piano music by

WILLIAM ALWYN (1905-1985)
DOREEN CARWITHEN (1922-2003)

MARK BEBBINGTON piano

Recorded with financial assistance from the William Alwyn Foundation.

11 - 11 Alwyn – Fantasy Waltzes 34:19
12 - 14 *Carwithen – Sonatina 14:26

Alwyn
15 *Funeral Rites for the Death of an Artist 4:45
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18 - 20 Sonata alla Toccata 10:30
21 - 25 *The Weather Vane 4:11

Total duration: 72:35

*Premiere Recordings

Recorded at Birmingham Town Hall on 12 & 13 August 2013
Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor
Front Cover Photo – Mark Bebbington © Rama Knight
Design & Layout: Andrew Giles

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## ALWYN – Fantasy Waltzes [34:19]

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<td>Tempo rubato e capriccioso</td>
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<td>Scherzando</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>In Tempo piacevole</td>
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## ALWYN – Sonata alla Toccata [10:30]

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<td>3</td>
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## The Weather Vane [4:11]

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<td>2</td>
<td>The West Wind – Allegro moderato e giocoso</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The Sunny South – Tempo di valse</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The North Wind Doth Blow – Allegro molto</td>
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## Total playing time 72:35

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Recording Producer: Siva Oke  
Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor
William Alwyn was born in Northampton on the 7th November 1905 and died in Southwold, Suffolk on 11th September 1985 just a few weeks short of his 80th birthday. His musical studies (in flute, piano and composition) took place at London’s Royal Academy of Music, where in 1926 at the age of twenty-one, he was appointed Professor of Composition; a position that he was to retain for almost thirty years. Alwyn’s large corpus of work, which is close to three hundred compositions, includes music in the majority of genres; opera, ballet, orchestral, chamber, instrumental and song. His major orchestral works include five symphonies, and concertos for flute, oboe, violin, harp and piano. In addition to this there are approximately two hundred film scores which include music for both documentaries and feature films. Among the latter are several classic British films that drew from Alwyn some of his finest music for the genre: Odd Man Out, The History of Mr. Polly, The Fallen Idol, and The Rocking Horse Winner. There is also incidental music for both radio and television.

In addition to composing and teaching Alwyn held many appointments on various committees including acting as Chairman for the Composers’ Guild of Great Britain for which he served three terms in 1949, 1950, and 1954. In
1948 he was elected a member of the Savile Club thereby joining a number of other British Savilian composers that include Richard Arnell, Malcolm Arnold, Sir Arthur Bliss and William Walton. When not composing music, Alwyn spent his time writing and painting, such was his desire to always be creative. Among his writings is a short autobiography entitled Winged Chariot, and perhaps most fascinating of all a diary that he kept between September 1955 and August 1956 while composing his Third Symphony that documents his daily routine composing for the cinema and concert hall. Alwyn was awarded a CBE in 1978 in recognition of his services to music.

Alwyn produced approximately one hundred and fifty pieces for piano solo during his composing career. His most significant works for the piano are the Sonata alla Toccata, Fantasy Waltzes, Twelve Preludes and Movements. In addition to this there are also two piano concertos dating from 1930 and 1960 respectively. Alwyn was a very capable pianist and his approach to writing for the piano was essentially that of a romantic. Even though he flirted briefly with neo-classicism his piano music was born out of the tradition exemplified by Liszt and Rachmaninov, through to the impressionism inherent in the music of Debussy and Ravel. The spirit of John Ireland can also be felt, particularly in the smaller descriptive pieces. Influences aside however, Alwyn found his own individual way in writing for the piano as can be heard from the selection of works presented here. His intuitive writing for the instrument resulted not just in virtuoso pieces for the concert hall, but also sensitive miniatures of a highly expressive nature, along with many educational pieces for examination purposes. Several of these examination pieces found their way onto the Syllabus of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music for which Alwyn was an examiner during the 1930s.

