

SOMMCD 273

Céleste Series

Piano Concertos by DORA BRIGHT (1862-1951) and RUTH GIPPS (1921-99)

Samantha Ward*, Murray McLachlan** pianos Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Charles Peebles

DORA BRIGHT:		9 Variation 5: Allegretto Tranquillo 1:23
Piano Concerto No.1 in A minor †*	[24:26]	10 Variation 6: Lento 3:15
Allegro moderato	13:58	11 Variation 7: Scherzo – Finale 6:34
2 Intermezzo – Andante espressivo	4:30	
3 Finale – Allegro	5:58	RUTH GIPPS:
		Piano Concerto in G minor, Op.34** [26:19]
DORA BRIGHT:		12 Allegro moderato 14:34
Variations for Piano and Orchestra †* [16:43]		13 Andante 5:50
4 Thema – Semplice – Moderato	1:02	14 Vivace 5:55
5 Variation 1: Grazioso	0:54	
6 Variation 2: Con Brio	0:55	15 RUTH GIPPS: Ambarvalia, Op.70 † 7:54
7 Variation 3: Andantino	1:14	Total duration 75:22
8 Variation 4: Tempo di Valse	1:23	

Recorded at The Friary, Liverpool on April 24-25, 2019

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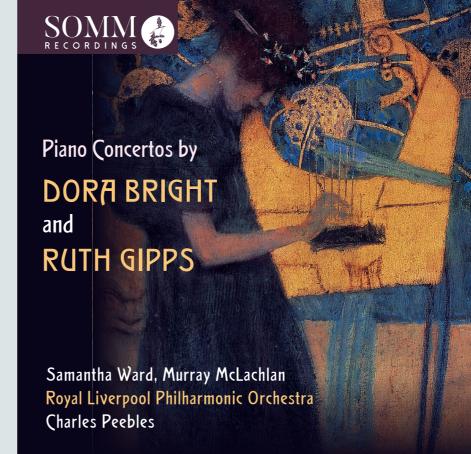
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Ruth Gipps and Dora Bright

The music of these two English composers, separated by almost 60 years, shares aspects to make a suitable pairing, as well as distinctions identifying their individuality. The first observation we should make, for purely historical purposes, is that both composers were women; today, of course, such an observation is as relevant as the colour of an individual's eyes, but to Dora Bright in the 1880s and Ruth Gipps in the 1940s the occasional discrimination they encountered, simply because they were women in what was regarded as primarily a man's world, was an additional burden to bear, wholly unconnected to the music they composed and performed.

Dora Estella Bright was born in Sheffield in 1862, her father being an excellent amateur musician. It was doubtless from him that she inherited her exceptional musical gifts, which led to her studying the piano at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Walter Macfarren and composition with the greatly significant Ebenezer Prout. Bright made her first appearance as a pianist at the Covent Garden Promenade Concerts in 1882, her pianism later gaining her the distinguished Potter Exhibition Award. In 1886, she appeared before Liszt during his last London visit in Sterndale Bennett's Caprice for piano and orchestra. She recalled: "When it was over I was summoned to Liszt who took me by both hands and smiling said, 'Mademoiselle, yous jouez a merveille!"

A British pianist praised by Liszt, one who later appeared three times with Georges Enescu and was described by George Bernard Shaw and *The Times* as "a thorough

musician", was clearly exceptional. In 1888, Bright became the first woman awarded the Lucas Medal for Composition, and on leaving the Academy she gave a notable series of recitals, in 1891 playing her Concerto in A minor at the Crystal Palace under August Manns. In 1892, Bright gave a recital series of ancient and modern English music, having first toured on the Continent in the autumn of 1889, successfully performing her Concerto in Dresden, Cologne and Leipzig.

With the first performance at a Philharmonic Society concert in 1892 of her Fantasia in G minor for Piano and Orchestra, Bright's career, at just 29, entered its most successful phase. The Fantasia was the first commission



Dora Bright, 1915. John Singer Sargent

by the Society for a woman composer, and 1892 also saw her perform her Concerto in D minor in Cologne. This was just prior to her marriage to Captain Wyndham Knatchbull of Bath (33 years her senior), after which her appearances and original compositions became less frequent.

Her husband's death in 1900 left Dora a widow, albeit financially secure. She continued to compose songs as well as several ballet scores and in 1910, whilst staying in Paris, she completed the final version of her Variations for Piano and Orchestra. Although not entirely forgotten in later life, Dora Bright Knatchbull

died in 1951 at her home in Somerset, aged 89. Regrettably, it appears much of her music is lost; the works on this disc are among the few surviving scores, largely owing to the endeavours of Valerie Langfield, Sam Laing and Peter Merry.

