



# CONCERTOS

## for Piano & Strings

SOMMCD 254



DDD

GORDON JACOB Piano Concerto No. 1 (premiere recording)  
MALCOLM WILLIAMSON Piano Concerto No. 2  
DOREEN CARWITHEN Piano Concerto

Mark Bebbington piano  
Innovation Chamber Ensemble (players from the CBSO)  
Richard Jenkinson conductor

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| <b>Gordon Jacob: Piano Concerto No. 1</b> (17:08)       | <b>Doreen Carwithen: Piano Concerto</b> (33:28) |
| 1 I. Allegro assai 4:26                                 | 7 I. Allegro assai 12:43                        |
| 2 II. Adagio 5:29                                       | 8 II. Lento 10:08                               |
| 3 III. Allegro risoluto 7:12                            | 9 III. Moderato e deciso ma con moto 10:36      |
| <b>Malcolm Williamson: Piano Concerto No. 2</b> (16:26) | <b>Total Duration:</b> 67:20                    |
| 4 I. Allegro con brio 4:31                              |   |
| 5 II. Andante lento 7:35                                |   |
| 6 III. Allegro con spirito 4:19                         |   |

Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

Recording location: CBSO Centre, Birmingham, 2-3 June 2014

Front Cover: Mark Bebbington. Photo © Rama Knight

Design and Layout: Andrew Giles

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# Concertos for Piano and Strings

by

Gordon Jacob · Malcolm Williamson · Doreen Carwithen

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**GORDON JACOB** (1895-1984)

## **Concerto No. 1 for piano and string orchestra**

The youngest of ten children, Gordon Percival Septimus Jacob was born in Upper Norwood, London, to an official in the Indian Civil Service who had received no musical education but had written a number of hymn tunes, which his son later described as 'not bad'. Six of Gordon's siblings were also amateur musicians, and he started having piano lessons at the age of eight. In the following year he began composing songs, and by the time he entered Dulwich College, at the age of thirteen, he was writing orchestral scores and was even invited to conduct his own Coronation March (in honour of George V) at a school concert. At nineteen he enlisted in the Field Artillery and saw active service during the Great War; but in 1917 he was captured and interned in Germany. On his release, he enrolled at the Royal College of Music, where he studied theory with Howells, conducting with Boult, and composition with Stanford (and later Vaughan Williams). Jacob's association with the RCM proved to be a long one, and he taught there from 1924 until his retirement in 1966, numbering among his pupils several distinguished composers, including Malcolm Arnold, Ruth Gipps, Imogen Holst, Elizabeth Maconchy, and Bernard Stevens. He achieved renown during his long life not only as a prolific writer

of attractive and technically accomplished music but also as an expert on orchestration. Composers as diverse as Vaughan Williams and Noël Coward entrusted him with arrangements of their music, and his rousing version of the national anthem was one of the musical highlights of the 1953 coronation.

Jacob's Concerto No. 1 for piano and string orchestra, which is here receiving its first commercial recording, was written in 1927 and premièred by its dedicatee, fellow composer Arthur Benjamin, with the Queen's Hall Orchestra under Sir Henry Wood. Like all the works on this CD, it is in three movements and combines passages of high virtuosity and rhythmic excitement with deeply-felt poetry. The opening *Allegro assai* begins with a helter-skelter, *impetuoso* gesture from the soloist, which prompts a highly rhythmic, *feroce* response from the strings, providing an accompaniment to the spiky main theme in piano octaves. The music becomes calmer, and a solo viola introduces a new melody accompanied by piano figurations, with solo violin and cello then joining in. After a short piano cadenza, the opening material returns, but the movement ends quietly. The *Adagio* begins with a melody in the lower strings against an accompaniment of triplets from the violas, again with much use made of solo instruments. The piano's *fortissimo* entry in a cadenza-like passage leads to its taking up the opening ideas, with the original viola triplets played by the right hand and the bass melody by the left. The main, rhythmical theme of the *Allegro risoluto* finale is heard on the strings before being adopted by the piano, which then introduces a more lyrical melody. This in turn is taken up by the strings in counterpoint with the first theme played by the piano. The work reaches a climax with powerful piano octaves against the second melody in the strings before coming to an abrupt conclusion.

**MALCOLM WILLIAMSON** (1931-2003)

**Concerto No. 2 for piano and string orchestra**

Malcolm Williamson was a fourth-generation Australian whose Scottish great-grandfather had come to Sydney in 1859. His mother and father (who was a curate) both had some amateur musical talent, and he started formal piano and organ lessons with the organist of a nearby Anglican church. From the age of seven he accompanied the hymns announced by his father during services, and when he was ten he wrote a waltz, his first extant composition. Having obtained a scholarship to study piano at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music while still only twelve, he later became a full-time student there, studying violin, horn and composition, and came under the influence of its newly appointed Director, the distinguished composer-conductor Eugene Goossens. In 1950 he spent six months in London, where he had some composition lessons with Elisabeth Lutyens. Three years later the Williamson family settled there, and Malcolm began earning a living as an organist, nightclub pianist, proof-reader, and employee of Boosey & Hawkes. He was a prolific composer in all the classical forms: there are ten operas, ten cassations (or miniature operas), six ballets, seven symphonies, nine concertos, scores for films and television, and much chamber, solo piano, choral and vocal music. His works exhibit a wide variety of styles and influences from Schoenberg (in his early works), Messiaen and Britten to jazz and popular music. This eclecticism, combined with a naturally extrovert energy and an exceptional gift for writing tunes, imparts to Williamson's music a unique character in which the most ear-splitting dissonances may suddenly be swept aside by a glorious outpouring of melody, notable examples occurring in the Third Piano

