

SOMM
RECORDINGS



Gerald Finzi · Freda Swain · Denis Aplvor
Clarinet Concertos

Peter Cigleris

*Jonathan Raper · Austin Beattie · Lynn Arnold
London Mozart Players · John Andrews*

With the growth of the Internet and the adoption of English as the major international language, one might think it more difficult to define national art in the 21st century than it was 80 or more years ago. Such a view, however, is seriously challenged on considering the three clarinet concertos by British composers in our collection, each of which dates from the mid to late 1940s. If the individuality of each composer reveals few unifying similarities – other than a strong creative impulse and an irresistible communicative skill – all three possessed remarkably assured natural creativity through more original musical thought than the casual ear might detect.

Each of these concertos contains elements of retrained, undemonstrative expression, set against moments of strong drama and occasionally trenchant language by composers who knew their limitations and so, in their various ways, achieved genuine art, even if their achievements were neither fully appreciated at the time nor – certainly in two instances – recognised since. For some listeners, therefore, these three clarinet concertos will come as revelatory experiences – certainly in the previously unappreciated music of Denis Aplvor and Freda Swain.

Denis Aplvor was born in Collinstown, County Westmeath in Ireland in 1916, ten days before the Easter Rising. Much of his very early life was spent in a country rectory, near the Shannon, before his family returned to their native Wales during the Anglo-Irish War in 1921.

The boy's musical gifts soon became apparent, and in 1925 he was accepted as a member of the choir of Christ Church, Oxford, where his musicianship was encouraged. Within a short while, his attempts at original composition came to the attention of his seniors. When his father was appointed a canon at Hereford Cathedral the family relocated once more. At Hereford, Aplvor learned the clarinet, piano and organ, sang in the Cathedral choir and played in local orchestras; before leaving, he had also written some songs for voice and piano, but despite his obvious talents, Aplvor's family refused to countenance a musical education for him.

And so Denis Aplvor entered University College London in 1934 to study medicine. Still, the pull of music remained. He played clarinet in the College orchestra as he had done earlier in the Welsh College at Aberystwyth. The orchestra's conductor, Dr Thornton Lofthouse, suggested composition lessons with his colleague Herbert Howells, but the meeting came to naught. Later, however, Aplvor became acquainted with the composer and critic Cecil Gray, through whom he studied with Patrick Hadley and, later, Alan Rawsthorne.

The early 1940s saw Aplvor as war doctor in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He was later posted to India, and it was during his military service that he composed his *Concertante for clarinet, piano and percussion*. Details of the first public performance (which took place at London's Suffolk Galleries, off Pall Mall) are uncertain, but the same players gave the broadcast premiere (BBC Third Programme, January 27, 1948): Frederick Thurston (clarinet), Kyla Greenbaum (piano), brothers James (timpani) and Thomas (percussion) Blades and Aplvor himself conducting. It appears that Aplvor never performed the work as a clarinetist.

It is a remarkably original composition. The combination of instruments is unique and may possibly have been suggested by Bartók's then recent *Sonata for two pianos and percussion* (1937) or *Contrasts* for clarinet, violin and piano (1938).

The powerful onward momentum of Aplvor's music is undeniable. From the first bar, although the listener may be somewhat surprised at the avoidance of the over-emphatic gesture, the composer's admirably cool instrumentation reveals an individual voice, stronger than it might at first appear and one that will repay the better knowledge only a recording can bring. The occasional unexpected turn of phrase adds a vein of Celtic poignancy, one in which the contrasting rhetoric is by no means easily achieved, although greater familiarity will surely reveal the depth of expression to the attentive listener.

Despite the unique instrumentation, this is not a work that relies for its emotional impact on coloristic effects. Although such expressions certainly exist, there is a unique and enveloping thread of genuine musical argument that is impressive, and the writing for Apłvor's unique instrumental combination is consistently masterly. Nowhere is this better heard than in the ethereal coda to the first movement, the timbral, tone-clustered quiet expression creating a powerfully emotional effect.

The glistening slow second movement is equally enthralling – perhaps the most Bartókian in colouration but no less compelling in emotional terms, as a series of duets – piano and timpani, piano and clarinet – meld into a slowly disappearing aura.

In the *Allegro* finale, the addition of side drum and triangle add to the *quasi-marziale* effect, the work continually exploring a range of expression emanating from the opening material before turning into an extended waltz-like variation, which in turn heralds an extended coda that brings the music – and with it the powerful expression of the entire work – to a definitive conclusion.

