

Photo: David Robson



Percy Turnbull (London, circa 1926)

# The Piano Music of Percy Turnbull

*Peter Jacobs* piano

Somm

Céleste  
Series



**The Piano Music of Percy Turnbull**  
Peter Jacobs, piano

**Seven Character Sketches**

|   |             |      |
|---|-------------|------|
| 1 | No. 2       | 1:34 |
| 2 | No. 3       | 1:37 |
| 3 | No. 4       | 1:57 |
| 4 | No. 7 Burla | 2:39 |

**Seven Miniatures**

|   |            |      |
|---|------------|------|
| 5 | Sonnet     | 2:43 |
| 6 | Rondoletto | 1:16 |
| 7 | Pastoral   | 5:06 |

**Pasticcio (on a theme of Mozart)**

|    |   |         |
|----|---|---------|
| 8  | Theme (Mozart K94)                        | 1:23    |
| 9  | I Tempo di Minuetto (after Bach)          | 2:07    |
| 10 | II Allegretto (after Mozart)              | 0:46    |
| 11 | III Allegro (after Beethoven)             | 0:42    |
| 12 | IV Allegro spiritoso (after Schubert)     | 1:41    |
| 13 | V Vivace (after Chopin)                   | 0:57    |
| 14 | VI Schnell (after Schumann)               | 1:07    |
| 15 | VII Andante con moto (after Brahms)       | 1:40    |
| 16 | VIII Allegretto (Óngarisch)(after Brahms) | 1:47    |
| 17 | IX Con moto (after Fauré)                 | 2:24    |
| 18 | X Modéré sans lenteur (after Ravel)       | 1:59    |
| 19 | XI Molto moderato (after Delius)          | 2:47    |
| 20 | XII Allegro molto (after Bartók)          | 0:51    |
|    |   | (20:11) |

**Sonatina**

|    |                                  |        |
|----|----------------------------------|--------|
| 21 | I Allegro moderato               | 4:17   |
| 22 | II Andante con moto (Intermezzo) | 1:50   |
| 23 | III Allegro spiritoso            | 1:44   |
|    |                                  | (7:51) |

**Dances**

|    |                           |      |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 24 | Gigue (Allegro spiritoso) | 2:53 |
| 25 | Valse (Con moto)          | 1:56 |
| 26 | Minuet                    | 1:39 |

**Fantasy Suite**

|    |                |        |
|----|----------------|--------|
| 27 | 1. Minuetto    | 2:21   |
| 28 | 2. Marionettes | 2:13   |
| 29 | 3. Toccata     | 1:16   |
|    |                | (5:50) |

**Preludes**

|    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 30 | An Epigram                             | 3:00 |
| 31 | Prelude VI (from <i>Six Preludes</i> ) | 0:33 |

**Three Winter Pieces**

|    |            |        |
|----|------------|--------|
| 32 | Carolondo  | 2:34   |
| 33 | Air        | 3:04   |
| 34 | Ballatella | 2:19   |
|    |            | (7:57) |

