



Arnold Cooke

The Complete Sonatas for Violin

SONATAS 1 & 2, SOLO SONATA
AND DUO WITH VIOLA

THE PLEYEL ENSEMBLE

Benedict Holland **VIOLIN** | Susie Mészáros **VIOLA** | Harvey Davies **PIANO**

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Sonata no. 1 in G for violin and piano (1939) pub. OUP

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | i Allegro moderato | 4:50 |
| 2 | ii Lento ma non troppo – Vivace – Lento ma non troppo – Vivace | 6:17 |
| 3 | iii Allegro ma non troppo | 4:28 |

Sonata for solo violin (1969) pub. Edition Peters

- | | | |
|---|-------------------|------|
| 4 | i Andante | 4:00 |
| 5 | ii Allegro vivace | 3:20 |
| 6 | iii Lento | 5:09 |
| 7 | iv Molto allegro | 3:56 |

Duo for violin and viola (1934-35) pub. Anglo-American Music Publishers

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|------|
| 8 | Introduction – Lento espressivo | 2:06 |
| 9 | i Allegro non troppo | 4:51 |
| 10 | ii Andante | 5:10 |
| 11 | iii Molto allegro | 4:34 |

Sonata no. 2 in A for violin and piano (1951) pub. Novello & Co.

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|------|
| 12 | i Allegro con brio | 9:55 |
| 13 | ii Andante con moto | 6:27 |
| 14 | iii Allegro vivace | 5:50 |

Total playing time: 71:13

Introduction

The extensive chamber output of Arnold Cooke (1906-2005), consisting of some forty five works, is as yet little explored by modern performers either on the concert platform or on disc. This CD is the first in a pioneering series of recordings of Cooke's chamber music by the Pleyel Ensemble in association with Mike Purton Recordings. Three of the works are World Première recordings with only the *Sonata no. 2 for violin and piano* (1951) previously available.

Born in Gomersal, Yorkshire in 1906, Cooke was schooled at Streete Preparatory School, then Repton, where his musicality blossomed. There he learnt cello, piano and organ as well as beginning lessons in composition. In 1926 he went up to Cambridge to Caius College where he gained a BA in History before taking his BMus and graduating in 1929. He had studied with E.J. Dent at Cambridge, who was a profound influence on the young man, before spending three years with Hindemith in Berlin at the Hochschule. After a season as Director of Music at the Cambridge Festival Theatre in 1932-33, Cooke taught harmony, counterpoint and composition at the Royal Manchester College of Music but went to London in 1938 before being enlisted in the Royal Navy during the war. In 1946, Cooke returned to London and after a year spent writing his 1st Symphony, took a similar post at Trinity College of Music to the one he had held in Manchester. He taught at TCM until his retirement in 1978 but continued to compose prolifically until the late 1980s. His final work was written in 1996 aged 90. Cooke lived in a retirement home near Tonbridge until his death aged ninety nine in 2005.

The first decade of the 20th century produced a remarkable generation of composers that would boast many of Britain and Ireland's finest achievers in that field: William Alwyn, Sir Lennox Berkeley, Christian Darnton, Gerald Finzi, Constant Lambert, Elisabeth Lutyens CBE, Dame Elizabeth Maconchy, Alan Rawsthorne, Sir Michael Tippett, Sir William Walton and Grace Williams amongst them. Apart from the extraordinary Benjamin Britten, born three years after this decade, these composers made many of the most important contributions to British music, arguably since the time of Henry Purcell, John Blow and Thomas Arne. Cooke, like his contemporaries, developed a unique and distinct musical voice although, as has been oft-remarked, he was clearly influenced by his period of study with Hindemith from 1929 to 1932. However, to dismiss his music as simply being that of an '*English Hindemithian*', as has been done, is as absurd as it would be to dismiss Mozart as simply being an Austrian J. C. Bach. After all, as John Donne so famously and succinctly observed, '*No man is an island...*'. Cooke's personal style developed, as with every composer's, from hearing and studying the music of his contemporaries and predecessors, absorbing what he wanted and synthesising a language which reflected his own taste, education and interests. Aside from Hindemith, Bartók and Brahms were equally profound influences for Cooke. His slow movements however, frequently pastoral and gently melancholic, as in the present two violin and piano sonatas, clearly display Cooke's Englishness, as does his use of modality, folk-like melodies and jig rhythms.

