

Hans GÁL

CHAMBER MUSIC FOR CLARINET

SERENADE FOR CLARINET, VIOLIN AND CELLO, OP. 93

TRIO FOR VIOLIN, CLARINET AND PIANO, OP. 97

CLARINET QUINTET, OP. 107

Ensemble Burletta

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

HANS GÁL'S CHAMBER MUSIC FOR CLARINET

by Eva Fox-Gál

Born in 1890 in Vienna, of Jewish descent, Hans Gál won early recognition as a composer, culminating in the Austrian State Prize for a symphony in 1915. In spite of the cataclysmic aftermath of the First World War (during which he had served in the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), Gál was able to build a rapidly rising career during the 1920s, particularly in Germany. His opera *Die heilige Ente*, premiered in 1923 in Düsseldorf under Georg Szell, was immediately taken up by a further six opera-houses for the subsequent season, and was still in the repertoire in 1933. These and other successes led to his appointment in 1929 as director of the Music Conservatoire in Mainz – but four years later the Nazi seizure of power resulted in instant dismissal and a complete ban on performance and publication of his work. He returned to Vienna, but in 1938 was again forced to flee, this time to Britain. Sir Donald Tovey brought him to Edinburgh, where he became a lecturer at the University in 1945, remaining active as a composer, pianist, teacher and scholar until his death in 1987. He was a founding member of the Edinburgh International Festival, and the author of books on Brahms, Schubert, Schumann, Wagner and Verdi.

Outwardly his life had been turned upside down by the major political upheavals that tore Europe apart in the twentieth century and that he experienced at first hand: two World Wars and their aftermath, persecution as a Jew under the Third Reich, exile to Britain in 1938, and life on the margins in the radically changed post-War musical climate where anything not deemed 'avant-garde' was disregarded and disparaged. But what is remarkable about Gál is how his life-long creativity as a composer was able to prevail in the face of the seismic events of his outer life. Rather it came from within, from his innermost being, which remained astonishingly intact, as did his absolute commitment to the musical values that sustained him. His musical roots

were deep and were nourished, even in times of drought, by the musical tradition from which he grew, going back to the great Austro-German classical tradition.

Gál's compositions include four operas, four symphonies, three solo concertos, several large-scale cantatas and a host of chamber, piano and vocal works. By the end of his long life, he had left a legacy of around 140 published works. His music can be enjoyed in many different ways. It is superficially easy to listen to, coherent and apparently straightforward, supreme in its clarity and formal mastery. But at the same time it is immensely intricate and subtle in its motivic structure, contrapuntal interplay of melodic voices, extended tonality and harmonic piquancy, wittily subverting expectation at every turn. His musical language is deeply rooted in the pre-serial Austro-German tradition, but the voice is essentially his own and is unmistakable to anyone who has the opportunity to get to know it.

Gál's works for clarinet span over half a century, from his *Wind Divertimento*, Op. 22, of 1924 to his *Clarinet Quintet* of 1977, and bear witness to his love for the instrument and his lifelong interest in exploring the challenge of different combinations of instruments.

Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet, Op. 107

Gál's *Clarinet Quintet* was written in 1977, hot on the heels of a *String Quintet*, and Gál very much regarded these 'late flowerings' as his last substantial works and as a conclusion to his life's work as a composer, though he was still to produce 24 *Fugues for piano* in 1980 and works for unaccompanied cello and for unaccompanied recorder in 1982 and 1983. His creative energy seems to have been powerfully stimulated by a summer holiday on the coast of Wales, with some magnificent cliff walks. Walking in nature had always been a major source of inspiration for him, and the starting point for many of his compositions, but this holiday in particular must have felt like a new lease of life, following a serious fall and fractured femur the previous December, at an age where full recovery is rare.

The *Clarinet Quintet* was not written for anyone in particular. The first performance was given by Philip Greene with the *Edinburgh Quartet* in the *Reid Concert Hall*,

Edinburgh, on 23 November 1978. They subsequently broadcast the work for BBC radio in March 1979.