**Total duration: 69:35**

Percy Purvis Turnbull was born in Old Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, on 14 July 1902. As a boy Turnbull gained his training as a chorister in the Cathedral Church of St Nicholas in Newcastle and he took lessons from Sigmund Oppenheimer, one of the most prominent piano teachers in the city. He left school at 14, being offered a scholarship to the Armstrong College of Art to study jewellery design, but this was curtailed when his father was conscripted into the army during the First World War. On finding employment he worked for the Tyne Improvement Commission, keeping up his musical interests in his spare time. During this period he gained much stimulation from his friendship with William Gillies Whittaker, almost certainly the most influential musical personality in the north-east of England at that time. Whittaker was a man of many parts: he was a lecturer at Armstrong College (now Newcastle University), a composer, conductor, folk-song collector, and friend of Holst and Vaughan Williams. In particular he enjoyed national renown for his choral conducting with the Newcastle Bach Choir (formed by him in 1915) whose dual mission was to perform the works of Bach and contemporary choral music by British and French composers. Whittaker's modernist zeal made its impression on the young Turnbull, who, by the time he gained a Foundation Scholarship to the Royal College of Music in 1922, was steeped in the new British and French music of the day. At the RCM he studied composition with Holst, Vaughan Williams and John Ireland, and attended classes with Dunhill, Dyson and R.O. Morris. His student contemporaries – Leslie Woodgate, Michael Tippett, Keith Falkner, Thomas Armstrong, Elizabeth Maconchy, Edward Clark, Michael Mullinar, Kenneth Wright, Edmund Rubbra, David Moule-Evans, Kendall Taylor – were of a high calibre, though it was Turnbull who earned the accolades of his teachers, winning the Mendelssohn Scholarship and, soon after, the Arthur Sullivan Prize. Besides composition, he also gained a reputation as an accomplished pianist, giving recitals not only at the RCM but also at the Wigmore Hall; this enabled him to find work as an accompanist for 2LO (forerunner of the BBC) and the BBC. During his time at the RCM (where he met his first wife, a fellow-student) he lived in Redcliffe Gardens, Earls Court, and was highly active as a composer of songs, piano music, chamber music and orchestral works. After leaving the College in 1927 he lived in an attic in Chelsea and continued composing while coping with the problem of earning a living.

His first job was with the Aeolian Piano Player Company, editing piano rolls under Percy Scholes, but the competition of gramophone records brought about the demise of the company. Thereafter, Turnbull's employment appears to have been piecemeal; he was often without work and life was hard. At Christmastime 1930 he married for the first time and moved to



Swansea, where he obtained work in the Empire Theatre (playing nightly and taking piano pupils during the day and doing copying work for Oxford University Press's newly formed Music Department under Hubert Foss; Vaughan Williams's Fourth Symphony and *Job*, and Walton's Viola Concerto, were among the works of which he did the first copies). This period of his life was generally unhappy: he disliked the theatre, its conductor, and the drudgery of his work, though his introduction by Hubert Foss to the father of Alan Rowlands (the noted Ireland executant), and the happy times he spent with the Rowlands family, provided valuable respite. Some time between 1934 and 1935 he moved to Chalfont St Giles in Buckinghamshire, close to his friend John Longmire. Ireland, a long-standing friend of Turnbull's, often came to Chalfont to see the Longmires, and the three of them spent much time together. The friendship with Ireland and Longmire took place within the growing shadow of war in Europe. In 1938 Ireland moved to Guernsey, accompanied by Longmire. Unaware that the Channel Islands might be vulnerable to enemy occupation, they lived happily amid the island's beguiling calm and tranquillity. Turnbull visited them in May 1940, hoping for a few weeks' rest, only for it to be dashed by the Nazi invasion of the Channel Islands in June. To avoid deportation to Germany the three, given less than 24 hours' notice, were forced to flee, catching the *Antwerp* to Weymouth packed with refugees. Their escape, at times by no means certain, had been a close one: occupation took place only days afterwards.

In 1941 Turnbull was conscripted into the army, serving throughout the war in the Royal Artillery as part of a mixed anti-aircraft battery along the east Yorkshire coast. On demobilisation in 1946 he left Chalfont St Giles (his wife left home in 1942 – divorce took place in 1955) and moved to Ewell, Surrey, where he became principal piano teacher at the Surrey College of Music at Fitznells. This period of his life, which witnessed his second marriage (in 1956), was happy and contented, and during the vacations he took up his second artistic gift – drawing and water-colour painting. Before the closure of the Surrey College he moved to Brook, Surrey, and when all piano work ceased he finally moved to Broomer's Hill, Pulborough, Sussex, from where he continued to visit John Longmire in Guernsey, and frequently travelled across to see Ireland at his windmill outside Steyning in Sussex. He died in 1976.

