Resilience' Concerto for oboe and orchestra**
**by Felix Turrión**
**10th February 2023 in Edgar Neville Auditorium, Malaga**
**Tiago Coimbra, oboe**
**Malaga Philharmonic Orchestra**
**Conductor: Levente Török**

The oboist Tiago Coimbra, solo oboe of the Göttingen Symphonie Orchester, Germany dazzled the audience packing the Edgar Neville Auditorium for the premiere of *Resilience*, a concerto for oboe and orchestra by the Spanish composer Félix Turrión. This work navigates effortlessly between the chamber and orchestral styles, and atonal and tonal aspects, creating a dialogue between the structural elements of the concerto. These emphasise the continuous changes of mood that the work goes through, characterising the immediacy of emotions in constant turmoil.

To reinforce this idea, Turrión conceives the concerto as a single piece constructed in three parts, which can also be understood as a succession of sound spaces related to the ideas of change and continuous movement.

In a long introduction, a motif introduced by the trumpet and horn is set against the wind section until the entrance of the strings. The solo oboe begins with an extensive cadenza, which the Portuguese oboist Tiago Coimbra delivered with great technical and artistic mastery. This was also demonstrated in the final, highly demanding section, the most virtuosic part of the concerto. The initial theme evolves through this carefully thought-out musical architecture, alternating between introspective reflection and the exuberance of our modern society, with its lights and shadows.

Alejandro Fernández (in translation)

## **Recording** REVIEWS


**Streams and Particles**
**by Edward Cowie**
**'Kandinsky's Oboe'**
**Christopher Redgate, oboe**
**Métier msv 28612**

*Kandinsky's Oboe* is a track from Streams and Particles which explores the music of Edward Cowie, a composer particularly inspired by the natural world. This eleven-and-a-half-minute work captures the essence of the oboe in all its colour and beauty, and Christopher Redgate plays what is inexplicably complex and intense music with a sense of ease and playfulness throughout all three movements, with seemingly little effort.

Cowie opens *Kandinsky's Oboe* with a sparse and scattered texture across the entirety of the oboe's registers. There is an almost improvisatory feel to the first movement, tying into the composer's muse of the Russian-born painter Wassily Kandinsky. The listener is transported to the beginning of a fascinating story ending with a glimpse of what is to come.

The composer writes: 'Lines are presented as a continuum,' which can really be felt in this second movement, where the soaring register of the oboe is fully explored and interspersed with playful quicker passages. I particularly like the way Cowie uses the sonority of the third octave to create so many colours in the lines. Christopher's apparent ease in the hair-raisingly high notes (which would make most oboists quake) is seemingly unmatched.

The piece's final movement 'Planes' is the first to employ other non-standard techniques, which adds a new depth to the piece. The few multiphonics, along with sung notes and spoken words, all add to what is a very impressive finale combining ideas from both the previous movements. Before bringing the work to a climactic and frenetic finish, Cowie introduces a repeated idea which departs from the material of the rest of the piece, holding us for a while in stasis until eventually allowing the music to float away into the ether.

There is some absolutely outstanding playing to be heard on this CD, even if some of the highest notes are barely oboe-like in nature! Christopher's playing is sublime and seems to defy any limit to both pitch and technique; a worthwhile listen!

Philip Haworth


**There are Things to be Said**
**Various composers**
**Tailleferre Ensemble**
**Ulysses Arts UA220060**

Chamber ensembles and their repertoire are becoming ever more imaginative and resourceful. This is a far cry from the situation in the late 1960s, when a freshly formed wind quintet set out to dazzle the musical world with its brilliance and diversity, only to be greeted with resistance and some scepticism.

'How many people are there in your quintet?' was a question asked more than once. 'Do you have any strings in your band?' was another. Even the secretary of a well-established music society wrote: 'We looked with dismay at your proposed programme. We recognised not a single name. Is there any chance that we are actually going to enjoy this concert?' The 'names' included such figures as Ibert, Danzi, Reicha and Malcolm Arnold, now the standard fare of most wind players.

Nowadays wind quintets are almost as firmly established as string quartets. Most music colleges will support several of these, along with reed trios and sextets for piano and wind. However, there is a constant search for new formats, new groups, new material. How refreshing and encouraging it is then to meet the Tailleferre Ensemble, formed in 2019 by two oboists, Nicola Hands and Penelope Smith, and comprising eight players, all women. The additional instruments are two flutes, two clarinets, bassoon and piano. There is no french horn, so no wind quintet! The clue to their existence lies in the ingenious title; Tailleferre, after Germaine of that name, perhaps the least well known of Les Six and its only female member. Their aim is to explore unfamiliar music, in unusual combinations and to commission new works, especially from female composers. Their debut album is neat and fascinating: eight players, eight works, all very symmetrical.

Female ensembles are not new, of course. I grew up with regular broadcasts, late at night and live on the BBC Third Programme (from a 'wireless set' the size of a sideboard), of the superb Portia Ensemble. This included such fine players as Thea King and Georgina Dobrée (single reeds, sorry about that!) amongst double reeds, Deirdre Dundas-Grant and Mary Murdoch. They did allow one male, the pianist Clifton Helliwell, into their ranks. Deirdre told me of the enormous obstacles put in the way of young women players trying to become established at that time. The stereotypical attitudes: 'Too emotional, not strong enough', or the usual rebuff: 'No skirt in this outfit!'