Gerald Finzi's *Concerto for clarinet and strings* in C minor was composed in 1948/49 and then premiered at the Hereford Three Choirs Festival on September 9, 1949 by Frederick Thurston with the composer conducting. Vaughan Williams, a long-time friend and admirer of the composer, heard the broadcast, and it clearly impressed him: he wrote to Finzi suggesting that the structure of the Concerto could be improved by the insertion of a cadenza, which Finzi duly added.

Interestingly, Vaughan Williams had conducted the first performance of Finzi's Violin Concerto (Queen's Hall, London, 1928). The work was later withdrawn and the slow movement – entitled *Introit* – revised and published separately (the complete original Violin Concerto has since been revived in performance and on recordings).

Finzi's Clarinet Concerto has become his most frequently heard concert work. It demonstrates the composer's complete empathy with his chosen solo instrument as well as his flawless writing for string orchestra. The essence of this undoubted masterpiece is a successful search for pacification in the wake of the dramatic and intense opening statement by the orchestra, which is answered by a ruminative, emotionally contrasted solo from the clarinet. Here – at once – is the dramatic conundrum, wonderfully explored and worked throughout the first movement in a classic concerto “question-and-answer” structure, always fluent and germane to the argument. The first movement does not fully resolve the music's inherent tension, but within the central *Adagio* we sense the eventual resolution in a meditative and moving contemplation, which – in passing – quotes from Finzi's then recent choral work *Lo, the full, final sacrifice* composed a few years before he received the diagnosis of the condition which was to claim his life in 1956.

The slow movement ends in that hoped-for mood of pacification, but there is still life to be lived: the concluding Rondo restores the here-and-now in a classic structure, memorably tuneful and forever forward-looking (with an occasional backward glance to the opening movement and change of pulse) before the sheer embodiment of human energy, which is encapsulated in the brilliant coda, brings this superb masterpiece racing to its breathless conclusion.

The mention of **Freda Swain's** name to most musicians would most likely bring to mind memories of attractive, short solo piano pieces often encountered in graded Academy of Music examinations – music that is worthwhile in itself, is full of character and includes a number of technical demands for the particular grade.

The idea that she was also an accomplished composer of around 450 concert and large-scale recital works in a modern (although not necessarily challenging) language was almost completely unknown during her lifetime. For example, in his groundbreaking study

Music in England (1942), Eric Blom dismisses her thus: “Freda Swain’s music somewhat resembles John Ireland’s but is without his technical and emotional complications”. And that is that – hardly a considered comment on the music of Charles Villiers Stanford’s last female pupil. Such disregard, however, is utterly repudiated in her larger chamber and orchestral works, as we hear in this world-premiere recording of her *Concertino for clarinet with string orchestra and (one) horn “Lumine naturi”* (By the light of nature), of 1948, which will undoubtedly come as nothing less than a revelation for very many people.

It is difficult not to be impressed by this fine composition, more properly described as a full-scale concerto (the composer’s title, *Concertino*, perhaps meant to downplay the power of the music). It is written in a wide-ranging yet singularly idiomatic language that acknowledges and draws upon the mores of established tonality and melodic language, but here more widely cast, individually and naturally utilising a broad palette of expression tightly controlled by a superlative technique that gives complete freedom to the composer.

Swain is not afraid of long-swept, almost late-Straussian, melodic lines, with a more varied inner life than such a description might infer. Her genuine thematicism organically draws from the freer approach to tonality and wider-ranging structures of her significant contemporaries – all put at the service of an expressive art that never disabuses the attentive listener.

Indeed, what is also remarkable in Swain’s *Concertino* is the wholly expressive nature of the work: the listener is in no doubt as to the intention of this music. Each movement is headed by a quotation from Algernon Blackwood’s writings, implying that the inspiration of the work emanated from Blackwood’s philosophical approach, perhaps best summed up by him when he wrote: “My fundamental interest, I suppose, is signs and proofs of other powers that lie hidden in us all; the extension, in other words, of human faculty”.

Here was inspiration for Swain to extend and broaden the big-boned melodic gestures of the late Romantic period and the stretching of tonality and structuralisation of her leading contemporaries – in the latter instance particularly Hindemith (although Swain’s melodic gifts can hardly be said to approach those of her internationalist German contemporary). The energy Swain exhibits in her major works – of which this Concertino is undoubtedly one – is remarkable for those brought up on her quasi-tea-room “background” pieces, important though they remain for their technical (and, indeed, genuinely melodic) content.