Such is the creative mastery and expressive character of Dora Bright's **Concerto in A minor** that the listener can spend much fruitless time in searching for 'influences'. It would be pointless to deny that the work arrived Janus-like, but although in some respects the seeker of influences may discern a ground-plan not unlike, say, Grieg's concerto in the same key, in almost every respect it is only to be expected that Bright, as a greatly gifted pianist, would have known the effectiveness of the form which had served composers from Bach to Tchaikovsky.

However, not many contemporary composers of that period would have begun their first piano concerto as Bright does: a quiet opening, an *Allegro* without drama, the initial idea simply stated answered by a rising cello phrase. Clearly, this is to be a discursive concerto rather than one of great drama, although the rhythmic impetus for the first theme has a somewhat martial air, capable of sturdy development. As the music unfolds, the piano assumes the senior role, introducing what might be considered a more lyrical second subject, the expressive contrasts clear if not overly without drama.

As this expository music is counter-stated, Bright demonstrates her qualities in an evolving sequence before what, almost traditionally, would have been the development section proper. Here, again, Bright shows her originality by beginning the extensive working with a relatively lengthy orchestral passage – suggestive, rather than reminiscent, of the *Belle Époque* of Saint-Saëns and Massenet – before

the piano re-enters with much lyrical dialogue with solo woodwinds. In this way, the composer's structural subtleties and instrumental colouration give an entirely new approach to the form, highlighted by what one might term a *faux*-recapitulation before the soloist's cadenza.

Bright's cadenza is clearly that of a composer who knows the solo instrument intimately; beautifully written, supremely well-laid out for the keyboard, the extended lyrical musing over the material constantly reveals fresh thematic development and decoration, the momentum maintained without virtuoso dramatics before a coda as the orchestra re-enters to end the movement.

The stage is set for the beautiful *Andante espressivo* movement, begun by the piano enunciating a simple, berceuse-like theme. This is almost immediately counterstated, gradually forming a lyrical *Intermezzo*, which may well prove to be the hidden 'hit' of this wonderful work – as memorable a theme as might have been penned by Edward MacDowell: simple in character, hauntingly expressive.

The Finale, a Sonata-Rondo *Allegro*, begins – utterly originally – with a short quiet tattoo on the side-drum. The music's light, airy character is propelled throughout by ongoing momentum, and not even the lyrical second subject, also given to the soloist, can alter its swaying pulse. When both themes are combined in counterpoint, Bright reveals herself once more as a composer in command of her medium: the 'development' section hints at new material – but is in fact subtle variants on the combined first and second subjects – before a varied recapitulation, in which the side-drum briefly reappears reasserting the military figure; an extended coda heralds the triumphant conclusion.

Bright's **Variations for Piano and Orchestra** is one of her last concert works, finally revised in 1910 during a stay in Paris. It is a remarkably impressive original composition, beautifully written for the solo instrument (as we might expect) and skilfully orchestrated, shot through with much brilliant and quietly witty writing, technically fascinating and with unobtrusive master-strokes of structural originality – not least the surprisingly quiet ending where a composer of lesser imaginative qualities might have succumbed to the lure of a brilliantly virtuosic conclusion. Without wishing to appear wise after the event, it is Bright's distinctive feminine *coda reminiscenza* to her Variations that declares her individual expressive command.

The Variations open without introduction: the theme, marked *Semplice*, grows from a brief, haunting, five-note idea, presented and enunciated quietly by the solo piano, moderate in tempo and memorable in its contours. We soon realize as the seven variations effortlessly unfold that the work is not to be a set of individual variants, but one wherein the theme is in states of flux, organic yet individually characteristic.

The attentive listener is soon drawn into the composer's fascination with, and ability to draw so much from, that initial idea. Bright's mastery of the medium and her structural originality are impressive – clearly, here is a composer of natural and genuine expressive force. There is nothing 'profound' in the Brahmsian sense; in this work the composer's individual character is clear, as in Variation 4 through a delicious waltz-like sequence, cleverly orchestrated and finely laid out for soloist and orchestra. This superbly-imagined variant ends with a short *tutti*, subtly varied with inner pulsation. The contrasting Variations 5 and 6 have the soloist hinting at deeper emotions, contemplative rather than searchingly profound.