The Fantasy Waltzes is a suite of eleven virtuoso piano pieces composed in London between June 1954 and April 1955 and is arguably Alwyn's finest creation for piano solo. The obvious rôle models here are the waltzes of Chopin, Ravel and Johann Strauss. Alwyn, however, using the basic three-four rhythm with great variety of freedom of style, interprets the whole range of the waltz in his own inimitable way. The idea for the Fantasy Waltzes originated while Alwyn was on holiday in Norway after a visit to Grieg's lakeside home. The third piece of the set, intended as a homage to Grieg and indeed inhabiting very much the sound world of the Lyric Pieces, was the first to be composed. At the head of the autograph manuscript score to this piece Alwyn has written “At the Tomb of Grieg”. Although conceived as a continuous cycle the suite does divide into two parts, Nos. 1-6 and Nos. 7-11, which encompass many moods from happy to sad, to the mysterious and funereal. The first part opens nostalgically and ends with the very rhythmic and joyous sixth waltz incorporating an expressive middle section. The seventh waltz, which opens the second part, is very subdued and mysterious exploring the chordal sonorities of the piano, invoking perhaps a funeral cortège with a doleful tolling bell. The eighth, ninth, and tenth are by turns light, dramatic and graceful. The eleventh is brilliant and light-hearted with a slower contrasting middle section that gradually gains momentum leading to a glittering finale. The Fantasy
Waltzes are dedicated to the New Zealand pianist Richard Farrell, who gave the first performance of the work in a BBC broadcast from Broadcasting House on 2nd June 1957. Less than a year later, in May 1958, Farrell’s promising career as a concert pianist was cut tragically short when he was killed in a car accident aged just 32. Alwyn admired Farrell’s playing greatly and must have been deeply affected by his death as he dedicated the fifth of his Twelve Preludes for piano to Farrell’s memory.

Doreen Carwithen was born on 15th November 1922 and died on 5th January 2003 aged eighty. She came from a musical family – her father was a singer and her mother a pianist and music teacher. Doreen commenced music lessons with her mother at the age of four, when she began learning both the piano and violin and, possessing perfect pitch, showed musical promise from a very young age. Her mother continued to give Doreen music lessons until she entered the Royal Academy of Music in 1941. Her principal studies at the RAM were piano, cello and composition. Doreen’s harmony (and later composition) teacher at the Academy was William Alwyn whom she married many years later. While at the RAM she received several composition prizes including the Elsie Owens prize for the most distinguished RAM student. Between 1938 and 1941 she had cello lessons with the well known English cellist Peers Coetmore, who later became the wife of the composer E. J. Moeran.

Carwithen’s musical output was relatively small mainly due to the fact that she devoted her energies in later years to promoting the music of William
Alwyn. However, she did produce four orchestral works – two concert overtures ODTAA (One Damn Thing after Another) composed between 1945 and 1946 and based on the novel of the same name by John Masefield, and premiered by the LPO under Sir Adrian Boult, Bishop Rock (1952), a Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra (1946-48), first performed at the 1952 season of BBC Promenade Concerts, and the Suffolk Suite (1964). There are also two String Quartets, a Violin Sonata, a Sonatina for cello and piano and a few solo piano works and several songs. In addition to this, Carwithen, like Alwyn, composed music for the cinema. Her output was far less than Alwyn’s, thirty-four scores in total; the majority of these were for documentaries and shorts with only six being full-length feature films.

Carwithen’s academic positions included Sub-professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music (1946-48), Lecturer in Music at Furzeldon Teacher Training College, London (1946-61) and serving on the Committee of the Composers’ Guild of Great Britain (1958-62). In 1961 (having largely given up composing) she left London and relocated to Blythburgh in Suffolk where she set up her new home with the composer William Alwyn, becoming his amanuensis and literary secretary, roles she continued to fill until his death in 1985. After Alwyn’s death Carwithen established the William Alwyn Archive, and in April 1990 formed The William Alwyn Foundation in order to promote her husband’s musical legacy. Despite her early successes it was hard for her to obtain a publishing contract, possibly due to her gender, and her works were seldom performed. After her death a few incomplete works were discovered, which include a Third String Quartet and a Symphony. There were also plans to compose a Cello Concerto, which unfortunately never progressed beyond the planning stage.

Carwithen’s Sonatina for piano solo (here receiving its première recording) was composed between February 1945 and February 1946, and is the first of her three solo works for piano. The other two are a Toccata (undated) and Four Preludes which were completed around 1950. The Sonatina is comprised of three contrasting movements largely based in the key of F sharp minor. The first, Allegro moderato, containing several changes of metre, has a somewhat neo-classical feel to it and juxtaposes very rhythmic ideas with more lyrical elements. The second movement, Molto adagio, is very sombre, expectant and mysterious incorporating highly decorative patterns alongside deep resonating chordal passages. It is the latter which brings the movement to a hushed enigmatic close. The third movement, Allegro molto, has much forward momentum propelled by fast moving quavers and incorporating syncopated rhythms, alongside brief passages of a more lyrical nature. However, there is no real pause for breath throughout the entire movement; the pursuing onward quavers (sounding towards the end of the work like jubilant pealing bells), lead to a delirious coda that concludes on a fortissimo descending cascading glissando on the black notes of the keyboard. The final F sharp octave in the bass provides a defiant and triumphant snarl to the work. The Sonatina was given its première by Carwithen’s lifelong friend Violet Graham-Williams as part of a concert that also included four of Carwithen’s songs at the Cowdray Hall, London on 8th March 1947.
Alwyn's *Funeral Rites for the Death of an Artist* (here receiving its première recording) was completed on 10th July 1931. It is not known to which (if any) artist this actually refers! This intense and brooding elegy is comprised of much chromatic writing alongside a deep and repeated tolling bell effect in the bass register of the piano. The piece begins quietly, rising to a climax in which the opening motif is thundered out briefly *fortissimo* before immediately subsiding to a *pianissimo*. This somewhat unsettling work concludes quietly on three successive chords of F minor, E flat major and A major before finally coming to rest on a chord of B flat minor underpinned by a final lugubrious tolling bell on B flat in the bass register.

