

Richard ARNELL

COMPLETE MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 1, OP. 11

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 2, OP. 55

VARIATIONS ON AN AMERICAN THEME, OP. 76

PASSACAGLIA FOR SOLO VIOLIN, OP. 23

with **Stanley BATE**

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 1, OP. 47

Patrick Wastnage, violin
Elizabeth Dunn, piano

FIRST RECORDINGS

TWO YOUNG BRITISH COMPOSERS IN WARTIME AMERICAN EXILE

by Lewis Foreman

The two young British composers represented on this album were products of the Royal College of Music (RCM) in the 1930s who found themselves in the USA on the outbreak of war in 1939, and whose early careers prospered in an international setting in consequence. Richard Arnell, known to all as 'Tony', was the son of a builder and property developer. After University College School in Hampstead, north London, he studied at the Royal College of Music between 1935 and 1939. A prizewinning composition student with the composer John Ireland, Arnell was attracted from the first to the solo violin, and an early violin concerto of his was played at the RCM in 1938. That year he married Charlotte Augusta Cronin-Lowe, and the couple sailed to New York for the World's Fair of 1939. In September the outbreak of war meant they could not easily return. The British Consul in New York recommended not travelling unless there was an overriding reason to do so, and as a consequence Arnell's early career as a composer unexpectedly took off in the USA. A daughter was born there in 1940.

Initially Arnell found making a living from music in New York to be difficult, but he composed incessantly and developed a circle of contacts, finding a variety of casual musical jobs. Eventually, he was employed by the BBC North American service. Finding themselves part of the Greenwich Village scene, Arnell soon established a reputation as a composer. The celebrated Galimir String Quartet performed his First String Quartet (written in 1939) at the New York Public Library in 1940. His overture *The New Age* was performed at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Leon Barzin, in January 1941.

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 (1940)

Having just completed his Violin Concerto in one movement, Arnell seized the opportunity offered by regular commissions from Mrs Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge

for performance at the Library of Congress, and he wrote this ten-minute Violin Sonata – his first – while at Islip on Long Island between 22 July and 15 August 1940. It is inscribed ‘To Mrs Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge’, and the composer styles himself ‘R. A. S. Arnell’, probably for the last time. It seems likely that the intended performer of both concerto and sonata was Harold Kohon, who in 1942 played Arnell’s Passacaglia for Solo Violin, Op. 23, and eventually premiered the concerto in 1946.¹ I have not managed to trace the date of the first performance of the Sonata, which remains unpublished.

The work is notable for its clean open textures. Essentially in three movements, the right hand of the piano is often in octaves and the left a single line. It falls into three parts, not designated as numbered movements but each ending with a double bar. The opening *Allegro* [17] exhibits Arnell’s mature approach to form, which is to announce a theme – a line – which is extended and the subject of development and elaboration with, and in opposition to, the piano. The close is heralded by a sudden quiet interlude and high-lying violin reveries before a sudden and vigorous rush to the end. This part is followed by the briefest of quiet interludes [18], hardly a slow movement – only seven bars of *Adagio* – followed by the much longer, almost exclusively lyrical, in places almost dancing, *Molto vivace* in $\frac{6}{8}$ [19], running longer than the earlier two together.

Passacaglia for Solo Violin, Op. 23 (1942)

Although he had ambitions to write orchestral works and, indeed, must have written a dozen up to then while in America, including three symphonies, the response to specific artists, with solo instrumental works for immediate performance, ensured that Arnell’s platform and profile continued to grow. Possibly the most practical of these commissions came with the Passacaglia for Solo Violin, Op. 23 [16], which Harold Kohon commissioned and played in New York in 1942. (It was not heard in the UK until a

¹ Kohon (1918–2012), a student at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, counted Michael Piastro and George Enescu among his teachers. He enjoyed a high profile as a performer on radio and made a number of recordings, both as soloist and with his quartet, the Kohon Quartet, who were all first-desk players in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. He was also the concert-master of a number of US orchestras: the Baltimore Symphony, the NBC Opera, the American Symphony and the New York City Opera.