Aside from chamber music and works for solo keyboards, Cooke contributed six symphonies, eleven other orchestral works and eleven

concerti, as well as two operas, choral and vocal music, to the canon; an impressive catalogue by any measure. He produced music over a period of nearly seventy years, perceiving himself embedded in the continuity of a musical tradition stretching back centuries. Other commentators have remarked upon this; thus as early in Cooke's career as 1936, Havergal Brian wrote of him: 'Many of the features of the work and personality of Arnold Cooke remind us of Brahms, who at twenty had developed an expert technique and a powerful, concentrated introspection.'¹ and 'he (Cooke) has tradition in his bones: his working principles and outlook are nearer to the Elizabethans and Bach than to Wagner and Strauss.'² Fifteen years later and John Clapham is writing about Cooke's *Sonata for two pianos* (1937), '...the influence of Brahms can at times be detected.'³ and of the *Concerto in D for strings* (1948) 'Cooke goes back in spirit to the concerti grossi of Bach and Handel'⁴. But, Cooke's lack of worldly recognition is noticed in 1967 by Colin Mason who described Cooke as '...the complete craftsman...' ⁵ going on to say that 'The structure of (current) English musical life provides no proper place for such a composer, and so Cooke has been deprived of some of the recognition due to him...' ⁶

1 Brian, Havergal, *Personalia: 'Arnold Cooke', Musical Opinion*, Vol. 59, no. 706, July 1936, pp. 844-845

2 Ibid.

3 Clapham, John, 'Arnold Cooke: The Achievement of Twenty Years', *Music Survey*, Vol. 3, no. 4, 1951, pp. 250-256

4 Ibid.

5 Mason, Colin, 'Arnold Cooke', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 108, no. 1489 (Mar., 1967), pp. 228-230

6 Ibid.

Cooke chose to write in a style which evolved only subtly from the 1930s onwards, attracting criticism from a number of quarters. Whilst this was doubtless hurtful to a quiet, shy and sensitive man, he rebuffed his critics with the following comment: 'I was never 'in the race for modernity'. It has never seemed to me to be worthwhile to write in the latest style merely in order to be modern or in the fashion.'⁷; the telling words of a composer at ease with his artistry. Nevertheless, Cooke's music *is*, of course, a product of the time in which he lived and so could only have been described by the epithet 'modern'. Cooke's is a musical language frequently built on melodic and harmonic perfect fourths and fifths within music that is always highly structured and expertly composed. The years with Hindemith had engendered and reinforced in Cooke the desire to compose intelligible, accessible music for both performers and listeners alike, as well as endowing him with an enviable technical security. It is, at heart, contrapuntal and the composer tends to adhere to 18th and 19th century forms within traditional genres.

There is a growing interest amongst performers in the significant catalogue of Cooke's works and a recognition that this is worthy music in its own right. This reassessment of Cooke's music is both timely and appropriate and allows insight into the legacy of a prolific and undeservedly neglected composer.

7 Cooke speaking on the BBC's Third Programme as the subject of *Composer's Portrait*. (Broadcast 3pm Wednesday 30.11. 1966.)