Gál's own programme note for the first performance reads as follows:

A homage to one of the composer's favourite instruments, this work was written last year, preceded by a string Quintet, both works the results of an intense interest in the unlimited possibilities of a 5-part texture. The clarinet, treated as a protagonist with a vocal character of expressiveness, is both combined with and opposed by the four string instruments who are acting in turn as counter-soloists.

A lyrical first movement in sonata form is followed by a grave, elegiac *lento*, a kind of dirge, twice interrupted by a relaxed *intermezzo*. Following this, a slowish, pensive introduction – it will later find an occasion for returning as a contrasting episode – moves into a sportive rondo finale in the character of a *commedia dell'arte*, where the clarinet is acting the part of a buffoon, bringing the movement to a burlesque conclusion.

It is indicative of Gál's refusal to take himself or life too seriously that he bows out (in what he thought to be his last work) with reference to a traditional character who is a clown, albeit a clown with an underlying pathos behind the mask. But it is also perhaps significant that Gál himself hides behind such a mask of understatement in writing about a work of extraordinary emotional depth and subtlety. He was deeply averse to writing about himself, let alone about the relationship of his music to himself and his inner being.

The Quintet as a whole has its own sound-world, a richness of texture that stems from five independent voices that are nevertheless so intertwined that one seems to emerge out of the other, each of them an individual with something personal to say, but then seamlessly stepping back into an accompanying role. Harmonically there is a refinement of the palette that is characteristic of late Gál. The first movement ^[1], in spite of being in the traditionally bright key of D major, feels predominantly mellow, with deep sunset colours, but also with more sprightly contrasting episodes that are lighter-hued.

As so often with Gál, the slow movement, which is here the central one of three [2], is the emotional heart of the work. The string opening of the ‘grave, elegiac’ *Lento*, which Gál describes as a ‘kind of dirge’, leads into a soulful melody on the first violin which then opens out and rises into a rapt counter-melody when the clarinet enters, continuing as an extended duet. The contrasting middle section brings a change of key, mood and pulse (a lilting $\frac{6}{8}$ time,), but here, too, the colours are pastel rather than primary, and the dynamic range predominantly *piano* and even *pianissimo*, rising to a climax only once, towards the end of the section. A recapitulation of the *Lento* is introduced by the cello, followed by the lower strings, adding new colours and textures, cumulatively enriching and extending the emotional intensity of the melody. The third and last time the *Lento* appears it is pared down to its essentials, the melody accompanied by bare chromatic crotchets, with the cello quietly and persistently establishing the prevailing key of B minor before the movement finally comes to rest.

The third movement [3] starts *Poco adagio* in D minor, in an improvisatory manner, as though it is feeling its way towards something. This ‘slowish pensive introduction’ leads to the *allegro molto* rondo finale, in a jocund D major. It is light-footed, joyous, full of rhythmic vitality, providing a total change of mood from all that has gone before, although not without a return of the *adagio* (as a ‘contrasting episode’), before the jaunty *allegro* is allowed to take the work to a buoyantly energetic conclusion. It expresses a *joie de vivre* which is as much an expression of Gál’s essential being as the profound sadness expressed in the *Lento*.

Such opposite poles, expressed here by Gál as ‘elegiac’ and ‘burlesque’, seem to be a fundamental part of his emotional and stylistic spectrum and are evidently part of his compositional DNA. His style cannot be adequately described in terms of either, but rather as a balancing of opposites. Each aspect is in a sense relativised within the work as a whole, but also within the overall context of Gál’s entire *œuvre*.

Trio for Violin, Clarinet and Piano, Op. 97

This trio was composed in 1950 when Gál had already been living in Britain for twelve years, had been a lecturer in the Music Department of the University of Edinburgh since

1945, and had acquired British nationality (in 1946). It comes at the end of a remarkably creative decade – particularly when one considers the outward disruptions to his life. He was hardly known in Britain when he arrived in 1938 and had to start anew, interrupted once more by five-and-a-half years of war and its inevitable deprivations, which included a period of internment as an ‘enemy alien’ in 1940 and the tragic loss of several close members of his family in 1942: his sister and aunt had taken their own lives immediately prior to deportation to Auschwitz; his mother had mercifully died of natural causes one month earlier, and his younger son had committed suicide at the age of eighteen. Evidently composition provided some sort of escape and solace at an intensely bleak time. His wartime works include several large-scale compositions: his Second Symphony (1942–43) and the Cello Concerto of 1944, as well as other orchestral compositions, works for solo piano and numerous chamber works. This trio comes between two further large-scale works: his Piano Concerto (1948) and his Third Symphony (1951–52).