*Richard Arnell (left)
and Stanley Bate*

broadcast in July 1950, and was published only in 1960, when an arrangement for viola also appeared.)

A passacaglia is a piece in which the theme constantly recurs in one shape or another – effectively, continuous variations over a ground bass and, indeed, Arnell's six-and-a-half-minute essay in the form is in essence a set of continuous variations. About halfway through there is an episode where the player is required to project contrapuntal lines, but otherwise the music flows continuously, the coda finally coming with forceful double stopping.

Arnell needed champions, and when a set of *Classical Variations in C* for strings was broadcast from the station WQXR, in New York, in December 1941, it attracted the interest of the Columbia Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and its musical director, the film composer Bernard Herrmann, who became Arnell's most influential American acquaintance. Friendship with Herrmann opened many doors for Arnell. Herrmann encouraged him and played his music with the CBC Orchestra, including the First Symphony and later the Piano Concerto.

The conductor Sir Thomas Beecham, then touring in the USA, programmed three of Arnell's wartime works, giving the first performances of others after the War. Arnell responded by dedicating his First Symphony to Beecham, who gave the first public performance at Town Hall, New York, in May 1944. Before that, Beecham had conducted Arnell's *Divertimento* No. 2 at the Museum of Modern Art, but it would only be after Arnell returned to London in 1947 that Beecham took him up in a wholehearted way, with many performances.

Arnell's cantata *The War God*, setting a text by Stephen Spender, was first performed in New York, conducted by Bernard Herrmann, on 25 April 1945 to mark the opening of the San Francisco United Nations Conference. In 1946, to mark Sir Winston Churchill's visit to Columbia University, Arnell wrote a *Ceremonial and Flourish* for brass. There were also various chamber and instrumental works, including three string quartets. All this music was crowned by the ballet *Punch and the Child*, commissioned for the New York City Ballet in 1947.

At the time of all this success, Arnell's first marriage ended in divorce in 1946. At CBS he met his second wife, Lois Ross, who was studying drama at the Neighborhood Playhouse and dance with Martha Graham, and they were married in 1947. Ultimately Arnell married eight times, each union being dissolved, except the last, when his wife predeceased him in 2004.

Although at first subscribing to the general attitude of his young contemporaries in the late 1930s to reject the concept of classical form and the symphony in particular, from the beginning Arnell was constantly preoccupied by the symphony. He confessed:

I enjoy thinking architecturally. Musicians all do although they might not understand if you put it to them just like that. Music is a sound within a space, so the space and its shape and texture is an intimate part of the sound.²

He thus wrote the *Sinfonia Quasi Variazione* (1941), *Fantasia for Orchestra* (1941), *Sonata for Chamber Orchestra* (1941) and the *Symphonic Suite*, finally completed in 1943. However, none of these found a champion and only the first achieved a performance. He was more successful with instrumental sonatas.

Second Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 55 (1948)

Returning to England in 1947, Arnell blew onto the war-torn London scene like a musical gale, moving from a land of plenty to one where austerity ruled. He had a personal voice that was new, a professional technique and a large portfolio of unheard works to place with performers and publishers. Among the first new works he wrote

² Unpublished autobiographical note.

in 1948 after returning to London, and roughly contemporary with the well-received Fourth Symphony, the Second Violin Sonata, Op. 55, is inscribed to Jean Pougnet, one of the leading violin soloists of the day. It was first heard in a BBC broadcast by Pougnet, accompanied by Wilfrid Parry in February 1950. The first performance itself had been a few days before, when Maria Lidka and Margaret Kitchin,³ both then thought of as modern-music specialists, took it to Switzerland for a performance in Lausanne. It was published soon after.