Concerto and the opera *Our Man in Havana*. His ability to turn his hand to any style with equal facility may well account for the decision, in 1975, to appoint him successor to Sir Arthur Bliss as Master of the Queen's Music – the first non-British-born composer to hold this prestigious post since Christian Kramer a century and a half earlier.

Williamson's prolific output includes four piano concertos (with sketches for a fifth), of which the Concerto No. 2 in F sharp minor, with string orchestra, is the most immediately accessible. It was written in the space of only eight days in late 1960 as an entry for a competition sponsored by the University of Western Australia. It won the first prize of £500 and was first played in the university's Winthrop Hall, Perth, on 3 May 1962 by Michael Brimer with the University String Orchestra conducted by Frank Callaway. The concerto, which is dedicated to Elaine Goldberg, a pianist and cousin of Williamson's wife, Dolly, was enthusiastically received, and the composer, who was then enjoying widespread acclaim as a pianist, performed the work himself at many concerts in several different countries. In his note for the Boosey & Hawkes edition, the composer confessed that 'God gives us the gift to write music but money gives us the impetus to write it. I do believe that some of the impulsiveness inherent in the outer movements was motivated by the hope of a prize'. Elsewhere he described the score as 'an overtly Australian work aiming at spontaneity and vigour rather than profundity'. He also wrote that 'this concerto is a serious parody, a necessary reaction at the time of my First Symphony, my Sinfonia Concertante and other works of a more serious interior nature. I mean no parody of any classic, of mediæval music or even a parody of the parodists. It is a parody of myself'.

The three movements are thematically related and display a wide variety of moods and stylistic affinities, from Gershwin to Stravinsky and Bartók. The toccata-like first movement (*Allegro con brio*) is in textbook 'sonata form', with a vivacious and highly rhythmic first subject contrasting with a more flowing, but still syncopated, second subject, which are then developed. The form is concise, the textures are spare, and every note tells. The second movement (*Andante lento*) opens with muted strings playing a canon before the piano enters with the same theme. A sequence of piano arpeggios then accompanies a new melody on strings, said to have been inspired by Jewish chants and no doubt a nod to the work's dedicatee. Interestingly, Williamson points out in his note to the score that the 'austere slow movement has been called by the Israelis very Israeli in flavour and by the Italians, very Italian'. A parallel has also been drawn by one commentator with 'a daily plainchant melody used for psalms', and the two musical traditions, Christian and Jewish, are undoubtedly connected. The energetic finale (*Allegro con spirito*) is dominated by a highly rhythmic idea, introduced by the piano, that resembles a theme in the finale of Bax's Fifth Symphony. This is followed by brief allusions to two popular dance forms, the conga and the waltz, while the flowing melody that provides contrast (first heard on strings) bears such a close resemblance to the one introduced by the solo horn in the finale of Stravinsky's *Firebird* that it must be a deliberate quotation. (Stravinsky himself borrowed the melody from a book of Russian folk-songs compiled by Balakirev.) The combination of catchy rhythms and heart-warming melody is irresistible and doubtless accounts for the concerto's immediate and enduring appeal.

**DOREEN CARWITHEN** (1922-2003)  
**Concerto for piano and string orchestra**

Doreen Mary Carwithen was born in Haddenham, Buckinghamshire, the elder daughter of an accountant who conducted the local church choir, and his wife, Dulcie, who had studied piano at the Tobias Matthay School and had intended becoming a concert pianist but took up teaching instead. Doreen started learning the piano from her mother at the age of four and then went on to the violin, which she abandoned in favour of the cello, studying for four years with Peers Coetmore, later the wife of E. J. Moeran. Her first composition, a setting of Wordsworth's 'Daffodils', was written when she was sixteen, and in 1941 she enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music, where she studied piano, cello, harmony and composition, one of her teachers being the composer William Alwyn. Her brilliant overture *ODTAA (One Damn Thing After Another)* received its first performance in 1947, the year in which she won a place on the J. Arthur Rank Apprenticeship Scheme studying the craft of film music. One of her first assignments was to assist Arnold Bax while he was writing the music for David Lean's classic version of *Oliver Twist*, and she went on to compose the scores for over thirty films herself as well as several concert works for orchestra, two string quartets, a violin sonata, and piano music. (Mark Bebbington has recorded her Sonatina, available on SOMMCD 0133, with works by Alwyn.) In 1961 she became her former teacher's second wife and, having always disliked the name Doreen, started calling herself Mary Alwyn.