Sonata no. 1 for violin and piano in G (1939)

This work was composed for the violinist Thomas Matthews and pianist Dora Gilson who premièred the work probably in 1939⁸, most likely in Manchester, although the exact date and venue are currently unknown. Composed during a period which also saw Cooke produce his *Sonata for viola and piano* (1937), *Sonata for two pianos* (1937), *Concerto for piano and orchestra* (1939-40), the *Passacaglia, Scherzo and Finale for string orchestra* (1937) and *Sonata no. 1 for piano* (1938), the *G major violin sonata* is a compact, lyrical work stylistically aligned with the slightly earlier pieces for viola and two pianos. However, the two years following the composition of those works saw Cooke's style relax still further from the somewhat severe counterpoint and dissonance of the mid-1930s, his immediate post-Hindemith study years. This deliberate attempt to compose in a more lyrical and melodic vein was articulated by Cooke in his broadcast for the BBC's Third Programme in 1966⁹ and had been born from a new-found interest in piano writing and its '...emphasis on harmony and configuration...'. If by configuration, Cooke meant that he was taking a more Classical approach to patterns of accompanimental piano texture than in his previously strict, contrapuntal writing, then he certainly succeeds in the present work. The music is, on the whole, melodic and uncomplicated and Cooke uses historical formal models for the three movements.

8 Poulton, Alan, 'A Dictionary-Catalog of Modern British Composers', Vol. 1, A-C, Westport: Greenwood 2000

9 Composer's Portrait, broadcast 30.11.1966.

A specific model for this work appears to be Hindemith's *Sonata no. 2 for piano* (1936). Hindemith wrote all three of his piano sonatas in 1936 and the second is, perhaps, the most accessible of them and easily the least technically demanding. Written in the same key, Cooke's sonata espouses a similarly gentle, melodic style and small-framed structure and the two works have a number of passing motivic similarities. Both Hindemith's and Cooke's are three-movement works, one movement of each alternates slow and quick sections, Hindemith's third and Cooke's second. Both sonatas end with a movement actually entitled 'Rondo'.

The first movement is an abbreviated sonata form which lacks a distinct development section. The soaring opening melody on the violin is echoed by the piano before a transitional section, making use of Brahmsian hemiola, takes the music to a second theme. This is initially treated canonically between piano and violin, before Cooke transforms it into another lyrical violin melody accompanied by gentle cross-rhythms in the piano. A short, virtuosic section based on the musical material of the second theme leads haltingly back to the opening music and the movement concludes quietly and slowly.

The second movement combines the traditional slow movement and scherzo into a single structure. It begins with a lilting lullaby that has a distinctly pastoral feel but this leads directly, and unexpectedly, into a fast jig in 6/8 time. The energy eventually dissipates before the lullaby returns very beautifully in the form of a cleverly-worked canon accompanied by figuration from the jig. To conclude the movement Cooke brings back the dance quietly in a shortened and altered form, building the volume all the way to an exuberant climax at its thrilling conclusion.

The finale is mostly gentle and lyrical but has a cheeky humour that imbues it with a sense of fun. A particularly quirky section has the violin playing a melody in harmonics over an offbeat piano left hand, giving the effect of someone whistling in the distance. After this there are some fireworks from both instruments, the music subsides eerily and the rondo theme is reintroduced in a different key before a virtuosic coda brings the work to a rousing finish.

Sonata for solo violin (1969)

This work was commissioned by Alun Hoddinott for the 1970 Cardiff Festival of Twentieth Century Music. Cooke had previously been invited to be external examiner at Cardiff University where Hoddinott was the Professor of Music, but the two composers would have met previously at Trinity College of Music where Cooke was teaching and Hoddinott on the panel of examiners. 1967 had seen Hoddinott's appointment in Cardiff, the year that he also founded the Cardiff Festival of 20th Century Music. It would quickly become South Wales' most important platform for new music at that time. The Festival commissioned numerous composers in the manner of the Cheltenham Festival, which had established Hoddinott's international reputation following the *Première* of his *Clarinet Concerto* in 1954. Cooke too had written important works for Cheltenham, including his *Clarinet Concerto no. 1*, premièred the year after Hoddinott's. Perhaps, as a composer, Hoddinott felt some affinity with his English counterpart: both were prolific, Hoddinott writing some 300 works to Cooke's 178, albeit over a life twenty years shorter than Cooke's, and both were traditionalists in many ways. Influenced by Bartók, both composers wrote much chamber music and each had begun his musical career as a string player.