The Second Sonata is in three movements, of which the first two carry the main weight of the musical argument. The opening *Vivace* [1] announces its serious intent with the opening chromatically rising octaves, sharply rapped out – C sharp, D, D sharp, E, B, C, C sharp, D, *fortissimo* – and the softly responding sustained violin chords. Rapid low octaves on the piano drive the music forwards, and the violin responds with fast triplets and the violin soaring above powerful octaves in the pianist's right hand. After each outburst by the violin there is a reflective interlude before it builds up again. Arnell's favourite trick of suddenly placing a rising scale in the violin line not only drives the music along but, as the movement approaches its end, with constant quavers running up an octave and a half, a sense of optimism begins to emerge. The sudden quiet interlude, when the piano holds the notes B flat, A, D, E flat, G, F sharp, sets the scene for the closing energy, but there are only two discordant chords of dismissal – hardly emotion recalled in tranquillity. In contrast, the thoughtful *Andante* second movement [2] is essentially lyrical, an extended slow poetic episode which, with the constant repetition of the haunting expressive motif, crowns the sonata. In contrast, the dancing *Allegro vivace* finale in $\frac{6}{8}$ [3], is effectively the scherzo, the wide-spanning theme in triplets eventually leading to a brief slow episode reminiscent of the motif of the slow movement and

³ Maria Lidka (Marianne Liedtke; 1914–2013) studied with Max Rostal in Berlin and, like him, escaped from the Nazi regime in 1934 to settle in Britain. She soon became a prominent feature of British musical life, both as chamber musician and soloist, giving the premieres of works by Richard Rodney Bennett, Iain Hamilton, John Joubert, Franz Reizenstein, Francis Routh, Michael Tippett and many more. The Swiss-born Margaret Kitchen (1914–2008) likewise enjoyed a profile as a proponent of new music: Tippett's Second Sonata was premiered by, and dedicated to, her, and she gave the first performance of an enormous number of new works, by composers including Alan Bush, Benjamin Britten, Alexander Goehr, Hans Werner Henze, Elizabeth Maconchy, Thea Musgrave, Priaux Rainier, Humphrey Searle and William Wordsworth. Lidka and Kitchin unveiled their duo in 1950, with the premiere of Peter Racine Fricker's First Violin Sonata.

heralding the throw-away *Presto* closing bars, where the violin twice soars through three octaves and offers a jockey gesture of dismissal.

Variations on an American Theme, Op. 76 (1955)

Dating from 1955, the *Variations on an American Theme*, Op. 76, for violin and piano was first heard in a BBC broadcast in December 1962, when it was featured on the old Home Service programme 'Music at Night' (a regular late-evening recital broadcast at 11.15pm). On that occasion it was played by Lionel Bentley with Wilfrid Parry. Arnell does not identify the theme, but the flavour of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* leaves one wondering whether he is in fact writing a generic tribute to American music.

The statement of the theme, *Andante* [4], elaborated over 21 bars, is followed by seven variations which are alternately fast and slow. The first, *Allegro* [5], is initially assertive but becomes reflective later. The second, *Andante* [6], uses Arnell's favourite device of having the left and right hand at the keyboard a quaver out, which creates a sense of weight and momentum at slow speeds. The third variation, a *Vivace* in $\frac{12}{8}$ [7], skips happily along and is followed by stage spookiness in the piano, left hand, *Lento, non troppo*. Variation five, *Allegro*, is for violin alone, creating the effect of a cadenza [8]. In the fleeting *Presto* sixth variation [9] the pounding quavers in the bass drive it along, and the solemn formality of the seventh variation, *Andante* [9], is announced by sombre piano chords which are maintained almost to the end.

Arnell was appointed to teach composition at Trinity College of Music in 1948, remaining there until 1987, and was also a lecturer at the Royal Ballet School in 1958–59. He was a notable influence on the teaching of film-scoring, first at the London School of Film Technique, later the London Film School, where he started the music department as music consultant. He was Music Director in 1975–88, while maintaining a pioneering link to the teaching of film-scoring at Trinity. He also played a considerable part in professional life, notably with the Composers' Guild of Great Britain, editing its journal, *Composer* (1961–64), and as acting as Chairman (1964, 1974–75) and Vice President (1992). He also sat on the Arts Council Music Panel.

