



Philip SPRATLEY



Music for String Orchestra

Sinfonietta

**Clarinet Concertino,
*Byard's Leap***

**Recorder Concertino,
*A Gallery of Cats***

**Suite for Harp, Strings
and Trumpet, *In Outlaw Country***

Linda Merrick, clarinet

John Turner, recorder

Royal Ballet Sinfonia

Manchester Sinfonia

**Barry Wordsworth, Philip Spratley
conductors**

FIRST RECORDINGS

PHILIP SPRATLEY ON HIMSELF AND HIS MUSIC

My early years were spent at Balderton, near Newark, Nottinghamshire, where I was born in 1942. I played the piano as soon as I was big enough to climb on the stool or be helped up by my elder brother, who was a big encouragement. My introduction to music was through the concerts of the Newark Operatic Society or singing in the choir with my father at St Giles' Church. Visits to the Albert Hall in Nottingham with my mother were a real joy, especially the Nottingham Harmonic Society concerts conducted by the much loved Herbert Bardgett. When I was fifteen, the vicar of Newark, the Rev. J. H. D. Grinter, arranged for me to play the organ at neighbouring Coddington church. This activity kept me going as school was not very enjoyable and the only thing there I really looked forward to was cricket and thus the opportunity to travel.

After working on the railway and other jobs, the award of a scholarship to the Royal Manchester College of Music came as a complete surprise. I had been given a place but a grant for the year had been refused and I had no funds of my own. At Manchester my tutors were George Hadjinikos for piano and Thomas Pitfield for composition. I also took time to play some organ with Ronald Frost who was for years chorus-master of the Hallé Choir and the finest they have ever had. After a brief return to my roots, being unable to settle I took up a post in Romford, Essex. Four years later my wife and I moved to Lincolnshire, first to Long Bennington where our three children were born and thence to Deeping St James. I was an instrumental teacher locally and for almost twenty years Director of Music at Bourne Abbey.

My catalogue of works is quite small, only 53 opus numbers to date. Nevertheless an opera *Rutterkin*, based on the story of the witches of Belvoir, had very successful

productions in Bottesford and later at Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School. A second opera, *The Three Strangers*, is so far unperformed. My most ambitious work is *A Choral Symphony*, on poems of the local pastoral poet John Clare, which was premiered by the Grantham Choral Society conducted by Philip Lank.

Apart from an unperformed violin concerto, the rest of my works are on the short side including the tone-poems *Plough Monday* and *The Legend of Hugh*. Since I am a church musician there are, inevitably, a number of anthems and organ pieces in my list and several works for concert band for local students.

But my real passion is for folk-music, closely followed by the music of the Baroque. In 1971–73 I collected several mumming plays from Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.¹ These are traditional post-Christmas romps which were performed by local ploughboys and the like. I am co-author with David Occomore of *Bushes and Briars: An Anthology of Essex Folk Songs*,² which contains several of the songs we collected there in the 1970s.

My philosophy is simple. Compose only when you really have to. I have a few works in sketches but they will have to wait until the time is absolutely right. Music is an act of friendship and one should always have one's audience and listeners in mind.

Sinfonietta, Op. 6

This is one of the few early works of mine I have allowed to survive. Even so, it has had many revisions and took until 1987 to reach its present form. It waited another eleven years before it was premiered, by students of the Royal Northern College of Music conducted by Ronald Frost in St Ann's, Manchester.

It is in the traditional format of four movements. The first is in sonata form and has the title *Pezzo poco serio* and, although there is no programme, travelling from my home to Manchester through the Derbyshire hills must have been a factor in its creation. This same scene is particularly noticeable in the last movement where the clatter of the wheels

¹ Published by the English Folk Dance and Song Society, London, 1977.

² Monkwood Press, Loughton, 1979.

of the train on the old (and, sadly, closed) Midland line can be visualised. The main melody at the very outset pops up in all different guises and refuses to lie down right throughout the whole work. The second movement, marked *Arioso*, is a song-like piece with an impassioned central section in which the strings are reinforced by the timpani. There follows a swift and energetic Scherzo with a humorous trio section – after all, *scherzo* does mean ‘joke’. After a short slow reflective beginning to the finale, entitled *Pezzo meno serio* there follows another athletic movement in which the timpani play an important role. There is something of the 1960s ‘shake, rattle and roll’ about this movement, although a slightly more serious episode occurs in the middle of it. This mood is dispelled and the work concludes with the main theme of the first movement appearing in augmentation optimistically and triumphantly.