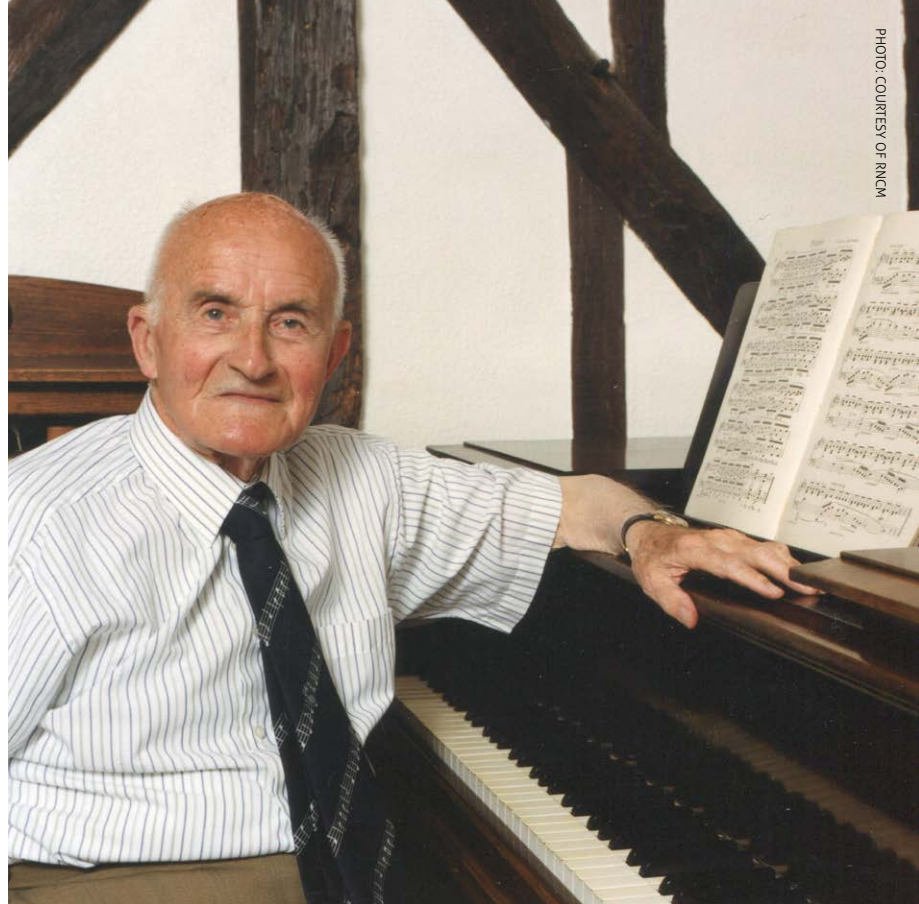


PHOTO: COURTESY OF RNCM

The *Sonata for solo violin* was Cooke's first work for Cardiff, the second being his *Piano Quintet* also of 1969 and the third, his *Sonata no. 1 for organ* written in 1971. Bartók's *Sonata for solo violin* provided a fairly recent model for Cooke; the astringent dissonances and constant tension in the music between major and minor thirds offering harmonic evidence for this influence. Hindemith, too, had written a *Sonata for solo violin* in 1924 and formally, Cooke's work is rather more akin to this than the Bartók. There are four movements in this 16 minute work, although the first *Andante* serves as a slow introduction to the *Allegro vivace* which follows it. The third movement, marked *Lento*, is the longest of the four. It is in A-B-A form with the reprise of the A section considerably varied and enriched. The last movement, *Molto allegro*, is energetic, light-hearted and makes much use of cross-rhythms. A brief slower interlude precedes a coda which finishes *Presto*.

