

MALCOLM ARNOLD (1921-2006)
A Centenary Celebration

SOMMCD 0640

Peter Fisher *violin* • Margaret Fingerhut *piano*

1 Solitaire – Sarabande* (arr. Alan Poulton)	3:34	13 Ballad	2:27
2 Trapeze – Lola's Theme* (arr. Alan Poulton)	2:51	14 Moto perpetuo	1:30
Sonata for Violin and Piano No.1, Op.15 [16:14]		15 Hobson's Choice Suite* (arr. Alan Poulton)	4:03
3 I. Allegretto	5:59	16 Sonata for Violin and Piano No.2, Op.43	8:07
4 II. Andante tranquillo	5:04	Five English Dances* (arr. Paul Harris)	
5 III. Allegro vivace	5:11	17 No.1, Set 1, Op.27	1:34
Four Scottish Dances, Op.59* [9:42]		18 No.3, Set 1, Op.27	3:02
6 I. Pesante (♩ = 104)	2:16	19 No.5, Set 2, Op.33	1:54
7 II. Vivace (♩ = 160)	2:13	20 No.6, Set 2, Op.33	2:23
8 III. Allegretto (♩ = 96)	3:49	21 No.7, Set 2, Op.33	2:53
9 IV. Con brio (♩ = 144)	1:24	22 Thème pour mon Amis* (arr. Alan Poulton)	1:34
Five Pieces for Violin and Piano, Op.84 [8:57]		23 The Chalk Garden – Madrigal* (arr. Alan Poulton)	2:01
10 Prelude	1:44		
11 Aubade	1:15		
12 Waltz	2:01		
		Total duration:	69:03

—————*First recordings—————

Recorded at Henry Wood Hall, London on November 21 & December 4, 2020

Recording Producer and Engineer: Michael Ponder

Front cover: *Private Practice* or *A Solo at Home* by H Pyall (1827) © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. (This print hung in Malcolm Arnold's study for many years.)

Design: Andrew Giles

Booklet Editor: Michael Quinn

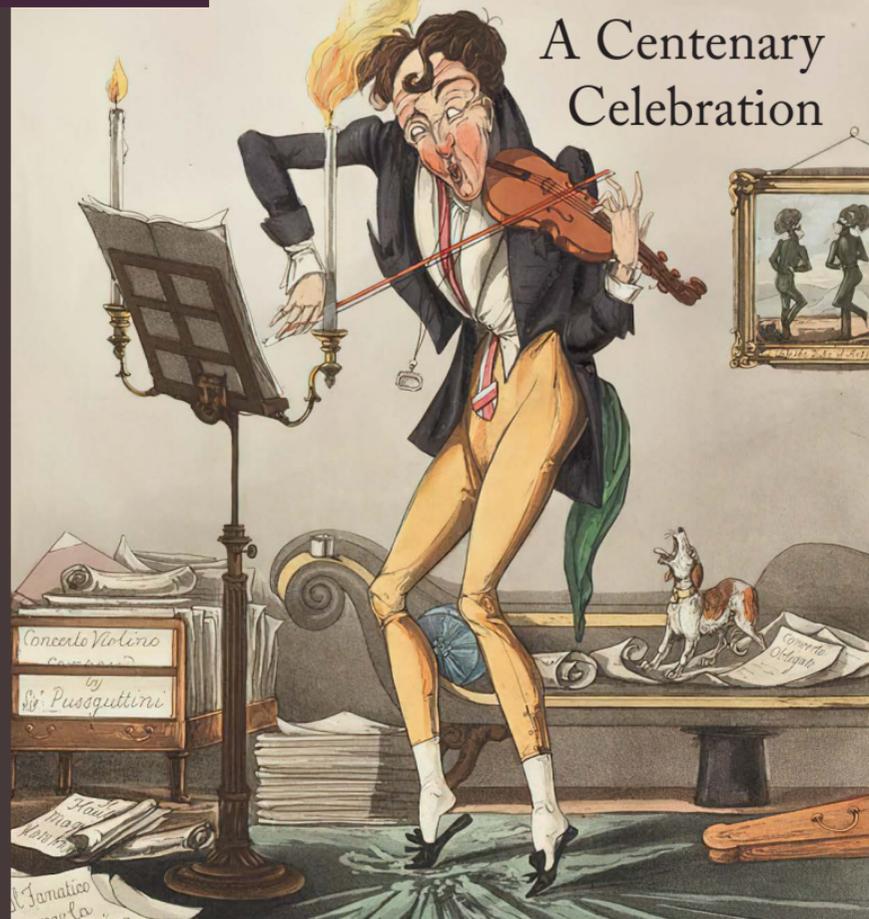
Visit www.somm-recordings.com for further information