The first movement of the Concertino, marked *Moderato* (Pastorale), is headed “...and the power of the old earth... thrilled down among the sunshine of the meadows and the music of sweet piping” (from *The Old Man of Visions*). It at once takes us into an individual world of expressive tone, the literary inspiration giving full rein to the composer’s creative imagination. In terms of instrumental colour, harmonic depth and melodic richness, Swain declares herself fully the equal of her more readily accepted contemporaries but does so in a language that is entirely hers. In the central slow movement, marked *Lento movimento* “And with the divine deliverance came the crying of sea-gulls, the glimmer of reedy tarns, the whispering of wind among grasses...” (again from *The Old Man of Visions*), Swain’s natural individuality takes full flight, melodically and harmonically, creating a sound-world of delicate natural suggestions organically held within a harmonic framework of no little depth. The finale, *Allegro assai*, is headed “Somewhere, through openings, came the sound of the night driving over the roof, and far above I had visions of those everlasting winds streaming by with clouds as large as continents on their wings...” (from *May Day Eve*).

This was no chance inspiration: the winter of 1946–47 had been one of England’s worst on record, and by the time Swain wrote the date “17/2/48” on her manuscript (after the second movement) the country had scarcely recovered from the previous year’s forces of nature, about which Blackwood had so finely written: *Lumine naturi* indeed, transmuted into music.

"This is a fresh and impressively pleasing collection which mixes the usual and the unusual to good effect with more of the latter than the former."

Rob Barnett, *MusicWeb International*

"...this pairing is not lacking, and they bring nuance and insight to bear, as well as fine tone and ensemble..."

Jonathan Woolf, *MusicWeb International*

"The performances are marvellous... with Peter Cigleris the pick..."

Guy Rickards, *Gramophone* (April 2019)

"... a rich, consistent tone and splendidly mellifluous phrasing..."

Jessica Duchon, *BBC Music Magazine* (April 2021)

"... played with tremendous care by Peter Cigleris..."

Flora Wilson, *The Guardian* (March 2021)

"Faster passages are well executed, and the melodic lines sing out..."

All the performances are solid and assured..."

Stephanie Reeve, *Clarinet and Saxophone* (Summer 2021)



Clarinetist **Peter Cigleris** is in demand as a soloist and chamber musician. His interest in the English clarinet repertoire has seen him premiere concertos and chamber music by Ruth Gipps, George Benjamin, Susan Spain-Dunk, Dorothy Gow, Cécile Hartog and others, as well as contemporaries such as Vahan Salorian, Gavin Sutherland, Lloyd Moore and Peter Seabourne.

As a solo recording artist Peter has a growing discography. He has featured on discs for Cala Records, Cala Signum, Heritage Records and Toccata Classics. Previously on SOMM Recordings is his recent *Clarinet Concertos* for solo clarinet and wind orchestra, featuring two world-premiere recordings, along with *Dedication:*

The Clarinet Chamber Music of Ruth Gipps (all world-premiere recordings) and a contribution to *Eclogue: British Chamber Music* ("Cigleris makes an eloquent case for the engaging single-movement Concertante [by Joseph Horowitz], and he also excels in Cecilia McDowall's hauntingly evocative *Y Deryn Pur*" – *Gramophone*).

On the concert stage Peter has performed internationally at the Festival-Groba in Spain and in chamber recitals in France, Netherlands and the US. Concerto appearances include the world premiere of Peter Wishart's *Serenata Concertante* (71 years after it was composed) at the International Clarinet Association's ClarinetFest (Belgium), Carl Maria von Weber's Concertino in Italy, and Mozart's sublime Concerto K.622 in Romania and Mexico. While in Mexico Peter also gave the Mexican premiere of Malcolm Arnold's Second Clarinet Concerto. Peter was invited to perform in Győr, Hungary for the European Clarinet Festival, and he gave the US premiere of Spain-Dunk's *Cantilena (Poem)* with the Reno Philharmonic. Peter's growing reputation within the international clarinet community resulted in his being approached to serve as co-artistic director for ICA's ClarinetFest 2024 (Dublin).

