

The Clarinet Chamber Music of **RUTH GIPPS** (1921-99)Peter Cigleris *clarinet*^a · Gareth Hulse *oboe*^bDuncan Honeybourne *piano*^cTippett Quartet^d (John Mills^e · Jeremy Isaac *violin*)Lydia Lowndes-Northcott *viola*^e · Bozidar Vukotic *cello*^e)

1	Rhapsody in E flat, Op.23 ^{ad}	11:08
2	The Kelpie of Corrieveckan, Op.5 ^{ac}	4:04
	Quintet for Oboe, Clarinet and String Trio, Op.16^{abe} [26:32]	
3	I. Allegro	10:49
4	II. Adagio	5:45
5	III. Energico	3:52
6	IV. Finale. Allegro moderato	6:06
7	Prelude for Bass Clarinet, Op.51 ^a	6:30
	Sonata for Clarinet and Piano^{ac} [19:17]	
8	I. Maestoso, Allegro ma non troppo	5:27
9	II. Andante con moto	5:12
10	III. Scherzando	3:12
11	IV. Maestoso, Allegro molto	5:26
	FIRST RECORDINGS	Total duration: 67:37

Recorded at The Menuhin Hall, Stoke d'Abernon, Surrey, on November 1-2, 2020

Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Michael Wight

Front cover: Ruth Gipps with her clarinetist-husband, Robert Baker, for whom all the music on this recording was written.

Design: Andrew Giles Booklet Editor: Michael Quinn

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The Clarinet Chamber Music of **RUTH GIPPS**Peter Cigleris *clarinet* · Gareth Hulse *oboe*
Duncan Honeybourne *piano* · Tippett Quartet

DEDICATION

Ruth Gipps – Chamber Music for Clarinet

The myriad musical gifts of Ruth Gipps, who was born in Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex in 1921, brought her to prominence at an early age. She was to become a pianist and oboist of concert standard, a conductor who founded and directed two orchestras and married a professional clarinetist, having met him during her student years. Clearly, music dominated her adult life, but it is as a composer that – nearly a quarter-of-a-century since her death in 1999 – she is most remembered today.

Two years before the outbreak of the Second World War, at just 16-years-old, Gipps entered the Royal College of Music in London. The determined young musician had chosen her career 10 years before. A precocious pianist, having been taught by her Swiss-born mother (herself a pianist of some accomplishment), Gipps had already appeared in public at local musical events, and had decided, before her age reached double figures, that she was going to become a composer. At the RCM, she studied oboe with Leon Goossens, piano with Arthur Alexander, composition with Ralph Vaughan Williams and orchestration with Gordon Jacob.

There was always something decisive in Ruth Gipps' character. The present writer, on meeting her for the first time in 1958, was immediately struck by her directness of utterance – never forceful, still less self-centred, but always open

and certain in her speech and in her music. This is not to say that she lacked subtlety – far from it, as the music in our collection amply demonstrates – but that her opinions were founded upon profound knowledge of the subject and were offered when she had something to add to the conversation.

Ruth Gipps's life at the RCM was enhanced by a growing attraction and admiration for her fellow-student, the clarinetist Robert Baker, then a pupil of Frederick ('Jack') Thurston. Ruth and Robert were later to marry – and were indeed encouraged to do so by Vaughan Williams, who sensed the mutual attraction between them when Gipps brought Robert to play her new piece for clarinet and piano, ***The Kelpie of Corrievreckan***.

The work is based on a poem by the widely-travelled 19th-century Scottish poet and writer Charles Mackay, from his 1851 collection *Legends of the Isles and Other Poems*. The story is outlined in Peters Edition's original publication of the work, telling of the Kelpie – a shape-shifting spirit of Scottish legend from the Corryvreckan Whirlpool (the strait between the islands of Jura and Scarba) – who mounts his seahorse and rides to the county fair. There, he sees Evan courting the fickle Jessie. The Kelpie steals her heart and that night, *Beltane E'en*, (May 1) rides off with her. Jessie is willing, until she discovers, too late, that the Kelpie lives under the sea. The next day, her lifeless body is found by fishermen.