© & © 2021 SOMM RECORDINGS · THAMES DITTON · SURREY · ENGLAND · Made in EU

Peter Fisher *violin* • Margaret Fingerhut *piano*
includes **FIRST RECORDINGS**

MALCOLM ARNOLD

A Centenary
Celebration



MALCOLM ARNOLD

A Centenary Celebration

A Personal Journey

I first met Peter Fisher in December 2015 at Kingston University when he was directing his Chamber Orchestra of London in a recording of British music for soloists and string orchestra. Among the pieces were three by Malcolm Arnold including the previously unrecorded Clarinet Concertino, Op.29a, and the Five Pieces for Violin and Strings Op.84a. (Both were arrangements of original chamber music works – more of this later.)

Later, I suggested he might consider recording an all-Arnold CD in celebration of the composer's centenary in 2021 featuring both original and arranged works for violin and piano. By now, Peter was forging a new collaboration with the pianist Margaret Fingerhut, and they both enthusiastically agreed with my proposal. A programme was agreed – new numbers were added, other numbers removed – as we honed in on a balanced programme reflecting both Arnold's serious and lighter side or, as Paul Jackson's excellent biography describes it: "The Brilliant and the Dark".

Willing sponsors soon emerged, including both the Malcolm Arnold Trust and the Malcolm Arnold Society, and the recording was completed in London's Henry Wood Hall during a Covid-ravaged December last year.

Three Serious Pieces

Despite the fact that Arnold's Op.1 is an orchestral Divertimento and the Overture *Beckus the Dandipratt* (Op.5) was a best-seller in the '78rpm charts, over two-thirds of his output during the 1940s was small-scale, mostly chamber music but also some vocal music. The former includes not only the wind pieces he wrote for members of the London Philharmonic – to which he had been appointed principal trumpet at the age of 21 – but also several works which, to the innocent ear, do not sound a bit like the Arnold of the early 1950s (for example, the two sets of **English Dances**, Opp.27 and 33, or the Serenade for small orchestra, Op.26).

These "non-Arnold" pieces have none of the gentle pastoral airs of a Moeran, Finzi or a Vaughan Williams. They seem instead to have a distinctly Eastern European edge, almost Rawsthorne-like in their tonal ambiguity and Bartókian dissonances. Among these enigmatic compositions are a 'first symphony', not for orchestra but for strings, written in 1946 for the Riddick String Orchestra¹, founded by the redoubtable Kathleen Riddick who conducted its premiere in Kensington Town Hall in April 1947.

Then there are his first forays into the intimate world of the string quartet – an early Phantasy of 1941, written for the Cobbett Prize at the Royal College of Music and the later String Quartet, No.1 Op.13, first performed by the New London String Quartet on the BBC Third Programme in November 1950.

¹ Arnold's first wife, Sheila Nicholson (1919-2009), played violin in the orchestra.

There are also a pair of terse, even tense, string sonatas, underpinned with some bravura piano writing, one for viola, Op.17 (1947), first performed by its dedicatee, Frederick Riddle with the pianist, Frederick Stone, the following year. The other, a three-movement **Violin Sonata** (Op.15) which dates from 1947. The Sonata's contrapuntal first movement is followed by a tranquil cantabile second movement which leads to (in the words of Hugo Cole) "one of the most violent and dissonant passages Arnold has ever written", after which the music returns to the tranquil opening as if nothing had happened. One could go so far as to say that this movement was an accurate musical portrait of the composer's mental state at that time.

In the Sonata's finale Arnold throws in a tarantella to try and lighten the mood, perhaps anticipating his forthcoming travel plans, having just been awarded the prestigious Mendelssohn Scholarship to study in Italy. Nevertheless, the two protagonists continue to fight over who has the dominant tonality, only for them to settle the argument on a final B flat at the work's conclusion.