Clarinet Concertino, Byard's Leap, Op. 27

Near the village of Ancaster in Lincolnshire there are stories of a famous horse called Byard who did a series of amazing leaps to escape the clutches of the evil old hag Meg. One version of the story tells of his demise shortly afterwards but another tells of his living to a ripe old age. The music depicts the second version and the first movement, which opens with a brief cadenza, evokes a pastoral scene. The scoring is for clarinet and strings only in this movement, where the horse is in a field close to the church – the day being Good Friday. The second movement is marked *Larghetto e desolato* as the lonely and unwanted Byard wanders towards the edge of the field. The doors and windows of the church are open and he hears a story of a man unwanted and abandoned by his friends. He cries out in pain as rumbles of thunder are heard in the distance. Two children in the choir sneak out to see what the matter is and for a brief moment a miracle occurs and Byard is able to tell them of his distress. The youngsters promise to look after him and visit him regularly. The last movement depicts the horse's joy as he finds new life to prance around his pasture. In the final section he describes his famous leaps to the two youngsters.

Recorder Concertino, *A Gallery of Cats*, Op. 26

Except for a very brief period there have always been cats in my house, including a black and white stray and one rescued from a barn once used by five-pound-note forgers. This work (composed in 1982–83, and revised in 2008) depicts a succession of these felines and their various antics, but listeners are encouraged to form their own pictures of them. There are seven short movements, all named after old dances: *Alla Giga*, *Alla Pavan*, *Corante*, *Lamentoso* (which is for the loss of an aged wild cat who was tamed), *Ostinato*, *Alla Valse* and *Rigadoun*. Four different recorders – soprano, treble, tenor and in the last movement soprano – are used, with an orchestra of strings only.

***In Outlaw Country*, Op. 12b**

This work was originally written in 1971 for a large orchestra and lay unperformed for over thirty years, I came to the conclusion that nothing would be lost if the scoring were reduced and the whole piece rethought. Two movements were dropped and two new ones added. The suite is a series of musical paintings of the area where I spent my early youth. I chose this title because the scenes depicted therein are in the area where Robin Hood and his merry men operated. Moreover, the rebels in the first movement were at one time all classed as outlaws although they eventually won the day.

In the first movement, 'Kirkgate', the listener is invited to view the scene in Newark looking towards the majestic west front of the church of St Mary Magdalene. This beautiful building suffered badly during the Civil War when the town was staunchly royalist. Just before midday, when the sun goes behind the spire, it briefly shines through a hole made by a cannonball which went in one side and out the other. The music recalls the past: the distant trumpet and furious strings depict Prince Rupert's army preparing for attack. The siege was relieved after the Prince's famous charge down Beacon Hill. But the dream fades quickly and suddenly, and the second movement follows swiftly – a slow and dreamy walk by the Trent between Fiskerton and Hazleford Ferry near Bleasby. The mood is quiet throughout and in the distance the Minster clock can

be heard striking 6 o'clock. Four solo cellos introduce the listener to the scene. The ostinato shifts to different keys in this arch-shaped movement and the music reaches a high, though restrained, point in the middle. Thereafter the opening returns with varied harmony and a short coda leads us to the next port of call: Southwell Minster and its village city. The hustle and bustle of market day is portrayed and the hymn-tune 'Southwell' appears in disguise. It was composed by H. S. Irons (1834–1905) who was organist and choirmaster at St Andrew's, Nottingham, for 29 years. After a trio section which portrays a somewhat eccentric clergyman, the scherzo is repeated. The coda uses part of the Irons hymn again.

The excursion continues to St Mary's Church, Blidworth, near Mansfield, close to Newstead Abbey, the ancestral home of Lord Byron. There's a local tradition where the male child born nearest to Christmas Day is rocked in a beautifully adorned cradle at a service of Evensong early in February. The solo cello announces the lullaby, which is repeated by the violins.

The fifth and final movement is a fast an energetic dance and can be regarded as the English version of the Italian saltarello. The journey continues to Wellow, near Ollerton, where a maypole miraculously survives on the village green. After the music has whirled the listener around, the piece turns full circle to end at Southwell in time for the carillon in the Minster to play at 12 o'clock noon. Then Irons' tune is heard in its full glory as sacred and secular are joined together in a rousing coda.