*Bicycle Ride* (here receiving its première recording) is one of nine pieces that Alwyn composed in 1952 especially for the collection of graded recreational piano pieces published by Alfred Lengnick under the title of *Five By Ten*. This series of five albums under the editorship of Alec Rowley featured piano music ranging from the very easy through to moderate and difficult by Lengnick's house-composers of the time, which in addition to Alwyn included Rubbra, Maconchy, Wordsworth, Arnold, Reizenstein, Stevens, Dring and others. *Bicycle Ride*, a humorous and witty scherzo, appears in volume three of the series.

*Piece for Piano* (here receiving its première recording) was completed in London in October 1940 and bears the dedication 'For Angela'. The dedication refers to the artist, Angela Latham, who along with her husband the musicologist, writer and critic Pater Latham was good friends of the composer. This dreamy and atmospheric piece, a nocturne in all but name, remains quietly sombre and somewhat remote throughout, with only one brief *fortissimo* climax. The piece ends as mysteriously as it began in a hushed whisper.

The three-movement *Sonata alla Toccata* was composed in London between February 1945 and June 1946; virtually the same time-frame as Carwithen's *Sonatina* for piano! The title page of the original manuscript bears the heading 'Sonata' with the words 'alla Toccata' having clearly been added later. Although composed during a period when Alwyn was experimenting with neo-classicism, the work is in essence romantic. The first movement begins majestically in C major in which the main idea of the whole work is stated. This then leads headlong into the toccata-style *Allegro*, making much use of cross-rhythms and accented notes, which is maintained throughout the movement. By contrast the second movement, an *Andante* in F major, is very simple in nature with bell-like repeated Fs appearing throughout, leading to a mysterious F minor conclusion. The final movement, marked *Molto vivace*, begins with a lively triplet idea that is maintained throughout much of the movement, incorporating once again those repeated Fs from the *Andante* and the use of cross-rhythms featured in the first movement. A broader theme provides the second subject, which develops more and more brilliantly before culminating in an extended restatement of the opening *Maestoso* theme but, this time, in the key of A flat major, leading to a *Presto furioso* that brings the work to a dramatic conclusion. The *Sonata alla Toccata* received its
première in a BBC Home Service broadcast by Joan Davies on 30th July
1947. It was later championed by the English pianist and musicologist
Denis Matthews (1919-1988).

Just three weeks before composing the *Funeral Rites for the Death of an
Artist*, Alwyn completed five short charming miniatures under the title
of *The Weather Vane* on 20th June 1931. A more different sound-world
there could not be! Obviously these pieces are intended for children
to play and most likely considered for publication given that the
original manuscript is written in a very neat fair copy. Alongside *The
Weather Vane* Alwyn also completed further sets of children’s pieces
which include *Spring Morning*, and *Caravans*. *The Weather Vane’s* five
descriptive pieces are entitled *The Weather Prophet*, in which is depicted
a weather cock turning slowly round on the steeple top, a breezy *The
West Wind*, a subdued *From the East*, a gentle lilting waltz *The Sunny
South* and finally a fast moving scherzo *The North Wind Doth Blow.
This is the work’s first recording.

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Mark Bebbington is fast gaining a reputation as one of today’s most
strikingly individual British pianists. His discs of British music for SOMM
have met with unanimous critical acclaim and notably, his cycles of Frank
Bridge and John Ireland, have attracted seven consecutive sets of 5****
in BBC Music Magazine.

Over recent seasons Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and
Northern Europe, the Far East and North Africa and has performed at
major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Royal
Philharmonic and London Mozart Players. As a recitalist, he makes
regular appearances at major UK and International Festivals.