Unlike most of Arnold's chamber music there is no dedication on the title page; the autograph score, like much of Arnold's early works, is lost. Unusually too, it would be four years before the work was given its premiere, by a young Nona Liddell² and Daphne Ibbott, in the Arts Council Drawing Room in London on 2 October 1951 under the auspices of the Committee

² Nona Liddell (1927-2017) later went on to lead the London Sinfonietta between 1970 and 1994.

for the Promotion of New Music. After the Sonata's second performance at Wigmore Hall on 17 April 1952, *The Stage* commented that "it was good to have the opportunity of renewing acquaintance with Malcolm Arnold's close-knit sonata... its many sterling qualities well merit its repetition".

It was rare for Arnold to repeat himself, so when he came to compose his **Second Violin Sonata** (Op.43) in 1953 to a commission from Suzanne Rosza³ and Paul Hamburger, he wrote it in one continuous span, though four distinct movements may be quickly discerned in performance. The opening lyrical tune with its clever avoidance of settling on a home key dominates throughout, this ambiguity only being resolved in the Sonata's enigmatic coda – listen out for the fragmentary piano writing here, possibly unique in all of Arnold's chamber music output.

The Sonata's dedicatees gave the first performance at London's Royal Festival Hall on 21 October 1953 (happily the composer's 32nd birthday). The Sonata was later taken up by Ruggiero Ricci⁴. He and the composer had crossed paths at a festival in Victoria in British Columbia, Canada during the early 1970s when Ricci performed the work, along with the enigmatic **Five Pieces for Violin and Piano**, Op.84, the third of the "three serious pieces" on this centenary CD.

³ Suzanne Rosza (1923-2005) was born in Budapest and met her husband, Martin Lovett (cellist in the Amadeus Quartet) while both were studying at the Royal College of Music.

⁴ Ruggiero Ricci (1917-2012), the Italian virtuoso, made his debut at the age of 11 playing Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in San Francisco.

This latter work, completed in August 1964, was dedicated to Yehudi Menuhin. Two years earlier Menuhin and his (only) pupil, Alberto Lysy, had premiered Arnold's Double Violin Concerto (Op.77) at the Bath Festival – now another commission came Arnold's way for a set of 'encore pieces' for a forthcoming American tour. By all accounts the premiere was a low-key affair – a concert given in Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland on 24 July 1965 with the pianist Ivor Newton.

There is no apparent synergy between the set's individual pieces. They could be played in any order. This was deliberate so that Menuhin could pick and choose which one (or more) of the five he would play as an encore. As it was, Arnold gave him quite a choice: among them an Aubade based on an Indian *rāga* (Arnold had journeyed to India in 1962 to score the film *Nine Hours to Rama*, profiling the events leading to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi); a languid Ballad culled from the *Arioso* section of his 1954 ballet *Rinaldo and Armida*, and a final, jazzy *Moto Perpetuo*, a movement dedicated to the saxophonist Charlie Parker.

Given that Menuhin would soon be duetting with the Indian sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar at the Bath Festival in June 1966 and French violinist Stéphane Grappelli on a famous 1976 recording of jazz standards, Arnold's choice of at least two of the movements in his "little suite" was prophetic. Since the first broadcast performance by Derek Collier and Ernest Lush on the BBC Home Service in January 1966, the piece has been largely ignored on the concert platform. It has nevertheless been recorded on several occasions, most memorably by

Ruggiero Ricci who gave it a sight-read performance with the pianist Rebecca Pennies in the composer's presence in the Canadian audience – a truly unique occasion, which found its way on to a rare One-Eleven CD in 1991.

Arnold must have inherited his Great Aunt's generosity of spirit when, in 1972, he donated the autograph score of the Five Pieces for Violin and Piano to Oxfam, inscribing the title page with the following remarks: "This is the original M.S. of these pieces especially written for Menuhin... I give them to Oxfam, with all good wishes for the work they do. Malcolm Arnold, March 8/72". Sotheby's auctioned the score in early 1973. It raised £80, about £860 today.

Three, Not So Serious, Pieces

This trio of film music excerpts, newly arranged for violin and piano for this recording, range in date from 1953 to 1964. Arnold once declared that **Hobson's Choice** (1953) was his personal favourite of all his 120-plus film scores and this joyful bundle of themes would surely explain why, incorporating, as it does, a jaunty opening 6/8 theme – an Arnold hallmark – which he borrowed from his one-act opera, *The Dancing Master* of 1952.