The story is depicted in some detail in the music – effectively, an original tone poem for clarinet (in A) and piano. The work opens with a surging 5/4 idea on the clarinet – surely, depicting the Kelpie – the music marked *Allegro appassionata*. Mackay's telling of the story is mirrored in the unusual opening in 5/4, with a

strong adherence to B minor, setting the scene admirably. The Kelpie's ride to the fair, the music of the festivities, the 'love-music' and succeeding drama is all there in this remarkably original composition, almost lurid in the closing pages as a screaming Jessie is dragged beneath the waves, the arpeggiated piano writing bearing the dying girl to her grave.

Throughout her career, Gipps' command of the piano was self-evident. Although she abandoned performing in public owing to a hand injury, during her student years her performance of Brahms's B flat Piano Concerto was much admired, and she was surely the first female pianist to perform the demanding Piano Concerto by Arthur Bliss – who became a staunch colleague, following their first meeting in 1942. Almost 30 years later, Gipps was to conduct the London premiere of Bliss's Cello Concerto (written for and premiered by Mstislav Rostropovich) with Julian Lloyd Webber as soloist.

Ruth and Robert were married in 1942, but not long afterwards they were separated when he was called up for military service. However, it was during this period that Gipps had composed her **Quintet for Oboe, Clarinet, Violin, Viola and Cello**, Op.16 – the completion exercise for her Durham University Bachelor of Music degree – and the single-movement Rhapsody in E flat major for clarinet and string quartet, Op.23 (1941), which was first performed at London's Wigmore Hall in July that same year.

It is not difficult to imagine how the instrumentation of Gipps' Quintet arose, with her as the oboist and her fiancé the clarinettist. As the music proceeds, the 'give-and-take' intertwining the solo wind instruments, borne by the

imaginative musicianship within her invention, produce a work of quality and individual character.

Written in 1941, the Quintet could well be seen as an instrumentally pared-down chamber symphony. The sturdy middle movements in particular show her ability to encompass the 'pastoral' style and her occasionally individual grasp of harmony.

It is in four movements, opening with a strongly sonata-form movement – by far the longest in the work. Whereas many English composers of Gipps' and earlier generations may have utilised the instrumentation as background colouration and texture in producing a constant pastoral atmosphere, Gipps is already striding out on her own path to produce music that may, occasionally, be expressed in a somewhat bucolic manner, but which her concentration on extracting the most widely-ranged expression from her ideas declares a born composer. The occasional intensity of this music is striking, and whilst – in the nature of things – 'English' characteristics in instrumental colouration may be discerned in the movement – as, for example, with Elgar – they are by no means the main expressive qualities in the movement.

Yet any composer, no matter how hard they may try, cannot entirely hide their musical nationality. It is Gipps' intensity, her admirable quality of setting out the material on which the discourse is to be based, that threads a remarkably original (for its time) texture combining an occasionally 'English' turn-of-phrase within a discourse compelled by nationalistic syntax. The attentive listener cannot help but be impressed by the quality of the music, as if one were

overhearing a discussion between friends, a point here and there taken up and developed through civilised concentration.

The central movements, *Adagio* and a brief scherzo-like *Energico*, move into other areas: the cello opens the relaxed slow movement with an extended theme taken up by oboe and clarinet, before string tone resumes through the violin's take; it may be fanciful to sense an English pastoral mood during a time of war, but in this movement the similarity of emotional expression between Gipps' Quintet and, say, the 1944 film *The Tawny Pipit* (with music by Noel Mewton-Wood), inhabits a world far removed from contemporaneous conflict.

The scherzando-like *Energico* third movement has the country-dwellers at play: the relatively extended passage for clarinet and string trio offers a somewhat more relaxed characterisation, but is beautifully melded into the overall expressive structure, and the finale develops further the nature of this early masterpiece. This is no blustery, all-action finale, but a subtle expression of inner strength unsullied by anguish or conflict. The result is a deeply-expressive example of genuine musical art.

The single-movement **Rhapsody in E flat** for clarinet and string quartet (Op.23) further explores Gipps' evolving language and must be considered another of her compelling chamber works. The beautiful opening at once places the music in its temporal locale – a combination of elements of the English pastoral school allied to an underlying strength of contemporaneous expression and quite individual developmental mores. For example, it is surprising to encounter what might at first appear to be a fugal exposition

after the extended exordium, but Gipps is so sure of the work's direction that it is eventually revealed to be, as it were, a reflectively extended variant of that opening Englishness – quite different from what one might expect. In its triple-pulsed flowing expression it remains wholly characteristic of the composer, fully germane to the argument.