A trio for violin, clarinet and piano presents the particular compositional challenge of combining and balancing the very different sonorities of these three instruments, a combination for which there was scarcely any repertoire before the twentieth century. Characteristically, Gál uses each instrument in a melodic and in an accompanying role, and his piano texture is also predominantly contrapuntal, with independent melodic lines. In a brief note about the work, Gál writes:

The three instruments are used in a permanent lively confrontation, thematic suggestions being treated both melodically and contrapuntally. In the opening movement, in sonata form, the lyrical character of the clarinet is prevailing, contrasted by a following Capriccio, a kind of scherzo with expressive episodes. The finale, a set of free variations on a theme introduced by the clarinet, moves through changing moods to a brilliant concluding peroration.

The ‘lively confrontation’ is particularly striking in comic altercations between the instruments, often between violin and clarinet, who interrupt each other like

squabbling partners, as, for instance, in the second subject of the *Moderato assai* first movement [4]. Such ‘untimely’ interruptions are then contrasted with passages of renewed peace and harmony, marked by more symmetry in the entries and also relative tonal stability. Much of the humour in this work derives from such ‘butting in’ between the instruments. Humour is particularly evident in the second movement, marked *Andantino capriccioso* [5]. For instance, the violin enters in what sounds like the wrong key, persisting through all sorts of ‘false relations’, and in the development section of this movement Gál plays with different time-signatures and asymmetries. In the finale, a *Tema con variazioni* [6], Gál’s penchant for thematic development comes fully into its own. The theme itself is in two contrasting sections, and each variation is characterised by a different tempo indication. The second variation (*allegro assai*), in particular, brings the contrapuntal ‘squabbling’ to a head, before the partners settle their differences again. The final variation builds up in speed and excitement, as if the three instruments are almost falling over one another to get to the end first.

This trio, with its balance of lyricism and contrapuntal virtuosity, expressiveness and wit, is characteristic of the composer at his most genial, and Gál frequently performed it himself on the piano, as he did at the first performance, a lunch-hour concert in Edinburgh in February 1952.

Serenade for Clarinet, Violin and Cello, Op. 93

Gál particularly enjoyed mastering compositional challenges, and writing for only three instrumental voices was one of these: ‘I was 40 before I learnt to write for 3 parts – and 60 before I learnt to write for 2’, he said with reference to his Duo for Bassoon and Cello.¹ In addition to string trios, he composed trios for flute and two violins (1940); oboe, violin and viola (1941); and recorder (or flute), violin and cello (1966).

In a note for a programme introducing his *Huyton Suite* for flute and two violins (on 25 September 1948), composed during his wartime internment in Huyton, Gál wrote about his special love for the trio as a genre:

¹ Quoted in Wilhelm Waldstein, *Hans Gál*, Verlag der Österreichische Musikzeitschrift/Elisabeth Lafite Verlag, Vienna, 1965, p. 38.

Chamber music, as the most intimate form of expression, is the realm to which the musician repeatedly returns in order to retain the link with the essence of things. In a duo, trio or quartet, independent individuals converse with one another. The musical symbol for this process is polyphony: the most perfect and most transparent form of polyphony is three voices; for that reason I have always had a predilection for the trio as the noblest medium of polyphonic setting.

In the case of the *Serenade* for clarinet, violin and cello, dating from 1935, Gál was faced also with the challenge of blending the tone-colours of clarinet and strings. Although in this work the clarinet plays an apparently prominent role, with a number of solo cadenzas, all three parts are otherwise intricately interwoven, the thematic material evenly distributed amongst the players. The individual movements, and also the thematic material within them, are richly contrasted, alternating between energetic, tonally unstable, strikingly asymmetric passages, and contrasting episodes of an idyllic character, with a very stable tonality, which seem to hark back to a better world. These contrasts are particularly evident in the *Cantabile* first movement [7], where the smooth, lyrical opening is shortly followed by a more energetic, rather spiky motif (still part of the first theme), whereas the contrasting second subject – the movement is in classical sonata-form – is contrasted in mood and key, evoking an idyllic serenity and stability, anchored in secure tonality. A substantial development section plays with all of the thematic material, tossing motifs and fragments of motifs between the instruments, heightening the contrast when the return of the lyrical opening theme brings a renewed sense of flow and stability. But every mood is short-lived, which seems to be a hallmark of this work.