The first performance was given by James Barton on 13 March 1970 in Llandaff Cathedral during the Cardiff Festival.

Duo for violin and viola (1934-35)

This is a work written during the composer's Manchester period. Cooke worked at the Royal Manchester College of Music from 1933 to 1938 as a teacher of composition, counterpoint and harmony. He had been recommended by Edward Dent when Cooke's position as Musical Director of Cambridge's Festival Theatre came to an end due to the theatre's financial problems. In 1934 Cooke won third prize in a competition to

compose an orchestral overture organised by the *Daily Telegraph*. Cyril Scott won the first prize and second was gained by Frank Tapp. The overture received a performance in Manchester from the Hallé Orchestra in May 1934 and then its London première at the Proms from the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sir Henry Wood. The Manchester years also saw Cooke produce a handful of important chamber works including a *Quartet for flute and strings* (1935-36), a *Sonata for viola and piano* (1936-37), a *Sonata for two pianos* (1936-37) and the *Duo for violin and viola*.

The Duo was given its first performance on the 4 March 1937 by the South African violinist David Carl Taylor and the violist Watson Forbes at the Royal Academy of Music. It is cast in three short movements and although quite austere is not merely an intellectual exercise in counterpoint. The first, an *Allegro non troppo*, is preceded by a canonic slow introduction marked *Lento espressivo* and develops the material of the introduction, initially also in canon. Similarly contrapuntal, the slow second movement is expressive and explores a winding melody including all twelve notes of the chromatic scale, although it is not a strict serial construction. The very quick finale, like the first movement, has D as its tonal centre but, again, is highly chromatic and contrapuntal with Cooke building much of his material from the interval of the perfect fourth. The movement ends emphatically with a breathless, virtuosic *Presto*.

Sonata no. 2 for violin and piano in A (1951)

Commissioned by the amateur musician Gerard Heller for his violinist wife, Rosemary Rapaport and her duo partner Else Cross, the second sonata was given its first performance by them at the Wigmore Hall on 17 May 1951. In the 12 years since the composition of the *Sonata no. 1*, Cooke had been called up to the Royal Navy, serving with some bravery and distinction during the war, obtained his Doctorate from Cambridge, moved to London, met his life partner William 'Billy' Morrison and become Professor of Harmony and Composition at Trinity College of Music. For his Doctorate in 1948, Cooke had submitted his *Sonata for viola and piano* (1937), *Piano Concerto* (1940) and his newly composed *Symphony no. 1* (1947) and his music had taken on a maturity and consistency of style that was to remain fairly stable for the next ten or more years. This work no longer has such a strong allegiance with the music of Hindemith (although it can still be found, something Cooke himself did not deny). Constructed on a larger scale than the *Sonata no. 1* but still with three movements, this is unpretentious, confident and skilfully-composed music. The first movement alternates powerfully rhythmical music with a lush lyricism reminiscent, at times, of Brahms. An unusually long coda brings the movement to an energetic close.

The second movement is a long and beautiful lilting dance of siciliennesque charm. In 6/8 time, its sound-world reflects music by Ireland, Vaughan Williams, Rubbra, Howells and others, with its gentle Englishness.

The finale begins with a long violin melody over a running, quaver accompaniment. The entire movement is built from this material and the second theme, first announced by the piano. The music is good-natured and not a little boisterous, building to a cadenza-like trill from the violin. A fugue follows in a slightly more deliberate tempo but the initial speed is regained just before a coda that drives the music towards its powerful finish.

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This CD was recorded at the Royal Northern College of Music on 14th August 2016 (*Sonata no. 1* for violin and piano), 28th and 29th August 2017. The recording of *Sonata no. 1* will be included as part of my Ph.D. submission and thanks are due to the RNCM for the use of the Carole Nash Recital Room and my Ph.D. supervisors Dr. Fiona Richards and Dr. David Jones.