The music thereafter proceeds through what might be perceived to be a series of continuous contemplations (rather than variations) on the opening material, the supremely lyrical writing for clarinet seemingly, at time, leading the way yet mostly combining with the strings until the clarinet alone brings the music to an end in a *reminiscenza*-like coda in a score earlier distinguished by free-flowing counterpoint: here is a fluent, masterfully eloquent composition that manifestly does not deserve the neglect which has befallen it.

When Sir Henry Wood conducted Gipps' tone poem *Knight in Armour* at the last night of the 1943 Proms, it declared the 22-year-old female composer to be a new voice. Her chamber music had been heard at the Wigmore Hall, and no musician could have had a more rewarding concert when, in Birmingham in March 1945, Gipps was soloist in Glazunov's F minor Piano Concerto, after which she played cor anglais in the premiere of her own First Symphony.

By that time, the Second World War was drawing to a close, after which many aspects of British life were to be markedly different from the 1930s. Gipps' post-war life was initially focused on Birmingham, and although she became a byword for industry and no-nonsense integrity, there is no doubt that she became a victim of anti-feminism in British music, as a composer, conductor

and administrator. Her outspoken comments on the post-war fashion for iconoclastic European musical movements, compared with the established language in which her music was couched, led to her undoubted qualities becoming sidelined. Although her music was by no means wholly ignored post-war, it is since her death in 1999 that her genuine qualities have come to be more widely appreciated.

In 1956 Gipps won the Cobbett Prize of the Society of Women Musicians for her **Clarinet Sonata**, Op.45, one of the finest such works by any British composer. Again conceived with her husband in mind, it falls into four movements, the slow movement written at a single sitting; "I heard it in my mind and wrote it down as fast as I could scribble".

The first movement, *Maestoso*, is cast in 5/4; opening with a powerful introduction, determined and shot through with an impressive certainty of forward-momentum – strikingly so, with a tempo change to *Alla marcia*. It is the inherent power of that momentum that propels the music on its way – initially balanced by the expressively beautiful slow movement, *Andante con moto*, in C sharp minor, the flowing clarinet line weaving a compelling texture with the piano.

The third movement is related (at several decades distance) to the post-war English pastoral school, the *scherzando* momentum lightened by an appealing Trio section, its mood carried over to the Finale. This opens with a slow introduction, the forces regrouping before a somewhat bucolic idea in 12/8 propels the music on its way to the Sonata's emphatic conclusion – not

before our expectations have been challenged by a slower passage having the character of contemplative reminiscence.

The Sonata was first performed in 1957 by Gipps' husband, and it was around that time that he acquired a bass clarinet. Within a short time, Gipps had written her Op.51, **Prelude for Bass Clarinet**, perhaps the only solo piece to be composed specifically for the instrument. The result is a masterly composition of compelling invention – joining a handful of 20th-century masterpieces for solo wind instruments – on a par with Debussy's *Syrinx* for solo flute, Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* for solo oboe, and Berio's *Sequenza XII* for bassoon. Berio's solo clarinet *Sequenza IXa* (later arranged for bass clarinet by Rocco Parisi) is the only comparable solo bass clarinet work, but that is an arrangement by another hand.

Gipps' Prelude has been described by Paul Conway (reviewing a performance by Peter Cigleris, the artist on this recording) as "a heartfelt soliloquy of considerable cumulative power, this single-movement piece impressed with its range of colours and variety of expression. The score's many changes of mood and register were comfortably accommodated within an engaging reading of notable fluency and elegance".

Effectively a bipartite structure, the work grows inexorably from its four-note opening phrase through a series of dance-like variations until the close – a further example of this exceptionally-gifted composer at the height of her powers.

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Clarinetist **PETER CIGLERIS** is in demand as a soloist and chamber musician. Peter has appeared on BBC Radio 3's *In Tune* programme talking with host Sean Rafferty and playing live with the Tippett Quartet. He has also performed live for the BBC Radio 3 Lunchtime Recital.