Turnbull's musical style is an interesting diffusion of many influences. Under Oppenheimer he acquired a broad knowledge of the standard canon of piano repertoire – Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin and Brahms – which he played with technical mastery and

which, as a piano teacher, he taught with thoroughness not only in terms of technique but also (as the *Pasticcio* testifies) in terms of style and syntax. Classicism remained close to Turnbull's heart. In general he preferred traditional dance style-forms, or the abstract schemata of sonata, rondo and prelude, though from time to time he indulged in freer fantasy structures. Of contemporary styles that he came by, he was captivated by the late Russian romantics (Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Medtner), who provided object lessons in texture and voice-leading, and he loved the music of Delius for its harmonic resourcefulness. Yet the thicker fabric of romanticism was tempered by a predilection for classical simplicity, which drew him to Fauré and Ravel. Indeed, Turnbull's Francophile tendencies lent his music a refinement and fragility which seems to have at its heart a world of sophisticated, delicate images that have much in common with the tinctures and pigments of subtle water-colour shades. At times this fragility is given a leaner edge as one senses an experimental journey into the more acerbic, chromatic world of Roussel and Ibert; conversely, Turnbull also shows a propensity on occasion to emulate the bitter-sweet harmonic world of John Ireland, though even here, Ireland's denser, iridescent parlance is tempered by Turnbull's predisposition for clarity and lightness of touch. Furthermore, much in keeping with the composer's own love of mimicry and *badinage*, there is much scope in his music for jest, humour and satire, attributes which add a distinctly neo-classical nuance to his style.

Piano music represents by far the most substantial part of Turnbull's output. His own highly proficient technique gave him a consummate understanding of the piano idiom which he was also able to convey as a teacher. In playing his piano works one is struck by the demanding nature of the writing, but at the same time one is aware, in spite of the difficulties, of the grateful spacing of chords, the figurations that lie under the hand, and the sensitive dynamic and tempo markings. This understanding contributed to his rare ability as a teacher and as a composer of music for less experienced hands than his own. His piano works, published ultimately in eleven volumes by Thames Publishing on behalf of the Turnbull Trust, were composed somewhat sporadically over a period of almost 40 years (from 1923 until 1960). Some works, such as the *Sonatina* and *Pasticcio*, were published during his lifetime, but a substantial proportion was not. Turnbull did not date his manuscripts, but he did have a habit of writing his home address on the title page, which can help to place them within a period of years. Some can be dated by style of handwriting; others (including the published works) were written and revised, sometimes over long intervals.

Among the most interesting pieces of his student days were a series of *Character Sketches*, intended to be musical illustrations of friends and colleagues. Turnbull later erased any clues as to the identity of each sketch, leaving the music to speak for itself, though it is not difficult to hear allusions to Ireland in No 3 and Holst in No 7 (*Burla*). *An Epigram*, which began life as a *Character Sketch*, is perhaps the most harmonically bizarre, owing something to the astringent harmony of Roussel. This aspect of Turnbull's language preoccupied him in later years, particularly while he was at Chalfont (1934-41) with army leave-visits (1941-46) and is nowhere more evident than in the austere, forbidding *Gigue*, a fine, assertive piece of piano-writing, in which the parameters of tonality are frequently blurred. Other pieces dating from this period of twelve years were the sombre *Valse*, the morose *Sonnet* (strongly reminiscent of Rachmaninov in texture, though harmonically more suggestive of Frank Bridge), the lightning *Prelude No. 6* (from *Six Preludes*), the Ravel-influenced *Minuet* and the frolicsome *Rondoletto* (perhaps intended for pedagogical use). The Three Pianoforte Pieces (published by the Turnbull Memorial Trust as the *Fantasy Suite*) were completed in 1938 and a contract was drawn up with Oxford University Press, though, in the end, publication by them did not take place. The *Minuetto* and the nimble-fingered *Toccatina* draw their inspiration in spirit and manner from Ravel's *Sonatine*, while the fantastical central movement, *Marionettes*, is a re-working of the much earlier *Character Sketch* No. 5.

Dedicated to Michael Mullinar, the *Sonatina* was published in 1948, two years after Turnbull was demobilised from the army. The first movement, a polished sonata structure, is characterised chiefly by its gentle lyricism, Alberti-style left-hand figurations and the tart dissonance of much of the accompanying harmony. The aphoristic slow movement functions, as its title (*Intermezzo*) suggests, as a brief 'recitative-like' interlude before the 'swing'-inspired rondo finale, arguably one of the composer's most extrovert utterances.