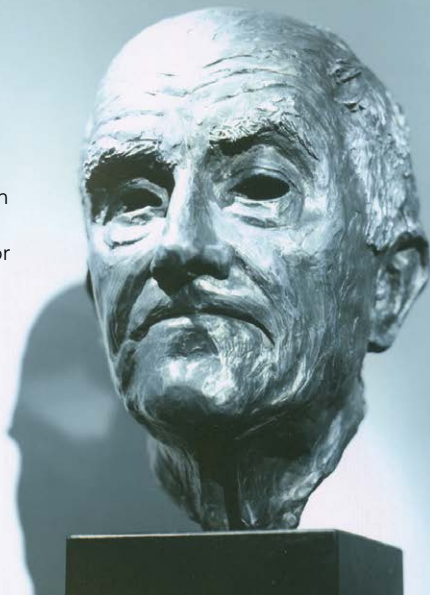
Harvey Davies

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THE PLEYEL ENSEMBLE

The Pleyel Ensemble brings together some of the UK's most experienced chamber musicians, many of whom work at the Royal Northern College of Music. The group comprises strings, wind and piano so offers a comprehensive overview of the chamber music repertoire. Formed in Manchester in January 2011 and directed by Harvey Davies and Heather Bills, the ensemble has now given over 250 concerts together and has an enormous and varied repertoire of chamber music. They are *Making Music Recommended Artists* for the 2019/20 season having been chosen for the second time in three years and have appeared at Music Societies and Festivals all over the UK.

The ensemble is named for the Classical composer Ignaz Pleyel (1757-1831), a brilliant musician and businessman, who, in addition to writing a large body of accessible chamber music, helped increase the popularity of this wonderful kind of music-making amongst amateurs and professionals as both music publisher and piano manufacturer in the early nineteenth century. To reflect this, their repertoire includes music by lesser-known 18th and 19th century composers. They are also particularly committed to performing British chamber music and have an active programme of commissioning works as well as championing composers who deserve yet better recognition such as Cooke, Berkeley and Alwyn.

The Ensemble runs its own concert series in Didsbury and Chapel-en-le-Frith presenting exciting projects such as the complete Haydn piano trios and Mozart's complete works for violin and piano.

Benedict Holland

Benedict Holland studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Manoug Parikian and was subsequently a prize-winner at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he studied with Yossi Zivoni.

He was a founder member of the Matisse Piano Quartet and the Music Group of Manchester, broadcasting regularly for the BBC, recording, and undertaking British Council tours and is a member of the Victoria String Quartet whose acclaimed début concert took place in 2017. Also an experienced orchestral leader, he has guest-led many of the UK's major orchestras, including the Hallé, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Northern Sinfonia, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Scottish Ensemble, Orchestra of Opera North and BBC Philharmonic.

Ben has always championed contemporary music, working with composers Harrison Birtwistle, John Casken, Brett Dean, Oliver Knussen, Steven Mackey, Anna Meredith, Mark Simpson and Duncan Ward, and has been Psappha's violinist since 2010. Personal highlights with Psappha include collaborations with Peter Maxwell Davies, taking Klas Torstensson's Violin Concerto to a residency at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, premiering Mark Simpson's chamber opera *Pleasure*, a tour to Israel of Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and a recent recording for the BBC of Charlotte Bray's evocative concerto *Caught in Treetops*.

Ben has been the leader of the chamber orchestra Sinfonia Viva since 2001 and the orchestra's Artistic Advisor since 2006, appearing as both director and soloist. Recent solo appearances include works by Beethoven and Schubert, and a performance of Mozart's A major concerto, broadcast on Classic FM.

Ben teaches at the RNCM, where he was awarded a professorship in 2016, Junior RNCM, and Chetham's School of Music. He gives consultative classes in orchestral and contemporary techniques at Birmingham and Trinity Laban Conservatoires and professional development classes for string teachers throughout the UK. He plays on a rare violin by Rogeri of 1710.