The second movement, *Burletta* [8], is a scherzo and is fast and agitated in character. ‘Burletta’ implies a comic form, but here the humour is dark and sardonic, with bite, and the music predominantly in minor mode. The contrasting slower middle section is serene and idyllic in character, and feels deeply nostalgic, evoking a sense of a better world which is irretrievably lost – or which perhaps never existed outside the imagination.

Intermezzo is at first sight a strangely understated designation for the slow movement [9], which is in the form of a deeply expressive vocal serenade: the clarinet sings a hauntingly sad melody, accompanied by *pizzicato* strings, like a guitar accompaniment. The poignancy increases when the violin joins the clarinet as a duet partner, extending the harmonic range of the melody with its own counter-melodies. But ‘intermezzo’ also implies that it is only an interlude, and it does indeed come to an end without full resolution, giving way to a clarinet cadenza. That in turn leads to a slow introduction to the finale, designated *Giocoso* [10] – but it, too, is not straightforwardly *giocoso* in mood. It is brisk, energetic and staccato, almost abrasive at times, though again with more flowing contrasting episodes, notably with the return of the haunting melody of the *Intermezzo*. The finale is the most tonally wide-ranging and also most technically virtuosic movement on this recording, culminating in a *stretto* (*Molto vivace*), which builds up to a powerful climax, before the work unexpectedly subsides into quiet serenity.

This is true chamber music, intimate and subtle, and the work as a whole has the lightness of touch which befits a ‘serenade’. But its heightened contrasts and discontinuities, although integral to Gál’s style, also perhaps express some of the trauma in his life at the time of writing it. His appointment as Director of the Mainz Conservatoire in 1929 had ushered in one of the most fulfilling and most intensely active and successful periods of his life. His contract had just been renewed before Hitler’s accession to power in 1933 brought his career in Germany to an abrupt end. ‘Non-Aryans’ like Gál were systematically eliminated from public life and stripped of all civil rights. With no possibility of any further employment in Germany, Gál had returned to Vienna, but was unable to obtain an official post and had to depend on private teaching and some occasional conducting for his livelihood. It was a bleak period in Austria, with the progressive erosion of democratic structures paving the way for the Nazi ‘annexation’ of Austria to the Third Reich in 1938. Although for Gál music was not a direct sounding-board for his inner turmoil, but rather a place of refuge from the chaos outside, there are moments in this and other works where one feels the full depth of loss.

The *Serenade* was first performed in Vienna in May 1936 at one of Gál's concerts with his Vienna Madrigal Choir, and was first broadcast, on Swiss radio, in January 1938. Yet it was not published until 1970, as Gál's Opus 93, 35 years after its composition, alongside his two wartime trios, the *Huyton Suite*, which became Op. 92, and the Trio for oboe, violin and viola, Op. 94.

Eva Fox-Gál was a lecturer in German literature in the Department of English and Related Literature, University of York, from 1971 to 2001. Since 1995 she has maintained a busy practice as a homeopath. As the daughter of Hans Gál, she grew up bilingually and imbibed much of the Central European culture which her parents brought with them. She is an active musician, both as pianist and as violinist, and is a committed chamber-music player. She is Honorary Vice-President of the Hans Gál Society.