The *Pasticcio* for piano, a set of pastiche variations on a theme by Mozart (the Minuet K 94) composed and revised in the 1940s and 50s, was published by Augener in 1957. Famous among his friends as a brilliant mimic, Turnbull had an equal flair for stylistic imitation throughout the entire gamut of great masters. Originally all twelve variations were considered for publication, but, fearful of litigation (particularly from the French publisher Durand), Augener refused to include the modern French variations (Fauré and Ravel). Since this radically altered his chronological scheme, Turnbull then decided to dispense with the Delius and Bartók variations as well, leaving the scheme of Bach to Brahms as the one to appear in print.

In 1958 Turnbull renamed his Ravel variation *Tribute to Maurice Ravel* in homage to his lifelong idol, and later still, in the early 1960s, the Fauré and Ravel variations were coupled as *Two French Tributes for Piano*. The *Pastoral*, composed between 1956 and 1960, bears a resemblance stylistically and aesthetically to the contrapuntal essays of Howells's *Clavichord*, though its scope and sonority suggest that it might at first have been intended for string orchestra rather than keyboard. A gentle rumination, the piece is very much a study in ever-changing phrase-lengths and metrical diversity.

*Carolondo*, *Air and Ballatella* (published as *Three Winter Pieces* in the Thames edition) were composed in or around 1956 and represent his last completed works for the piano. He continued working on them in 1957, and, after his move to Pulborough, he devoted more time to them between 1959 and 1960. *Carolondo* (an elision of 'Carol' and 'Rondo') was written during the Christmas season and makes overt allusion to *The First Nowell* against a background of pealing bells and carillons. Turnbull was especially fond of this festive miniature, which has a touching naivety in its transparently diatonic language, flowing quaver passage-work and pastoral atmosphere. The lyric impulse of *Carolondo* is continued in the *Air*, though there is a greater harmonic intensity in the four-part polyphony and an elegiac melancholy in the simple melody underpinned by Elgarian sixths. Turnbull's finale, *Ballatella*, invokes the spirit of an 'ancient' dance with its invigorating rhythm, false relations, hemiolas, and snatches of modality, though the engaging amalgam of 'modern' harmonies and dissonant appoggiaturas has a twentieth-century flavour more akin to the combinations of old and new in Warlock's *Capriol Suite* and Moeran's *Whythorne's Shadow*.

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Peter Jacobs has built a considerable reputation as an advocate of the byways of piano music, especially the neglected French and English repertoires. He has made more than twenty CDs, all of which have had critical acclaim. Among his most successful are the complete piano works of Frank Bridge, and three discs devoted to Cecile Chaminade. Other composers represented by major works are Harold Truscott, Trevor Hold, Alan Bush, John Foulds, Benjamin Dale, and Maurice Emmanuel. Peter Jacobs is a busy teacher and examiner, and is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.

The Turnbull Memorial Trust was founded in 1979 to promote the publication and performance of his most significant compositions for voice, pianoforte and strings. All of



Turnbull's piano works (with the exception of one or two small pieces) are published by Thames Publishing and distributed by William Elkin Music Services.

Percy Turnbull est né à Old Benwell, Newcastle-upon-Tyne le 14 juillet 1902. Enfant, il a reçu sa formation comme choriste à l'Eglise Cathédrale de St Nicholas à Newcastle, et il a pris des leçons avec Sigmund Oppenheimer, un des professeurs de piano les plus importants de la cité. Il a gagné beaucoup d'encouragement de son amitié avec William Gillies Whittaker, qui était presque certainement la personnalité musicale la plus influente du nord-est de l'Angleterre à cette époque. L'enthousiasme moderniste de Whittaker a marqué le jeune Turnbull qui, lorsqu'il a gagné une Bourse de Fondation au Collège Royal de Musique en 1922, était imprégné de la nouvelle musique anglaise et française du jour. Au Collège il a étudié la composition avec Holst, Vaughan Williams et John Ireland. Ses contemporains comme étudiants – y compris Michael Tippett, Elizabeth Maconchy et Edmund Rubbra – étaient d'un calibre supérieur, mais c'est Turnbull qui a reçu les accolades de ses professeurs, en gagnant la Bourse Mendelssohn et, peu de temps après, le Prix Arthur Sullivan. En plus de la composition, il a gagné une réputation comme pianiste accompli. Pendant ses études au Collège il était très actif comme compositeur de chansons, de musique pour piano, musique de chambre et œuvres orchestrales. En quittant le Collège en 1927 il habita une mansarde à Chelsea où il continua de composer en même temps que de gagner sa vie.