Broadly, the work inhabits a concerto-like (moderately fast-slow-fast) tripartite plan, but throughout we are impressed by the music's organic beauty, with no attempt at profundity. Neither does Bright descend to superficial virtuosity or rhetoric. As an example of her subtlety, what at first appears to be a *fugato* exposition from the soloist leads instead to a wonderful scherzo finale sequence, in which the myriad subtleties of Bright's creativity are displayed in successive passages of delightful invention, the ideas succeeding one another as if in accelerated fashion – here is a genuine composer, whose multi-faceted inspiration trumps our expectations in a surprising coda – a quiet five-note distillation as Bright takes her leave of us in the most affecting and genuinely charming manner.

The equally profound musical gifts of Ruth Gipps, born in Bexhill, Sussex, in 1921, brought her to prominence at an earlier age than did those of Dora Bright. Gipps was a child prodigy pianist and composer: aged 16, she entered the Royal College of Music, studying oboe with Leon Goossens, piano with Arthur Alexander and composition with Gordon Jacob. Moving to Durham University during the war, Gipps met her future husband, clarinettist Robert Baker.

One of the first female pianists to tackle Arthur Bliss's virtuosic Piano Concerto, Gipps's performing career was thwarted by a hand injury. This did not, however, prevent her from playing entirely – Gipps, now concentrating on composition and conducting, became the most notable British female conductor, founding several orchestras, the programmes of which reflected her own belief in the veracity of tonal-based composition at a time when newer procedures assumed greater prominence. Her music, alongside that of other composers of similar beliefs, appeared sidelined by the BBC and others. Gipps's oboe-playing was of a high professional standard; her

appearances with the City of Birmingham Symphony were fondly remembered by her colleagues. However, there is no doubt that the fact Gipps was a woman proved a barrier to many opportunities which would otherwise have been open to her, although eminent conductors, including Henry Wood and Adrian Boult recognised her undoubted gualities as a performer and composer.

Nonetheless undaunted, as a composer Gipps went on to produce five symphonies and several concertos in a significant output of around eighty opus numbers; it is the Piano Concerto in G minor of 1947 which is the major work of hers in our collection. The first movement, Allegro moderato, is driven by a strong sense of forward momentum - the heraldic first entry of the soloist, once heard after a growing exordium, can never be forgotten: in style not unlike a combination of Bax and Bliss, although the strength of Gipps's own personality is ever-present. The inherent expressive power of the music is soon evident, as the material expands in dialogue before the contrasting second subject proper, given to the soloist, brings some relief of tension. A third lyrical theme, given to the clarinet, ensues, before a brief reference to the opening phrase ushers in a central toccata-like section, prefaced by a dialogue between soloist and timpani, showing the material in a new light, with delightful cross-rhythms occasionally under-pinning the soloist. Further development leads to a brief cadenza before the main opening music returns for what might be thought of as a counter-recapitulation - in mood, gesture and character; the soloist heralds the ensuing powerful coda in unmistakable fashion.

The central movement, *Andante*, is introduced by a contemplative clarinet solo before the main melodic first part of the movement gets under way; a highly contrasted central *Allegro* – a light, dance-like, section – appears and returns to

the original melodic material before the soloist prepares for a reference to the initial clarinet, briefly conjoined with oboe at the close – a personal reference?

The *Vivace* finale is full of life and onward momentum, with a brief fanfare-like figure on the horns setting the music in train and returning at various points in the movement to ensure the music propels forward. There



Ruth Gipps in her Morgan motor car

is much brilliant writing for soloist and orchestra in this good-natured music, the character unfailingly positive and uplifting as the triumphant coda arrives.

Ruth Gipps's *Ambarvalia*, Op.70, is a short study for orchestra of Haydn-Mozart size, without timpani. It was written in 1988 in memory of Adrian Cruft, a fine musician (composer, conductor, double-bassist and Chairman of the Composer's Guild of Great Britain), who had died the previous year aged 66. The title, *Ambarvalia*, refers to the Roman annual rite (held at the end of May), a slow procession blessing the fields and arable land for the fruits of the earth to come in the Autumn harvest. Gipps's music falls into three broad sections, the central part being a contemplative *pianissimo* reflection, as the underlying 12/8 pulse remains constant throughout.

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SAMANTHA WARD has performed extensively around the UK, China, Japan, Germany, Italy, France, Greece and Macau, appearing on national television and radio numerous times. She has performed in major venues such as London's Wigmore Hall, St Martin-inthe-Fields and St John's Smith Square, Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, St David's Hall in Cardiff and Tokyo's Toppan Hall. She has won first prize in a number of competitions, including the Making Music Philip and Dorothy Green Award for Young Concert Artists, the Beethoven Society of



Europe's Intercollegiate Piano Competition, the Hastings International Concerto Competition and the Worshipful Company of Musicians' Maisie Lewis Award.