Shelley Levy, clarinet, graduated from the University of Cape Town. She was awarded a prestigious Swiss government scholarship to study at the Geneva Conservatoire ('Premiere Prix de Virtuosité') before continuing at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. Her teachers have included Oliver De Groote, Thomas Friedli, Walter Boeykens, Thea King and Michael Whight. She won the Oudemeester Competition for Wind Instruments, the Natal 75th Anniversary Prize for Orchestral Instruments and the wind category of the ATKV Forte Competition in South Africa and was a woodwind finalist in the Royal Overseas League Competition in London. As an orchestral freelancer she has played with the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, amongst others. She has given numerous solo and chamber-music concerts in South Africa, Europe and Canada, also giving concerto performances with all the major symphony orchestras in South Africa and chamber concerts at the Demetria Festival and Sani International Festival in Greece. Her UK performances include concerts in the Barbican and the Royal Albert Hall. She has been broadcast by BBC Radio 3 with the Leto Ensemble.



Katalin Kertész, violin, was born in Budapest. After four years at the Béla Bartók Conservatoire in Budapest, she studied in Germany with Eckhard Fischer and Annette-Barbara Vogel. Additional studies with André Gertler, Tibor Varga and Nelly Söregi-Wunderlich also provided important musical influences. Since moving to the UK she has performed on both modern and period violin in a multitude of chamber groups and ensembles, including The City of London Sinfonia, The Philharmonia, The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, The London Handel Orchestra and The Brook Street Band (including two CD releases on the Avie label) and The Hanover Band. Katalin has performed in such prestigious venues as the Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, the Royal Albert Hall (at the BBC Proms) and the Barbican and has given concerts in Europe, South Africa, New Zealand, China and South America. She has appeared on the BBC programme *In Tune* and played at the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival in Finland. Katalin is leader of the Kertész Quartet, a string quartet performing eighteenth-century repertoire on period instruments. Katalin's interest in the music of Hans Gál led her to give numerous pioneering performances in the UK and South Africa, including the Scottish premiere of Gál's Sonata in D of 1933.



Joanne Green, violin, studied with the eminent Enescu pupil Nathan Gutman in Australia before winning a coveted full postgraduate scholarship (as the Clarke scholar) to attend the Royal College of Music in London. While there she became a founder member of the Hogarth Quartet and won prizes in international competitions, participated in the BBC Young Artists programme and was a winner of the Tunnel Trust competition. She was a sub-principal member of the Northern Sinfonia in Newcastle and for the last twelve years has been a long-standing member of The Scottish Ensemble. Playing Baroque violin, she has also been one of the leading forces behind the ground-breaking Avison Ensemble, including its well-received catalogue of recordings for Naxos and Linn Records. Joanne has played on the front desks of many UK orchestras, including the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. She is also a highly experienced education amateur and has written and delivered projects all over the country. She taught at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for



ten years and has coached chamber music at Pro Corda and for the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme and is now a visiting music specialist at Wells Cathedral School.

Nichola Joy Blakey, viola, was born and raised in Manchester, before moving to London to begin her studies at the Royal Academy of Music with James Sleigh on viola. Since graduating, she has enjoyed a busy freelance career giving concerts and recitals across the UK and abroad with ensembles and orchestras as diverse as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, the orchestra of Opera North, Ex Cathedra, Collegium Musicum 90 and the Brook Street Band. She has performed in the Royal Albert Hall (at the BBC Proms), Symphony Hall, Birmingham, and the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, and toured Europe with various international artists including Johann Johannsson and Olafur Arnalds and Fyfe Dangerfield (of the British band Guillemots), as well as appearing with pop artist Emeli Sandé at the Royal Albert Hall for a DVD. She has made several recordings for general release, including Handel's *Dixit Dominus* with the Brook Street Band and the choir of Queen's College Oxford for the Avie label, and has broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM, as well as Capital Radio. Nichola is a member of the Kertész Quartet. She coaches musicians at the New London Music Society Summer School.



Cressida Nash, cello, studied music at St Anne's College, Oxford, and cello with Ula Kantrovitch at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and subsequently as a postgraduate with Lowri Blake at Trinity College of Music, London, where she won bursaries to study and perform contemporary and chamber music at the Dartington International Festival. As a soloist she has performed in France, Germany, Greece, South Africa and India, and has travelled regularly to the Netherlands to give recitals with Trio de L'Aer. In 2007 she became a founder member of Musicians South West, with whose members she has given countless recitals over the past decade, including a performance of Mendelssohn and Moscheles cello sonatas at the Mendelssohn Haus in Leipzig as part of the 2011 Gewandhaus 'Mendelssohn and England' Festival. With The Bath Consort she has given recitals in Bath and at The Pound Arts Centre, and as cellist with Trio Paradis from September 2014 to May 2015 toured the well-reviewed



show 'Women of World War One', a project supported by many trusts, including The Arts Council and Pound Arts. Cressida was recently invited to join the Kertész Quartet.