Son premier emploi fut avec l' Aeolian Piano Player Company, de préparer les rouleaux de pianola sous la direction de Percy Scholes; mais la concurrence des disques a coulé la compagnie. Par la suite ses emplois, à ce qu'il paraît, ont été précaires, parfois dans les théâtres; il a été souvent sans travail, et sa vie a été dure.

En 1941 Turnbull fut enrôlé dans l'armée. Il a servi tout au long de la guerre dans l'artillerie, comme membre d'une batterie antiaérienne sur la côte est de Yorkshire. Après la démobilisation il est devenu professeur principal de piano au Collège de Musique de Surrey. A cette époque de sa vie, qui a vu ses secondes noces (en 1956), il était heureux et content; pendant les vacances il a exercé son autre talent artistique, celui du dessin et de l'aquarelle. Il est mort en 1976.

Le style musical de Turnbull est un mélange intéressant de plusieurs influences. Sous l'enseignement d'Oppenheimer il a gagné une connaissance générale du répertoire normal

de piano – Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin et Brahms – qu'il jouait avec grande maîtrise et qu'il enseignait en profondeur, non seulement en termes de technique mais aussi de style et de syntaxe.

Le classicisme lui est resté très cher. En général il préférait les formes de danse traditionnelles ou les schémas abstraits de sonate, rondo et prélude, quoiqu'il se soit livré de temps en temps à la fantaisie plus libre. Parmi les styles contemporains il était captivé par les compositeurs romantiques russes, qui lui ont fourni des modèles de contexture et de conduite des voix, et il aimait aussi la musique de Delius et de John Ireland pour leurs ressources harmoniques. Mais le tissu plus grossier du romantisme était tempéré par son penchant pour la simplicité classique, qui l'a attiré vers Fauré et Ravel. En effet, les tendances francophiles de Turnbull ont donné à sa musique un raffinement et une subtilité qui semblent évoquer un monde d'images sophistiquées et délicates qui ont quelque chose des teintes et pigments des aquarelles. Parfois cette fragilité acquiert une nervosité plus mordante, comme on le sent dans un voyage d'exploration dans le monde plus piquant et chromatique de Roussel et d'Ibert. En accord avec son penchant pour l'imitation et le badinage, sa musique a beaucoup d'occasions pour la plaisanterie, l'humour et la satire, des attributs qui donnent à son style une nuance distinctement néo-classique.

La partie la plus substantielle de l'œuvre de Turnbull, c'est la musique pour piano, récemment publiée en onze volumes par la maison d'édition Thames Publishing, de la part du Turnbull Trust.

Traduction: *Denys Becher et Nadia Jackson*

Percy Turnbull wurde am 14 Juli 1902 in Old Benwell, Newcastle-upon-Tyne geboren. Seine Ausbildung als Chorsänger machte er als Junge an der Domkirche St Nicholas in Newcastle und er nahm bei Sigmund Oppenheimer, einem der bekanntesten Lehrer in der Stadt, Klavierstunden. Seine Freundschaft mit William Gillies Whittaker, der zur damaligen Zeit mit Gewissheit die einflussreichste musikalische Persönlichkeit im Nordosten Englands war, gab ihm sehr viel Ansporn. Whittakers modernistischer Eifer machte großen Eindruck auf den jungen Turnbull, der, als ihm 1922 ein Stiftungsstipendium für das Royal College of Music verliehen wurde von der damaligen neuen britischen und französischen Musik ganz eingenommen war. An der RCM studierte er Composition unter Holst, Vaughan Williams