PHOTO: TIM WILLIAMS



Susie Mészáros

Susie Mészáros is a member of the world-renowned Chilingirian Quartet. After her studies at the Yehudi Menuhin School, she was appointed Principal Viola with the Camerata Salzburg and was a regular chamber music partner of her teacher, the great Hungarian violinist Sándor Végh. She made her Wigmore Hall debut as a duo with Yehudi Menuhin in 1977 and performed with Vladimir Spivakov and Arthur Grumiaux. At 17 she won the Gold Medal at the Royal Over-Seas League competition and was a string finalist in the BBC Young Musician of the Year

and played with many leading chamber ensembles including the Nash Ensemble. Susie was leader of the Fitzwilliam Quartet, the Katin Piano Trio, Prometheus Ensemble and concert master of Kent Opera Orchestra, and regularly performed recitals on Radio 3 on both violin and viola. Susie has appeared as soloist with the BBC Symphony, BBC Concert and BBC Welsh orchestras. She is now a member of Manchester-based ensembles Psappha, the Pleyel Ensemble and the newly formed Victoria String Quartet.

A sought after teacher, Susie taught at the Yehudi Menuhin and Purcell Schools and currently teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and Royal College of Music teaching violin, viola and chamber music. Susie has performed as a guest principal with orchestras such as the Philharmonia, Britten Sinfonia, London Mozart Players and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and is regularly invited to sit on juries including the Trondheim and Bordeaux International Quartet competitions, the Royal Overseas League competition and the 'Help Musicians' awards. She plays on a viola by Jacob Fendt.



Harvey Davies

Harvey Davies began playing the piano before he was three. He was a chorister at New College, Oxford and a Music Scholar at Marlborough College. Harvey studied the piano with Helen Davies and David Parkhouse then with Ryszard Bakst at the Royal Northern College of Music. In 1990 Harvey gave his South Bank debut during the Park Lane Group's prestigious contemporary music series and has performed at most of the UK's significant venues. Harvey is established as a fine chamber musician and accompanist. He has worked with many eminent musicians including Atar Arad, Alison Balsom, Alfie Boe, James Bowman, Rebecca Evans, Catrin Finch, James Gilchrist, Evelyn Glennie, Emma Johnson, Guy Johnston, and Jennifer Pike. From 1998 Harvey toured the Middle East regularly with finalists from the BBC Young Musician of the Year for Penny Adie Productions.

Harvey has a chamber music series in Didsbury and Chapel-en-le-Frith with his group *The Pleyel Ensemble*. Comprising some of the UK's leading instrumentalists, the Pleyels are indulging their interests in performing lesser-known 18th century, as well as British, chamber music, and are actively commissioning new works.

Helen and Harvey Davies are a mother-and-son piano duet team. Composers who have written for them include Jeffrey Lewis, Nicola Lefanu, Alun Hoddinott, Brian Hughes, Pŵyll ap Sion and John Metcalf. Première recordings include the duet works of Richard Stoker, Kenneth Leighton's Sonata and in 2007 a collection of works written for them by Welsh composers entitled '*Diversity*' which was MusicWeb International's CD of the month for December 2008.

Harvey is a founder member of *Ensemble Cymru*, a ground-breaking chamber group in North Wales. It was nominated for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in 2006 and continues to receive acclaim for its innovative work in education as well as its concert performances.

Cambridge University,
Gonville & Caius College

Artistes: The Pleyel Ensemble - Benedict Holland:
Violin (Tracks 1-14), Susie Mészáros: Viola (Tracks 8-11),
Harvey Davies: Piano (Tracks 1-7, 12-14)
Venue: The Carole Nash Room,
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
Dates: 14th July 2016 (Tracks 1-3),
28th/29th August 2017 (Tracks 4-14)
Producers: Mike Purton (Tracks 4-14),
Heather Bills (Tracks 1-3)
Recording Engineer: David Coyle
Editing: Mike Purton
Recorded at 24 bit resolution
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