Peter studied at both the Birmingham Conservatoire and Royal College of Music. Whilst at the Conservatoire, Peter won the prestigious John Ireland Chamber Music Award with a performance of that composer's *Fantasy-Sonata*. Peter also performed Malcolm Arnold's Second Clarinet Concerto as part of the composer's 80th birthday celebrations. Whilst completing his postgraduate studies at the RCM, Peter was awarded the Prix de Fossat and was invited to Cahors, France to present a recital for Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark at a private reception.

As an orchestral player Peter has worked with several well-known English orchestras and has been involved in various session recordings. Peter has also held the principal clarinet seat with the Symphony Orchestra of India and has worked with conductors such as Charles Dutoit and Rafael Payare amongst others.

Peter has appeared on BBC Radio 3's "In Tune" programme talking with Sean Rafferty and on a separate occasion playing live with the Tippett Quartet. He has also performed live for the BBC in the Radio 3 Lunchtime Concert. Peter has worked with Martin Cousin, Mark Bebbington and Julian Lloyd Webber, performing for various music clubs and in festivals around the UK including the Windsor Festival, Wooburn Festival, English Music Festival and Carlisle International Music Festival. Peter is a member of "ChamberMusicBox", which presents innovative chamber music programmes in London and the surrounding areas.

Peter maintains a private teaching studio with many students gaining their ABRSM Grade 8 as well as the ARSM, often passing with distinction. During the summer months he can be found tutoring at the Exmouth Summer School. For the last few years he has been invited to be a member of the international jury for the Silverstein Clarinet Contest and the Music and Stars competition.

Peter is a proud artist for Backun, D'Addario, Silverstein Works, Carbonissimo and Chedeville.



Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, percussionist **Austin Beattie** joined English National Ballet in 1990. He is now Principal Percussion of the ENB Philharmonic and has been involved in many ballet premieres, including the groundbreaking *Giselle* by choreographer Akram Khan.

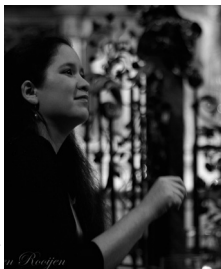
London-based timpanist and percussionist **Jonathan Raper** performs regularly in a wide spectrum of musical genres. He is timpanist of the Irish Chamber

Orchestra and can be heard performing with many of the UK's leading orchestras including English Touring Opera and the ENB Philharmonic.



Pianist **Lynn Arnold** is recognised for her collaborative musicianship, distinguished by the colours in her "glorious pianism" (*MusicWeb International*). A founding member of the Warwick Piano Trio, Lynn plays with artists including Francesca Barritt, Bozidar Vukotic and Roderick Williams. An advocate of British music, Lynn has recorded widely to much critical acclaim, with the Tippett Quartet, with her piano duet partner Charles Matthews and with violist Peter Mallinson, for Dutton Epoch, Toccata Classics, Convivium Records, Albion Records and Meridian. An

alumna of Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music, and a former Park Lane Group Young Artist, Lynn studied with Vanessa Latache, Michael Dussek and Patsy Toh. Lynn is on the staff of the Royal Academy of Music Junior Department and has coached chamber music at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.



John Andrews has conducted many of the UK's leading orchestras and ensembles, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Concert Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the BBC Singers, BBC Philharmonic, The Orchestra of Scottish Opera, the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Manchester Camerata.

He has won the BBC Music Magazine Award three times: for Malcolm Arnold's *The Dancing Master* (2021); J.F. Lampe's *The Dragon of Wantley* (2023) and British Piano Concertos (2024). Alongside the BBC Music Magazine Awards, his recording of Ethel Smyth's *Der Wald* won Presto Music's "Rediscovery of the Year" in 2023.



© Edmond Choo Photography

He has gained a formidable reputation for bringing neglected masterpieces back to public attention. Building on his early discoveries of the unloved corners of Italian *bel canto* and the English baroque, he has championed composers from Eccles, Arne and Lampe in the 17th and 18th centuries to Arnold, Lutyens and Maconchy in the 20th and 21st. He has made over 20 recordings and appears regularly with the BBC Concert Orchestra and at the English Music Festival.

John has conducted over 40 operas for The Grange Festival, Opera Holland Park, English Touring Opera, Garsington Opera, Buxton International Festival and the Volkstheater Rostock. He is Principal Guest Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra and Artist-in-Association with the English Symphony Orchestra. Recent projects include albums featuring music by Granville Bantock, Peter Warlock and Avril Coleridge-Taylor, and two projects with the Manchester Camerata.