Peter has worked with Martin Cousin, John Lenehan, Mark Bebbington, Julian Lloyd Webber performing for various music clubs and festivals around the UK, including the Windsor and Wooburn Festivals, English Music Festival, Carlisle International Music Festival and the ICA's ClarinetFest.

Internationally, Peter has performed at the Groba Festival in Spain, recitals in France, Netherlands and the US. Concerto appearances include performances in Belgium, Italy, Romania and Mexico.

Peter's interest in English repertoire has seen him premiere concertos and chamber music by Ruth Gipps, George Benjamin, Peter Wishart and Susan Spain-Dunk, as well as contemporaries such as Lloyd Moore and Peter Seabourne.

Peter is featured on recordings for Cala Signum, Toccata Classics, Divine Arts Records and Heritage Records. He is making his debut on SOMM Recordings with this collection of chamber music by Ruth Gipps.

Peter is an artist for Backun Musical, Silverstein Works and Marca Reeds France.

petercigleris.com



GARETH HULSE is principal oboist with the BBC Concert Orchestra, a position he has previously held with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, English National Opera and the London Philharmonic. A member of the London Sinfonietta, he is also the oboist of the Nash Ensemble, with whom he has been playing chamber music for many years. He teaches at the Royal College of Music.



DUNCAN HONEYBOURNE, commended by *International Piano* magazine for his “glittering performances”, is best known for his interpretations of 20th- and 21st-century British piano music. Following concerto debuts at Symphony Hall, Birmingham and the National Concert Hall, Dublin, recital debuts included London, Paris and international festivals in Belgium and Switzerland. His debut recital disc was described by *Gramophone* magazine as “not to be missed by all lovers of English music”, while *BBC Music Magazine* remarked: “There are gorgeous things here. Hard to imagine better performances”.

Duncan has toured extensively throughout the UK, Ireland and in Europe as solo and lecture recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician, appearing at leading concert halls and festivals. His solo performances have been frequently

broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and more than 20 radio networks worldwide, including French, Swiss, Austrian, Belgian, Portuguese, Dutch and German Radio, ABC (Australia) and Radio New Zealand.

Duncan has premiered over 70 new piano works, including John Joubert’s Third Piano Sonata, John Casken’s *Tempus Plangendi*, Cecilia McDowall’s *Notes from Abroad*, three piano cycles by Sadie Harrison, Adam Gorb’s *After the Darkness* and Andrew Downes’ Piano Concerto at Birmingham Town Hall.

Duncan’s solo recordings have been awarded five stars in *Musical Opinion* and *International Piano* magazines, and have featured as *MusicWeb* Recordings of the Year and Recommended Discs on Austrian Radio. Duncan is a Tutor in Piano at the University of Southampton and Sherborne School, and Founder and Artistic Director of the Weymouth Lunchtime Chamber Concerts near his home in Dorset.

duncanhoneybourne.com

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TIPPETT QUARTET

John Mills, Jeremy Isaac (violin), Lydia Lowndes-Northcott (viola),
Bozidar Vukotic (cello)

“The Tippett Quartet’s performances are little short of astonishing” *The Times*

TIPPETT QUARTET

The Tippett Quartet have performed at Kings Place, Purcell Room, Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Bridgewater Hall, and frequently perform on BBC Radio 3. They have performed at the BBC Proms and toured Europe, Canada and Mexico. Their broad and diverse repertoire highlights the Tippett Quartet’s unique versatility.

Their impressive catalogue of recordings has been released on Naxos, EMI Classics, Signum, Decca, Classic FM, SOMM Recordings, Vivat, Guild, Real World, Dutton Epoch and Toccata Classics to universal critical acclaim. Most recently they were awarded *Gramophone* Record of the Month for their recording of *Górecki Quartets*: “I cannot recommend this recording highly enough, and have run out of superlatives”.

In 2011 they celebrated the anniversary of the iconic film composer Bernard Herrmann with a series of concerts and radio broadcasts. They have worked with Damian Montagu and Hugh Bonneville for *In a South Downs Way* – a collection of poems set to music, and can also be heard as featured artists on the film *Knives Out*.

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