There have been changes over the last few decades. Teaching has seen a move from a predominance of male students in the 1970s, especially on the bassoon, to exclusively female, round about 1990, before settling down to approx 60/40 in favour of girls. (A non-official assessment made of children's orchestras pre-pandemic.) Meanwhile, in BBC National Orchestra of Wales, during one of its changes of name, someone enquired about the gender of the word 'Cerddorfa' (Orchestra) when providing a Welsh translation. People scratched their heads. 'Well it used to be masculine, but it seems to be feminine now. I think it can be either.'

This debut album was released in March 2023. The opening work is by the group's namesake, Tailleferre – her *Sonate Champêtre* – no doubt suggested by the pastoral associations of woodwind, especially flute and oboe. I am ashamed to say that I had never heard any of her music, so was interested to encounter a piece immediately recognisable as belonging to Les Six: lively, rhythmic and tuneful, played with precision, enthusiasm and some powerful interjections from the piano. The other works range from *Little Duos*, specially commissioned for oboe and cor anglais by Rhian Samuel – 3 movements full of contrast and individuality – to the *Three Lyrical Pieces* of Bill Douglas (a male composer crept in there!), fresh and airy and scored for three players. Also featured is *Century Dances* by Cecilia McDowell – a free and easy *Allemande* and the spectral *Ghost Dance* – finally the full ensemble in *Metamorphoses* by Jenni Brandon. All are characterised by excellent technique, fine runs and some impressive tonguing. (Nice to be young!)

Wind ensembles are not without their problems, though 'challenges'/'opportunities' are the preferred terms nowadays. One challenge is that too constant a wind sound can become tiring, aided and abetted by modern instruments, whose full and homogeneous tones can lead to textures which are too rich and unyielding. Tailleferre Ensemble deals with this skilfully by regularly varying the combinations, the use of the piano – a great antidote to wind tone – and some subtle use of dynamics and phrasing. I have always admired the French bassoon, on which instructions such as two, three and four 'pianos' can really be achieved and are not just progressive shades of a red face. The bassoonist in particular nevertheless manages a wide range of colours from the much more powerful German instrument.

It is a brave ensemble that offers baroque works these days, unless they appear on period instruments, which have a transparency and poignancy all their own. One baroque piece is featured here, by a male composer, Melchior Hoffmann, and is thoroughly worthwhile. In this, all the players are highly impressive on their modern machines, showing control and subtlety and some breathtaking double-tonguing!

The Tailleferre Ensemble has decided very wisely to seize the moment and to record these pieces for posterity. *These Things Have to be Said* is the title of the work by Ingrid Stölzel. These things have certainly been said, with exuberance and conviction!

Robert Codd


**Love is a rebellious Bird**
**French music for oboe and piano**
**Catherine Tanner-Williams, oboe**
**Christopher Williams, piano**
**Willowhayne Records**
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Drawing its title from Carmen's aria, *Habanera (L'amour est un oiseau rebelle)*, Catherine Tanner-Williams and Richard Williams have drawn together a rich programme of French music for their third CD. Including three well-known major works from the twentieth-century repertoire, the CD is to be commended especially for including some lesser-known works by Henri Brod, Blai Maria Colomer and Henri Dallier, all framed by two world premiere recordings: three arias from Bizet's *Carmen* and *Nocturne and Impromptu* by Claude Arrieu.

The CD opens with the arias from Bizet's *Carmen* in which the oboe takes the part of the heroine in her opening *Habanera* aria and the famous and seductive *Seguedilla*. These are followed by Micaela's aria from Act 3. Catherine plays these arias with a fine cantabile line and these arrangements form a lovely addition to the oboe and piano repertoire.

Henri Brod's *Fantasie* on the mad scene from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* continues the operatic opening to this programme with some lyrical and dramatic writing for the oboe. Brod (1799–1839), famous for his études, wrote a number of excellent works for the oboe that deserve more attention from oboists, not least this fine work based on two arias from Act 3 in the opera. Here, and in the following *Fantasie* by the Catalan composer, Blai Maria Colomer (1840–1917), Catherine Tanner-Williams' Marigaux sings across the whole range of the oboe with some especially fine top notes.

The *Fantasie-Caprice* of Henri Dallier (1849–1917) is equally impressive as a concert work from later in the nineteenth century, written as a Solo de Concours for the Paris Conservatoire and dedicated to the eminent French oboist Georges Gillet. This lyrical work is a real gem and one that deserves greater recognition as a concert piece.

The three more renowned works from the French repertoire that follow add context for these pieces and receive enjoyable performances. In the Dutilleux *Sonate*, the *Vif* second movement is on the steady side and the delicate piano and pianissimo markings in all three movements are less apparent in this recording. Poulenc's *Sonata*, too, was finely done if a little in need of a wider dynamic range fully to realise the power of Poulenc's markings. It could be that the recording levels on this CD, which tend to favour the oboe above the piano, played a part in this.

A most enjoyable performance of the Saint-Saëns *Sonata*, together with the evocative *Pièce en forme de Habanera* by Ravel, leads the CD to conclude with the first recorded performances of *Nocturne* and *Impromptu* by Claude Arrieu (pen name for Louise-Marie Simon, 1903–1990). These are delightful works and it is hard to believe that they have not been recorded before. Played here with elegance and wit, they bring this CD to a satisfying close: a CD inspired by love, love of the voice and singing lines.

The well-designed booklet gives much useful information on the composers and their works, whilst leaving us guessing as to who arranged the Carmen arias and whether these will be published!

George Caird

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