In August 2013, Samantha founded PIANO WEEK, her international festival and summer school for pianists of all ages and abilities. Over five consecutive years at the festival, Samantha has joined forces in two-piano recitals with Stephen Kovacevich and Leslie Howard. PIANO WEEK is supported by Steinway & Sons (UK, Japan and China) and Schott Music publishers.

Samantha is a recording artist, author and composer for Schott Music and in 2016 she was commissioned by the Guild of Young Freemen to write a piece for Sir Andrew Parmley marking his inauguration as Lord Mayor of London. Aside from

her performing career, she has given master classes and been invited to be a jury member at several competitions throughout Asia and the UK. Samantha was awarded a fellowship from the Guildhall School of Music for the year 2007-08, where she studied under Joan Havill. She previously studied with Leslie Riskowitz and at Chetham's School of Music with Alicja Fiderkiewicz.

www.pianoweek.com



MURRAY MCLACHLAN has consistently received outstanding critical acclaim since making his professional debut in 1986 at the age of 21 under the baton of Sir Alexander Gibson. Educated at Chetham's School of Music and Cambridge University, his mentors included Ronald Stevenson, David Hartigan, Ryszard Bakst, Peter Katin and Norma Fisher.

His recording career began in 1988 and immediately attracted international attention. Recordings of contemporary music have won numerous accolades, including full star-ratings, as well as 'Rosette' and 'Key Recording' status in various iterations of the



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Penguin Guides and 'Disc of the Month' and 'Record of the Month' in Music on the Web and The Herald.

McLachlan's repertoire includes over 40 concertos and 25 recital programmes. He has given first performances of works by many composers and has appeared as soloist with most of the leading UK orchestras. His recognition has been farreaching, bringing invitations to perform on all five continents.

McLachlan teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester where he has been Head of Keyboard since 1997.

As well as performing and teaching, Murray McLachlan is well known internationally for his numerous articles on piano technique and repertoire. His three books on technique – *The Foundations of Technique*, *Piano Technique in Practice* and *The Psychology of Piano Technique* – were published by Faber Music and have received wide acclaim.

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CHARLES PEEBLES studied at Cambridge University, the Guildhall and as a Conducting Fellow at Tanglewood. He has conducted, amongst others, the City of London Sinfonia, City of Birmingham Symphony, BBC Singers, English Chamber Orchestra, London Mozart Players, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Nash Ensemble, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Royal Philharmonic and BBC Symphony Orchestras. In 1992 he won the First Cadaqués Orchestra International Conducting Competition in Spain, subsequently conducting virtually every major Spanish orchestra including

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Orquesta Nacional de España. Engagements throughout Europe and beyond have included the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Latvian National Symphony, Presidential Symphony in Turkey and National Symphony of Mexico. He has recorded for Hyperion and Largo Records.

He has conducted a wide operatic repertoire for English Touring Opera, Holland Park Opera and Broomhill, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* for Glyndebourne Touring, a critically acclaimed series of Rossini operas for Garsington and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for the Bavarian State Opera in Munich. He made his Far East debut in a televised concert with the distinguished tenor, José Cura.

Recent opera has included Carmen and Hansel and Gretel for the St Magnus Festival and performances with the orchestras of English National Opera and Scottish Opera. Since 2001, Charles has been Music Director of University College Opera, conducting the British premieres of Reynaldo Hahn's *Ciboulette*, Dvořák's *Vanda*, Lalo's *Fiesque*, Gounod's *Polyeucte*, the first British stagings of Bloch's *Macbeth* and Smetana's *Libuše*, plus the first staging since the 18th century of Rameau's *Acante et Céphise*. He was created an Honorary Fellow of UCL in 2012.

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For **RUTH GIPPS**:

Lance Baker and Victoria Rowe.

Original scores provided by Victoria Rowe from the Ruth Gipps Archive

For **DORA BRIGHT**:

Jacqueline Knatchbull and the Knatchbull family Kathy Adamson (Royal Academy of Music, London) for the copy of Bright's Concerto and Variations

Dora Bright's Concerto and Variations (following initial transcriptions by Sam Laing and Peter Merry) and Ruth Gipps' Concerto edited, and performing materials produced by,

Valerie Langfield (rcg@valerielangfield.co.uk).