It should be remembered that both Arnold's father, Will, and his grandfather, James William Arnold, became wealthy men during the boom times of Northampton's shoe-manufacturing industry during the first half of the 20th century. Though Arnold was never encouraged to join his siblings – neither did he show any desire – it must have given his father particular delight to hear the evocative 'Shoe Ballet' which his son had composed for the film starring John

Mills as the diffident Willie Mossop and Charles Laughton as the boozy Henry Hobson who, in one memorable scene, appears drunkenly transfixed by the moon's reflection in a pool of water to the accompaniment of a musical saw.

A love-triangle on a high-wire was the central plot of *Trapeze* (1956) from which **Lola's Theme** (Gina Lollobrigida's character in the film) proved to be a major hit in America and was later featured on the *Steve Allen Television Show* during the film's own publicity circus. (Incidentally, all the scenes were filmed in the Cirque d'Hiver in Paris). The third extract, **Madrigal** is from the psychological thriller, *The Chalk Garden* (1964), starring a young Hayley Mills with Deborah Kerr as the mysterious governess Miss Madrigal, whose theme combines Arnold's seemingly inexhaustible lyricism with a tinge of melancholy.

Three Dance Arrangements (Mea culpa)

Unsurprisingly, Arnold had an ambivalent attitude to arrangements by others of his music. On occasion he would express delight, for instance with several of the wind and brass band transcriptions and on others, wished people had "perhaps best left things alone". Some of these dance arrangements for violin and piano derived from already widely-popular orchestral scores may well have fallen into the latter category. I can only plead guilty as charged.

In 2001, I had started working for Arnold... again. This time as his Promotion Manager. Since the mid-1980s when, as his part-time Business Manager, I had helped pull him out of the musical doldrums, got him settled in East Anglia, and then, just as suddenly, parted company, I had longed to pick up

the pieces again. I was soon doing the rounds with his three main publishers – Lengnick, Novello and Faber. It was during one visit to Lengnick's office in Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire, that I recommended they commission a new arrangement for multiple solo instruments and piano of the two sets of *English Dances*, Opp.27 and 33. In due course five of the eight dances were eventually published, scored for flute or oboe or clarinet as well as violin, in fine transcriptions by Paul Harris.

Later Novello were similarly persuaded to agree the publication of the *Four Scottish Dances*, Op.59 (1957) in the piano solo arrangement by John Yorke and another for violin and piano by David Gedge given its premiere by Peter Fisher and Margaret Fingerhut at the Savile Club, London – where Arnold had been a member – on September 23, 2016 to mark the tenth anniversary of the composer's death.

Then, in May 1984, and on this occasion, with the composer's express permission, I had made an arrangement for flute and piano of the limpid **Sarabande** from the 1956 ballet *Solitaire*. This version was first performed by John Franklin (principal flute in the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra) and myself in the summer of 1984 at a musical soirée in the home of Peter and Alison Osborne in the Ludlow Hills, and significantly, in the presence of the composer. Given his ambivalence to arrangements he did seem suitably pleased with the piece. Novello published the Sarabande in 2004 – this version for violin and piano was edited for performance by Peter Fisher. Like the other dance arrangements here, it too is a recording first.

Whistling for my Friend

In early 1984 John Amis invited Arnold to compose a short piece for whistler and piano for BBC Television's *My Music*. I was then deep into my researches on all of Malcolm's music, including further investigations into a newly-found pile of sketches and early works written as occasional pieces. There I discovered a barely-finished sketch entitled *Theme for Players* dating from around 1965 which he had written for a television cigarette commercial. I suggested to Malcolm that this little theme, suitably developed and with an appropriate piano accompaniment, would fit the bill. With his permission I re-arranged the whole piece, giving it the punning title ***Thème pour mon Amis*** and duly sent it off without telling Amis the background history. He replied by return, thanking the composer for coming up trumps: the whistling premiere took place on BBC2 in December 1985 with Steve Race on piano. Though the original work has been recorded before – by John Amis and Penelope Thwaites – this new version for violin and piano is another first recording.

Alan Poulton, Chairman, Malcolm Arnold Society © 2021

SOMM wishes to acknowledge the Malcolm Arnold Trust, Malcolm Arnold Society and the David Laing Foundation for their generous sponsorship of the recording.