Born in Nairobi and brought up in Manchester, John graduated from Cambridge University with a PhD in music and history. He now lives in London with his wife, children, three cats, two chinchillas and a corn snake.



© Kaupo Kikkas

London Mozart Players are the oldest, freshest and most adventurous chamber orchestra in the UK.

Set up over 75 years ago by Harry Blech to perform the works of Mozart and Haydn, LMP's mission has evolved into creating bold, ambitious and accessible musical experiences for all. LMP are proud to be at the forefront of embedding arts and culture into the life of communities across the UK and beyond, performing both new works and music that stays true to their roots.

LMP work with schools and music hubs around the UK and beyond to inspire the next generation of musicians and music lovers. They are continuing their long tradition of promoting young talent: Jacqueline du Pré, Yan Pascal Tortelier and Nicola Benedetti are just three of many young musical virtuosi championed early in their careers by them.

LMP are based at Fairfield Halls in Croydon and have residencies at St John's, Upper Norwood, Thaxted Festival and Grayshott Concerts. Jonathan Bloxham has served as their Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor since July 2025.

Collaborating with many of the world's greatest soloists and conductors, LMP's work is made in Croydon and celebrated across the globe.



Violin 1

Simon Blendis
Martin Smith
Nemanja Ljubinkovic
Thea Spiers
Tom Grundy
Magdalena Loth-Hill

Violin 2

Gemma Sharples
Anna de Bruin
Aries Chow
Jeremy Metcalfe
Stephanie Waite

Viola

Judith Busbridge
Christopher Beckett
Claire Newton
Katie Perrin

Cello

Sarah Butcher
Daisy Vatalaro
Chris Murray

Double Bass

Lucy Shaw
Melissa Favell-Wright

Horn

George Strivens

Grateful thanks in supporting this project go to Mr Xavier Bellouard and Mr Clive Jenkins. Also, to my sponsors Backun Musical, D'Addario, Silverstein Works and Chedeville. Thanks also go to the Finzi Trust, Finzi Friends, RVW Foundation, the John Ireland Trust, the Francis Routh Trust and Plymouth Concerts.

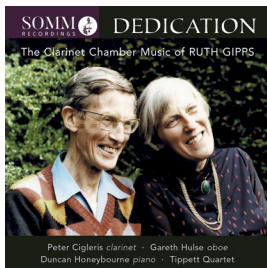
More from Peter Cigleris on SOMM Recordings



SOMMCD 0705



SOMMCD 0653



SOMMCD 0641

Peter Cigleris clarinet Clarinet Concertos
Gerald Finzi · Freda Swain · Denis Aplvor

SOMMCD 0722

DENIS APIVOR (1916–2004)

Concertante for clarinet, piano and percussion, Op.7a *

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Vivace e con fuoco | 5:34 |
| 2 | II. Andante | 8:21 |
| 3 | III. Molto allegro | 6:12 |

Jonathan Raper timpani · *Austin Beattie* percussion · *Lynn Arnold* piano

FREDA SWAIN (1902–1985)

“Lumine naturi” Concertino for clarinet with string orchestra and (one) horn *

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|------|
| 4 | I. Moderato (Pastorale) | 6:26 |
| 5 | II. Lento movimento | 9:48 |
| 6 | III. Allegro assai | 7:47 |

London Mozart Players

GERALD FINZI (1901–1956)

Concerto for clarinet and strings, Op.31

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------|
| 7 | I. Allegro vigoroso | 8:07 |
| 8 | II. Adagio, ma senza rigore | 11:19 |
| 9 | III. Rondo: Allegro giocoso | 7:50 |

London Mozart Players

John Andrews conductor

Total duration:

71:27

* Premiere Recordings

Recording: St George’s Headstone, Pinner View, Harrow, London, 9–11 September 2025

Executive Producer: Siva Oke

Recording Producer: Michael Ponder · **Recording Engineer & Editor:** Adaq Khan

Front Cover: *Talsarn (Christmas Eve)* (1981), Kyffin Williams (1918–2006)

© The National Library of Wales / Image: Hereford Museum and Art Gallery

Design: WLP London Ltd · **Booklet Editor:** Ray Granlund

Visit **somm-recordings.com** for further information

® & © 2026 SOMM RECORDINGS · THAMES DITTON · SURREY · ENGLAND · Made in the EU