It didn't take Arnell long after his return from the USA to establish himself as one of the leading younger British composers of the day, with a flood of performances, hearings of many of the works written in the States, notably the Fourth Symphony, *Punch and the Child* and the Piano Concerto, but also a succession of new ones, including the Second Violin Sonata, *Ode to the West Wind* (1950), a String Quintet, a fourth String Quartet and the ballets *Harlequin in April* (1951), *The Great Detective* (1953) and *The Angels* (1956). Sadler's Wells toured *Harlequin in April* widely, including it on a US tour.

He faded from prominence with the rise of the avant-garde, and the musical directorship of William Glock at the BBC from 1959, and he received an ever-decreasing number of performances. At Trinity College of Music he promoted a pioneering interest in film scores and electronic music, and was one of the first to take jazz seriously. With his sixth wife, the painter Charlotte Jennings, he collaborated on film projects and mixed-media works. By then living in the south of France, he returned to the UK after his eighth wife, Joan Heycock, died in 2004, and was accommodated at the Musicians' Benevolent Fund Home at Bromley, south-east of London, until its closure shortly before he died, on 10 April 2009.

STANLEY BATE (1911–59)

Stanley Bate was born on 12 December 1911 in Plymouth. Composer and pianist, he first came to prominence in his home town as a brilliant teenager, when two prentice operas were produced locally. He went to the Royal College of Music, studying composition with Vaughan Williams and Gordon Jacob and piano with Arthur Benjamin; later he studied in Germany with Hindemith, and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger wrote of him: 'He possesses personality, strength, originality, and also a natural vein which makes his music a pleasure for the amateur as well as the professional musician'.⁴

Beginning to make his name as pianist as well as composer before the Second World War, Bate was associated with the London theatre and with ballet at the Lyric

⁴ Source unrecorded; possibly a letter to Felix Aprahamian.

Theatre, Hammersmith. In November 1938 he married the Australian composer Peggy Glanville-Hicks, who had been a fellow student at the RCM, and they sailed to the USA en route to Australia in May 1939. After touring, in 1941 Bate and his wife returned to the USA, leaving Sydney on 2 April. Like Richard Arnell, also in New York, Bate was taken up by Beecham, who conducted his Second Piano Concerto at Carnegie Hall in February 1942. Soon the celebrated Lener Quartet played Bate's Second String Quartet at Town Hall, and he represented Britain at the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival at Berkeley, California, in August 1942 with his Sinfonietta No 1. In 1943 Bruno Walter conducted his *Concertante* for piano and strings, Op. 24 (in fact his First Piano Concerto), with the composer as soloist. Other performances included *Haneen, fantasy on an Arabian theme* for flute, gong and strings, played in San Francisco in 1945; and the premiere of his Viola Concerto with Emmanuel Vardi and the NBC Symphony in 1947.

Separated from his wife, in 1945 Bate undertook an extensive tour of Brazil and then again returned to New York, not returning to London until 1949. Two composers living such a nomadic existence must have created considerable tensions, and they duly divorced in 1948, though even in October 1947 Virgil Thomson could engage Glanville-Hicks to write New York reviews as 'Peggy Bate'. Bate soon married his second wife, Margarida Guedes Nogueira, who was a Brazilian diplomat, and they came to London in 1949. Margarida is the dedicatee of his First Violin Sonata.

London proved to be not as happy an artistic climate as New York had been. Bate was briefly celebrated for his Third Symphony, which was warmly received at two Cheltenham performances, the first in 1954 and the second in 1965. The Fourth Symphony, written in 1955, was performed at the Royal Festival Hall on 20 November 1955 and broadcast in the late 1950s. There are five piano concertos (the fifth unfinished, and also one for two pianos, and four other works with piano solo) and three violin concertos (of which the third had a brief success in 1953). There are also concertos for viola, cello and harpsichord. His lyrical, largely tonal, approachable style, if occasionally derivative, received a warm reception from the public but did not make him any friends at the BBC or in avant-garde circles. His apparently chaotic lifestyle and absence in the

USA and South America during the war also did nothing to help his later career, and in spite of his brilliance his increasing failure to consolidate his reputation as a composer after he returned to London led to his early death at the age of 47. His mother believed it was lack of sleep that killed him; others suggested alcohol abuse or worse.