Her most substantial orchestral score, the **Concerto for piano and string orchestra**, was begun in 1946 and completed two years later. A BBC advisory

panel consisting of Edmund Rubbra, Lennox Berkeley and Alwyn himself recommended it for broadcasting, and Maurice Johnstone, director of the BBC Northern Home Service, arranged for it to be played in October 1951 in the programme *Orchestral Hour*. Two months later the pianist Thomas Bromley and the BBC Northern Orchestra again played it on air, and Johnstone pressed its claims as a work suitable for performance at a Promenade concert: 'It is certainly one of the most attractive pieces by a youngster that I have heard for a long time – a rough description might be to say that Rachmaninoff might have written it if he had belonged to the same stable as Vaughan Williams or Moeran.' (The mention of Rachmaninov reminds us that several films made in the 1940s contain pastiche works for piano and orchestra, such as Addinsell's *Warsaw Concerto*, Bath's *Cornish Rhapsody*, and Williams's *The Dream of Olwen*.) Johnstone's recommendation was accepted, and Carwithen's concerto opened the second half of a Prom given at the Royal Albert Hall on 25 August 1952 by the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Trevor Harvey, with Iris Loveridge as the soloist.

The opening *Allegro assai*, like its counterparts in the other two concertos recorded here, opens vigorously, with stark, angular piano writing and sparse string textures. The music then dies away, and the piano introduces a contrasting, lyrical subject which leads into what the composer describes as a 'quasi-cadenza'. Development and recapitulation of the material follow in accordance with classical 'sonata form'. The slow movement (*Lento*) is dominated by a duet (to use Carwithen's own word) between the piano and a solo violin, which enters in the third bar accompanied by muted strings. The violin's free and sinuous melodic

line contrasts with the piano's first entry in which the theme begins slowly in the bass surrounded by thick chords. The tranquil close of this beautiful movement is followed by a complete change of mood in the finale, marked *Moderato e deciso ma con moto*, which begins with the two principal thematic ideas heard simultaneously and described by the composer as 'a broad, chordal melody played by the strings against a rising scale passage on the piano'. An extended cadenza for the soloist leads into a coda that begins quietly with the strings playing their initial melody against trills on the piano before the music starts on its inexorable progress to a triumphal ending.

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## MARK BEBBINGTON

Mark Bebbington is fast gaining a reputation as one of today's most strikingly individual British pianists. His discs of British music for SOMM have met with unanimous critical acclaim and notably, his cycles of Frank Bridge and John Ireland, have attracted seven consecutive sets of 5\*\*\*\*\* in BBC Music Magazine.

Over recent seasons Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, the Far East and North Africa and has performed at major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic and London Mozart Players. As a recitalist, he makes regular appearances at major UK and International Festivals.

## INNOVATION CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

The Innovation Chamber Ensemble was formed in 2001 by the principal string players of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. The ensemble's first concerts were at their home of the CBSO Centre, Birmingham and at London's Wigmore Hall. The group has played at many of the U.K's leading festivals and most prestigious venues. The ensemble has made several recordings (which have included being featured as Classic FM disc of the week) and broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and 4. Recently the ensemble has recorded for Somm Records including the first recording of Elgar's Powick Asylum Music, Wassanaer – Six Concerti Armonici and most recently a disc of piano concertos with the pianist Mark Bebbington. In its larger formation with winds and brass, ICE has performed Mahler 4 and *Das Lied von der Erde*, Bruckner 7 and Mussorgsky *Pictures at an Exhibition* at the Buxton, Deal, Fishguard, Newbury, Petworth and Sounds New (Canterbury Cathedral) Festivals.

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## RICHARD JENKINSON conductor

Richard Jenkinson studied the cello from the age of five with Florence Hooton, Raphael Wallfisch and William Pleeth. As a cellist he won many awards and prizes including the Gold Medal (Guildhall School of Music of Drama), Vittorio Gui Chamber Music Competition (Florence, Italy) and has played concertos in the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Symphony Hall, Birmingham and recitals at the South Bank, Wigmore Hall and in chamber groups at most festivals and venues around the U.K. He was principal cello with the Irish Chamber Orchestra and

the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and is currently cellist with the Dante String Quartet. He has made recordings for Somm, Hyperion, Nimbus, Blue Rhythm and the Toccata labels.

Richard studied conducting with Michael Salter (Repton School), Alan Hazeldine (Guildhall School of Music & Drama) and more recently has been fortunate of the support of Ilan Volkov, Andris Nelsons and Professor Simon Halsey at the University of Birmingham. He is currently Music Director and conductor of the Innovation Chamber Ensemble, Orchestra of St John and the British Police Symphony Orchestra. He has conducted at the Bromsgrove, Buxton, Deal, Fishguard, Newbury, Petworth (including in his own arrangement of Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition), Sounds New (Canterbury Cathedral) and will perform at Hereford Cathedral and Birmingham Symphony Hall during 2014. Richard is currently studying for a Ph.D in music at the University of Birmingham where he is a Bramall Scholar.

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