Linda Merrick has established an international profile as a clarinet soloist, recording artist and clinician. She specialises in contemporary repertoire, and for the last fifteen years has been at the forefront of generating new works for her instrument by British composers, commissioning over 35 solo works for clarinet, including nine new concertos, and releasing much of this repertoire on CD.

Linda's catalogue of solo recordings to date includes new concertos for clarinet and concert band by Malcolm Arnold, Nigel Clarke, Martin Ellerby, Kit Turnbull and Guy Woolfenden (Polyphonic) and Philip Sparke (Anglo Records), and concertos for clarinet and orchestra by Edwin Roxburgh (NMC) and John McLeod (Chandos). Her pioneering work for clarinet and electronics has led to two further CDs, entitled *New York Counterpoint* and *The Hemlock Stone* (both on Classicprint), and her chamber-music output includes a premiere recording of Wilfred Joseph's Clarinet Quintet (Metier), and recordings of chamber works by Malcolm Arnold (Maestro Sound and Vision) and Martin Ellerby (SRC). A CD of four clarinet quintets by Nigel Clarke, Martin Ellerby, Edwin Roxburgh and Kit Turnbull with the Navarra String Quartet is in preparation from Naxos.

Linda has broadcast as a solo artist for BBC Radio 3, Radio France and DRS1 (Switzerland), and performed in America, Australia, the United Arab Emirates and across the UK and mainland Europe. She is a founder member of the contemporary ensemble Sounds Positive, with whom she has commissioned and premiered over seventy works by British composers and released a CD of chamber music by John Lambert on the NMC label.

Linda is Vice-Principal of the Royal Northern College of Music, where she holds a professorship and is Director of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. She is also the UK representative for Howarth Clarinets.

John Turner is one of the leading recorder-players of today. He was Senior Scholar in Law at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, before pursuing a legal career, acting for many distinguished musicians and musical organisations, alongside his many musical activities. These included numerous appearances with David Munrow's pioneering Early Music Consort of London. He now devotes his time to playing, writing, reviewing, publishing, composing and generally energising. He has played and broadcast as recorder soloist with the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the Academy of Ancient Music, the English Chamber Orchestra and the English Baroque Soloists, amongst other leading chamber orchestras. His recordings include no less than five sets of the 'Brandenburg' Concertos, but lately he has made numerous acclaimed recordings of contemporary repertoire for the recorder, including four concerto discs. In the last year or two he has played in Germany, Switzerland, Poland, France, New Zealand, Japan and the USA, and given many broadcast recitals. He has given the first performances of over 400 works for the recorder, many of which have now entered the standard repertoire, and his own recorder compositions are regularly set for festivals and examinations. He was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the Royal Northern College of Music in 2002 for his services to British music.

Barry Wordsworth is Music Director of the Royal Ballet Covent Garden, having previously held the position from 1990 to 1995. He is also Principal Conductor of the Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra, and in October 2006 became Conductor Laureate of the BBC Concert Orchestra, having served as its Principal Conductor since 1989. From 2005 to 2008 he was Music Director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Barry Wordsworth made his first televised appearance at the BBC Proms in 1989 and he has conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra regularly in subsequent Proms seasons. He has also toured extensively with the orchestra, including tours to Japan and to the United States for their 50th anniversary in 2002.

Highlights in recent seasons have included guest appearances with the Royal

Concertgebouw Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, Seoul Philharmonic, Guangzhou Symphony, Rotterdam Philharmonic, New Zealand Symphony and Sydney Symphony. In the UK, Barry Wordsworth has conducted the Philharmonia, London Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

In addition to his symphonic career, Mr Wordsworth has enjoyed a long and close relationship both the Royal Ballet in London and the Birmingham Royal Ballet. In recent seasons, he has also conducted productions for the New National Theatre Tokyo, the Leipzig Ballet, and the ballet of the Opéra National de Paris.

Barry Wordsworth holds honorary doctorates from the University of Brighton and the University of Central England in Birmingham, and in 2006 he was made an Honorary Fellow of Trinity College of Music in London.