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, Op. 47

During the early 1940s Bate produced a continuous series of pieces which seem to respond to the commissions or contacts that an active composer-performer might receive on tour, including seven sonatinas for piano, a Second String Quartet and this First Violin Sonata. It was written during a concert tour of Brazil, and immediately premiered by Anselmo Zlatopolsky⁵ with Bate himself at the piano. Back in England, Maria Lidka and Margaret Kitchin played it at the Guildford Festival in 1950. When the Sonata was published in 1951, the solo part had been fingered and bowed by Lidka.

Bate's First Sonata falls into the conventional four movements. The violin line of the opening *Allegro* [12] – which has something of Bate's teacher Vaughan Williams about it – is elaborated and then contrasted with a headlong succession of double-stopped semiquavers. The two alternate, but the opening theme and its elaborations dominate before the opening itself returns. Seven bars of double stopping lead to the close as the piano recalls the first theme. The serene *Lento* slow movement [13] is heralded by the piano playing quiet, wide-spanning chords over which the violin sings a sorrowing line, and is sustained over a considerable span.

The *Tempo di Marcia* marking of the scherzo [14] does not proclaim a conventional march: it is dominated by running triplets which maintain a continuous momentum. At the end the opening returns before a vigorous throw-away close. The *Presto* finale [15] makes its initial impact by fast-repeated piano figuration driving inexorably onwards while the violin sails above it. A dissonant interlude with the piano banging out sustained quaver chords must have made it sound very modern in its day. It is followed by a

⁵ Zlatopolsky, born in Russia in 1900, was an émigré violinist whose career was largely focused on South America in the 1940s and 1950s; he was first violin of the São Paulo Quartet and, as a soloist, often played modern South American repertoire.

sustained romantic interlude before the opening of the movement returns with more driven music, a new episode and a sustained high octave on A by the violin for the close.

***Lewis Foreman** has published over 30 books on music and musicians, including the standard biography of Bax, now in an expanded third edition. His authoritative booklet notes for many recording companies have a reputation of their own, and he has written programme notes for leading orchestras and ensembles, the London Symphony Orchestra and The Nash Ensemble among them. For many years he wrote music- and record-industry obituaries for The Independent newspaper.*

Plymouth-born violinist **Patrick Wastnage** attended Dartington College of Arts from the age of sixteen. He went on to the Guildhall School of Music, where he studied with Yfrah Neaman, Erich Gruenberg, David Takeno and later with Sándor Végh. After winning various prizes and playing concertos with the Guildhall Symphony Orchestra, he worked as a freelance player with orchestras including the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. Since joining the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1986, he has led a parallel career as soloist and chamber-music player, performing in concerts all over the UK and abroad. He premiered Richard Arnell's Piano Trio, Piano Quartet and *Salute* for String Trio in the presence of the composer.



Photo: Andreas Grieger

Elizabeth Dunn studied with Geraldine Peppin at the Guildhall School of Music, where she won prizes including the Kleinwort Cup for outstanding piano-playing. During this time she developed a keen interest in chamber music, particularly for piano and strings. Since then she has performed extensively as soloist, accompanist and in chamber groups with members of London orchestras. British contemporary music has played an important role in her career and she has given first performances of several works written especially for her.



Photo: Andreas Grieger

Since their meeting as students, the long-standing collaboration between Patrick and Elizabeth has included research into and performance of neglected British violin-and-piano repertoire. Their interest in the chamber music of Richard Arnell (and later his contemporary Stanley Bate) was sparked by a meeting with the composer at a music-society concert in Suffolk. They have premiered many works by other British composers, as well as the Violin Sonata by Arnell's Canadian pupil Donald Hoffman.



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