Photograph: Aristide Mazarrella

Hailed by *The Times* as “one in a handful of the world’s finest musicians”, **Peter Fisher** studied under Kveta and Jaroslav Vanecek at the Royal College of Music, and later with Ricardo Odnoposoff in Stuttgart and Franco Gulli in Bloomington in the Music School of Indiana University.

A prizewinner in the Alexandre Glazunov Violin Competition in Paris, he has enjoyed a varied career as soloist, chamber musician, orchestral player and even headline act for major cruise lines, for which 40 years of performing as a featured artist for the eminent jazz and ‘cross-over’ couple, Sir John Dankworth

and Dame Cleo Laine, might well have prepared him. Dankworth composed his *Mariposas* for Peter’s debut in Wigmore Hall and later presented him in a performance of the same work with full orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall on the occasion of the Dankworth’s golden jubilee concert.

Peter established the Chamber Ensemble of London (CEOL) in 1997, consisting largely of principal string players of major London orchestras and respected artists from the London chamber music scene. CEOL has enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with its composer-in-residence, Clive Jenkins, which has resulted in concerts at most of the finest chamber music venues in London and elsewhere in the UK. With Jenkins, CEOL has produced a variety of CDs focussing on British composers of all periods, in some cases rediscovering works which, mysteriously neglected over time, have since come to enjoy frequent airing on radio stations around the world.

Peter Fisher's recording with violinist Maya Iwabuchi and CEOL of Malcolm Arnold's Concerto for Two Violins was featured by BBC Radio 3 and inspired Peter to explore other facets of Arnold's extensive output. The opportunity to explore the full extent of Arnold's music for violin and piano together with Margaret Fingerhut – an avid advocate of British music – for the present CD was certainly one not to be missed. Indeed, the debut of the Fisher-Fingerhut duo took place in 2016 in London's Savile Club, of which Arnold was a member, at a dinner recital to mark the 10th anniversary of the composer's death. The duo are delighted to be celebrating the centenary of Arnold's birth by presenting what they feel must surely be a comprehensive musical portrait of an extraordinary composer.

In these recordings, Peter plays a violin made in Bologna, Italy by Roberto Regazzi in 1997.

peterfisheriolin.com



Photograph: Andy Tyler

Margaret Fingerhut has been described by *Gramophone* as a pianist of “consummate skill and thrilling conviction”. Her distinguished career has taken her all over the world and she is particularly known for her innovative recital programmes in which she explores the highways and byways of the piano repertoire. As a concerto soloist she has appeared with the all the UK's major orchestras, and she is frequently heard on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM and many radio stations worldwide.

Her extensive discography on the Chandos label has received much critical acclaim and won many accolades. Her recordings reflect her long-standing fascination with exploring lesser-known repertoire, including works by Bax, Lennox and Michael Berkeley, Bloch, Dukas, Elgar, Falla, Grieg, Howells, Leighton, Novák, Stanford, Suk and Tansman, as well as several pioneering collections of 19th century Russian and early-20th century French piano music. Two of her Bax recordings were

nominated for *Gramophone* awards, and her disc of solo piano music by the Polish/French composer Alexandre Tansman was awarded the accolade of *Diapason d'Or* in France. Her disc of encores, *Endless Song*, was Featured Album of the Week on Classic FM and was selected as an Editor's Choice in *Pianist* magazine. She was the soloist in the première recording of Elgar's sketches for his Piano Concerto slow movement, and she also made the first recording of a rediscovered student piece by Rachmaninoff.

In 2019, Margaret undertook a major recital tour, performing a programme called *Far from the Home I Love* at 32 venues across the UK to raise money for refugees. Her specially created programme of words and music gave a cultural context to what it means to be a migrant. She raised a total of £88,000 and was presented with a Champion of Sanctuary award by City of Sanctuary UK in recognition of her work.

margaretfingerhut.co.uk

 [YouTube youtube.com/user/margaretfingerhut](https://www.youtube.com/user/margaretfingerhut)



SOMMCD 062

Piano Music by
Malcolm Arnold
and
Constant Lambert

Mark Bebbington
piano

"Bebbington enhances his reputation in music by this gifted, jazz-loving Brit...has all the stylish aplomb, improvisatory freedom and infectious swagger one could wish for...intrepidly communicative."

Gramophone, Editor's Choice, February 2007

"Throughout Bebbington plays with scrupulous clarity and control and with a palette that rejoices in crisp, bright colours. His energy is infectious..."

BBC Music Magazine, December 2006