Sinfonietta

Recorded: 16 March 2007, Angel Studios, London

Recording Engineer: Gary Thomas

Producer: Philip Lane

Clarinet Concertino; Recorder Concertino; Suite for Harp, Strings and Trumpet

Recorded: 15 September 2008, St Thomas' Church, Hillgate, Stockport

Recording Engineer: Richard Scott

Producer: David Ellis

Booklet notes: Philip Spratley

Cover photograph: Bernd Moore, Moore Weddings (www.mooreweddings.co.uk)

Design and lay-out: Paul Brooks, Design & Print, Oxford

The composer gratefully acknowledges grants from the Ida Carroll and the RVW Trusts.

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0088

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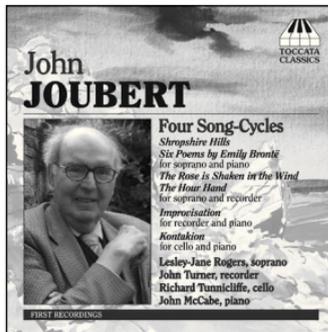
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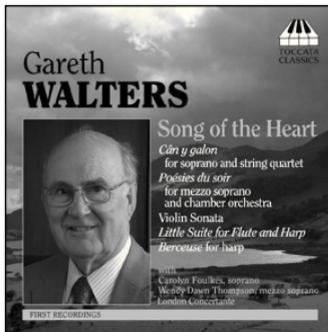
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“these song cycles [...] burst with his characteristic melodic inventiveness and vivid word setting and are beautifully captured here by Lesley-Jane Rogers. Chamber pieces are also

included, with John McCabe, who has long championed Joubert's work, in fine form at the keyboard. ♪

Stephen Pritchard, *The Observer*
TOCC 0045



Walters' career as a composer. They enclose the buoyant, Celtic-coloured *Little Suite for Flute and Harp*, the expansive *Violin Sonata* and the gentle *Berceuse* for harp.

TOCC 0090



“The three works on this enterprising release [...] reveal a composer of integrity and intelligence. [...] music of quality and genuine staying power. I'm happy to report that performances and recordings [...] are uniformly

admirable, as is the presentation (Taylor himself provides the helpful listening notes). Well worth exploring. ♪

Andrew Achenbach, *Gramophone*
TOCC 0015



recordings made in the composer's presence. Sound quality is superb – the details in the delicately scored parts are crystalline, and the climaxes are allowed to expand fully. ♪

Peter Joelsson, *Audiophile Audition* TOCC 0087

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This CD reveals a fresh, original and immediately attractive voice in British music. Philip Spratley, born in Nottinghamshire in 1942, has his roots in English folksong and his compositions are strongly evocative of the countryside – though animated by a rhythmic vivacity and drive that recalls Shostakovich, Britten and Tippett. Spratley's music also abounds in memorable melodies, and his ability to write tunes with the ring of folksong about them reveals him as a true heir of Holst and Vaughan Williams.

PHILIP SP RATLEY Music for String Orchestra

Sinfonietta, Op. 6	26:30	Recorder Concertino, A Gallery of Cats, Op. 26	13:00
1 <i>Pezzo poco serio</i>	8:28	8 <i>Alla Giga</i>	1:36
2 <i>Arioso</i>	6:38	9 <i>Alla Pavan</i>	1:29
3 <i>Scherzo</i>	5:50	10 <i>Corante</i>	1:35
4 <i>Pezzo meno serio</i>	5:34	11 <i>Lamentoso</i>	2:12
Clarinet Concertino, Byard's Leap, Op. 27	16:16	12 <i>Ostinato</i>	1:33
5 <i>Cadenza – Andante pastorale</i>	7:57	13 <i>Alla Valse</i>	1:22
6 <i>Larghetto e desolato</i>	4:22	14 <i>Rigadon</i>	3:13
7 <i>Allegro non troppo</i>	3:57	Suite, In Outlaw Country, Op. 12b	15:52
		15 <i>Preludio</i>	2:23
		16 <i>Notturmo</i>	3:29
		17 <i>Scherzo</i>	3:24
		18 <i>Lullaby</i>	2:49
		19 <i>Finale</i>	3:47

Linda Merrick, clarinet **5–7**

John Turner, recorder **8–14**

Tracey Redfern, trumpet **15, 17, 19**

Eira Lynn Jones, harp **16–19**

Royal Ballet Sinfonia **1–4**

Manchester Sinfonia **5–19**

Barry Wordsworth **1–4**, Philip Spratley **5–19**, conductors

TOCCATA CLASSICS

16 Dalkeith Court,

Vincent Street,

London SW1P 4HH, UK

Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020

Fax: +44/0 207 834 5020

E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com

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