Pavel Timofeyevsky, piano, gives recitals and appears as a soloist with orchestras at major concert venues worldwide such as the Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Shanghai Oriental Centre for Arts, Guangzhou Opera House, Mumbai National Centre for Performing Arts and Merkin Concert Hall, New York. An eloquent speaker, he gives regular lecture-concerts for the Kensington Music Society in London. A devoted supporter of connecting with new audiences, Pavel has extensively performed for Live Music Now in community venues all over the UK. He has recorded for the label Music-Chamber with violist Katya Lazareva and British composer Ian Stewart. Pavel is also a sought-after composer and winner of the prestigious BBC/Guardian Young Composer of the Year Award. Recently he conducted a world premiere of his new work for orchestra, *Questors Suite*, in Cadogan Hall in London. He has composed music for several films, including the critically acclaimed documentary *La fin de la belle époque* for Russian television and a soundtrack for Russia's oldest animated film studio, Soyuzmultfilm. He has recorded the soundtrack and starred in the US documentary *Tchaikovsky*.



Ensemble Burletta (www.burletta.co.uk) explores repertoire for clarinet, strings and piano in various combinations, ranging from duo to quintet, from the Viennese classics to contemporary composers. Its members have performed together or with other ensembles in prestigious venues such as the Wigmore Hall, the Royal Albert Hall, the Southbank Centre and the Barbican, and performed in festivals such as Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival in Finland and Sani International and Demetria Festival in Greece. They have given concerts in Europe, South Africa, New Zealand, China, South America and Canada and have been broadcast by BBC Radio 3.



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Engineer, producer and editor: Simon Fox-Gál

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The **Hans Gál** Society



Hans Gál was one of the most wonderful men I have ever met. He was a complete musician, knowledgeable about all forms of music. Every note Gál wrote or played had real meaning. As a composer, he never bothered to follow fashion – nor to react against it. He created in a way that was true to himself – and that is surely the only way that music can have real value.

Steven Isserlis, President of the Hans Gál Society

The Hans Gál Society is a UK-based charity whose aim is to extend awareness of Gál's life and work by supporting performances, recordings, publications and research, and to preserve his musical legacy for future generations.

Membership costs from just \$30/€30/£20 year and comes with a free CD, newsletters, prior notice of events and releases, and the knowledge that by your support you will be enabling present and future generations to discover Hans Gál's musical and cultural legacy.

For more information on Hans Gál, the Society and how to join or support it in any other way, please visit www.hansgal.org or contact Tanya Fox at The Hans Gál Society, 16 Blakelock Place, Edinburgh EH9 1RL, United Kingdom; tanya@hansgalsociety.org

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HANS GÁL Chamber Music for Clarinet

Clarinet Quintet, Op. 107 (1977)*	24:36
1 I <i>Allegro comodo</i>	7:48
2 II <i>Lento – quasi allegretto</i>	9:43
3 III <i>Poco adagio – allegro molto</i>	7:05
Trio for Violin, Clarinet and Piano, Op. 97 (1950)	20:28
4 I <i>Moderato assai</i>	8:03
5 II <i>Andantino capriccioso</i>	6:09
6 III <i>Tema con variazioni</i>	6:16
Serenade for Clarinet, Violin and Cello, Op. 93 (1935)*	20:19
7 I <i>Cantabile</i>	7:47
8 II <i>Burletta</i>	3:58
9 III <i>Intermezzo</i>	3:06
10 IV <i>Giocoso</i>	5:28
	TT 66:04

Ensemble Burletta

Shelley Levy, clarinet

Katalin Kertész, violin

Joanne Green, violin 1–3

Nichola Blakey, viola 1–3

Cressida Nash, cello 1–3 7–10

Pavel Timofeyevsky, piano 4–6

*FIRST RECORDINGS