und John Ireland. Seine Kommilitonen – unter anderen Michael Tippett, Elizabeth Maconchy und Edmund Rubbra – waren Studenten von großem Format, jedoch war es Turnbull, der den Lob seiner Lehrer erntete, ihm wurde das Mendelssohnstipendium verliehen und kurz darauf wurde er mit dem Arthur Sullivan Preis ausgezeichnet. Neben seinen Kompositionen verdiente er sich auch als fähiger Pianist einen guten Ruf. Während seiner Zeit am RCM war er als Liederkomponist, als Komponist von Klaviermusik, Kammermusik und Orchesterwerken äußerst aktiv. Nachdem er 1927 das College verlassen hatte, wohnte er in einem Mansardenzimmer in Chelsea und machte mit dem Komponieren weiter, während er zugleich mit dem Problem, einen Lebensunterhalt zu verdienen, zurechtkommen musste.

Seine erste Arbeitsstelle hatte er mit der Aeolian Piano Player Company, wo er unter Anleitung von Percy Scholes Klaviernotenrollen bearbeitete, die Schallplatten aber machten dieser Firma große Konkurrenz und schließlich führte es zur Auflösung dieser Firma. Turnbolls darauffolgende Anstellungen, einige davon an Theatern, scheinen kunterbunt durcheinander gewesen zu sein; er war sehr oft arbeitslos und das Leben war schwer.

Im Jahre 1941 wurde er einberufen und er diente den ganzen Krieg hindurch in der Königlich Artillerie, wo er Teil einer gemischten Flugabwehr an der Ostküste Yorkshires entlang war. Nach seiner Entlassung aus dem Kriegsdienst im Jahre 1946 wurde Turnbull Hauptklavierlehrer am Surrey College of Music. Dieser Abschnitt seines Lebens, der seine zweite Eheschließung (im Jahre 1956) sah, war glücklich und zufrieden und während der Ferien widmete er sich seinem zweiten künstlerischen Talent, dem Zeichnen und der Aquarellmalerei. Er verstarb im Jahre 1976.

Turnbolls musikalische Stilrichtung ist eine interessante Ausströmung vieler Einflüsse. Unter Oppenheimer eignete er sich umfassende Kenntnisse bezüglich seines Klavierrepertoires an – Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin und Brahms – die er mit technischem Können spielte und welche er, als Klavierlehrer, mit Gründlichkeit, nicht nur bezüglich der Technik sondern auch bezüglich des Stils und der Syntax unterrichtete. In seinem Herzen blieb Turnbull der Klassik sehr nahe. Im allgemeinen bevorzugte er die traditionellen Tanzstilformen oder das abstrakte Schema der Sonate, des Rondos oder des Präludiums, ab und zu jedoch gab er den freieren Fantasiestrukturen nach.

Von den zeitgenössischen Stilen, auf die er kam war er besonders von den späten russischen Romantikern (Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Medtner) eingenommen, die Musterbeispiele bezüglich

des Aufbaus und der Stimmführung lieferten, er liebte auch die Musik von Delius und John Ireland wegen ihres musikalischen Einfallsreichtums. Dennoch verdünnte sich das dichtere Gewebe der Romantik durch ein Faible für die klassische Einfachheit, welche ihn in die Richtung von Fauré und Ravel führte. Tatsächlich verliehen Turnbolls frankophile Neigungen seiner Musik eine Feinheit, die als Kern eine Welt von niveauvollen und zerbrechlichen Bildern zu haben scheint, ein zerbrechlicher, bilderreicher Stil, der mit den Anstrichen und Pigmenten, die man in den feinen Schattierungen von Aquarellen vorfindet sehr viel gemeinsam zu haben scheint. Gelegentlich wird dieser Zerbrechlichkeit ein schmalerer Rand verliehen, wenn man sich auf einer experimentellen Reise in die härtere und chromatische Welt von Roussel und Ibert zu fühlen scheint. Im Einklang mit der Liebe des Komponisten zur Nachahmung und badinage gibt es in seiner Musik viel Spielraum für Scherz, Humor und Satire, Merkmale, die seinem Stil eine eindeutige klassizistische Nuance verleihen.

Die Klaviermusik steht bei weitem für den bedeutendsten Teil Turnbolls Schaffens. Im Auftrag der Turnbull Stiftung veröffentlichte es Thames Publishing kürzlich in elf Bänden.

*Ilse Herlihy*

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