

mór

Arnold Cooke

Piano Trio, Quartet and Quintet



THE PLEYEL ENSEMBLE

Harvey Davies | Benedict Holland | Sarah Ewins | Susie Mészáros | Heather Bills

Piano Trio (1941–44) pub. A-AMP

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | i Poco lento – Allegro | 8:44 |
| 2 | ii Andante con moto | 9:02 |
| 3 | iii Allegro molto – Presto – Lento – Prestissimo | 7:00 |

Sarah Ewins (violin), Heather Bills (cello) and Harvey Davies (piano)

Piano Quartet (1948-49)

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------|
| 4 | i Allegro ma non troppo | 8:58 |
| 5 | ii Scherzo; Allegro vivace | 5:08 |
| 6 | iii Lento | 8:08 |
| 7 | iv Rondo; Allegro – Più mosso | 6:36 |

Sarah Ewins (violin), Susie Mészáros (viola), Heather Bills (cello) and Harvey Davies (piano)

Piano Quintet (1969) pub. A-AMP

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|------|
| 8 | i Andante – Allegro | 8:12 |
| 9 | ii Scherzo; Molto vivace | 3:41 |
| 10 | iii Andante | 6:34 |
| 11 | iv Allegro vivace – Più mosso | 6:56 |

Benedict Holland (1st violin), Sarah Ewins (2nd violin), Susie Mészáros (viola), Heather Bills (cello) and Harvey Davies (piano)

Total playing time: 79:06

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Heather Bills **CELLO**

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 second in a pioneering series of recordings of Cooke's chamber music by the Pleyel Ensemble in association with MPR. All three of the works are World Première recordings.

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 for a further decade in a retirement home near Tonbridge dying just prior to his 99th birthday 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.)

Piano Trio in C (1941-44)

Standing as the thirtieth work in the chronological catalogue of Cooke's known compositions the *Piano Trio* was begun when he was in his mid-thirties. Of these early compositions, sixteen are chamber works, mostly for strings and piano, clearly showing Cooke's leaning towards writing for small instrumental groups. At this point, the list of works includes two sonatas for cello and piano, two for violin and piano, one for two pianos and two string quartets. The present trio is Cooke's second for this instrumental combination, although the other was composed while he was still at school at Repton in the early 1920s and is now lost.

At the invitation of the brilliant literary critic John Davenport and his American wife, Clemency, known as Clement, Cooke stayed at 'The Malting House', Marshfield in Gloucestershire. Arriving in the summer of 1940, apart from a few short visits to his home in Hampstead and to his parents in Yorkshire, Cooke spent the next twelve months there. Before the war Davenport had worked in Hollywood for M.G.M. as a script writer alongside F. Scott Fitzgerald and in 1939 was assigned by them to find suitable writers and literary material in England. The Davenports bought 'The Malting House' at this time and invited friends to stay there for extended periods to use as a creative retreat. Other guests during Cooke's visit included Dylan and Caitlin Thomas, Sir William Glock, who Cooke knew from his student days in Cambridge, the novelist Antonia White and another friend of Cooke's, Sir Lennox Berkeley. Glock was to have an affair with Davenport's wife, eventually marrying her a few years later. This rather bohemian arrangement was, nonetheless, artistically

inspirational and the guests at Marshfield seemingly worked and played hard. Whilst there, Cooke completed his *Piano Concerto*, wrote the *Sonata no. 1 for cello and piano*, the *Four Shakespeare Sonnets* for the soprano Sophie Wyss and the first movement of the *Piano Trio*. Cooke's call-up to the Royal Navy came in early autumn 1941 meaning that his compositional productivity decreased considerably and the trio was shelved. A period of leave at the end of 1943, which he took at home in Yorkshire, enabled him to begin work again and write the second movement, whilst the third was completed during a quiet spell aboard his ship, the *D. S. Thames*, in the summer of 1944.

The trio was taken up by the Kantrovich Trio whose members were Vera Kantrovich (vln), Lilly Phillips (vcl) and Hilda Bor (pf). They gave the simultaneous first performance and broadcast on 11 August 1947 in a BBC studio, broadcasting it again for the BBC in 1948 and 1951. Subsequent performances were given at the Macnaghten New Music Group in 1956 and Conway Hall in 1964.

The manuscript of this work resides in the Cooke Collection at the Archive of the Royal Northern College of Music and it was published for the first time in 2008 by Anglo-American Music Publishers. This substantial work in three movements exhibits little of the much-remarked-upon influence of Hindemith, rather seeming to point further back, to Brahms. The slow introduction and following Allegro of the first movement show a clear motivic affinity with the Romantic composer's Piano Quartet in C minor, Op. 60 and share its triple-time signature. Although the finale has a

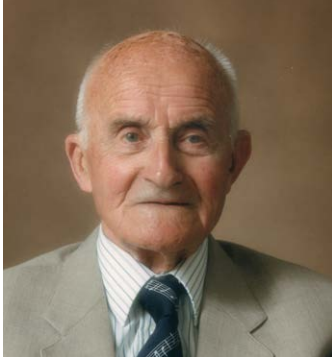
somewhat lighter nature, the first two movements are serious in mood, perhaps reflecting the horror of the period in which they were composed. The outer movements also have C as their tonal centre and Cooke makes much use of hemiola and pedal points; both Brahmsian devices.

The short, slow introduction to the first movement gives way to an energetic and muscular Allegro which derives almost all its material from the preceding 28 bars. The music is thus highly integrated and, as usual for Cooke, the textures are mostly polyphonic or contrapuntal. The coda, although in a steadier tempo, like numerous examples from Brahms' first movements, maintains the sense of tension to its uneasy close. The slow movement is the longest of the three and begins with an allusion to Mozart rather than Brahms, its tonal uncertainty created similarly to the magical opening of Mozart's 'Dissonance' quartet, KV 465. There the similarities end however and Cooke builds a movement of emotional power underpinned by almost constant, sinister, throbbing quavers in the bass part of the piano. There are moments of great beauty where the tension gives way to melancholy but a long, quiet coda allows the music to dissipate without relieving the sense of foreboding. The finale is very fast and restless and, as with the rest of the work, is tautly constructed from just a few melodic and rhythmic ideas. The strings open with a melody that lends the movement its underlying Lydian harmonies and their whole-tone inflections. The frantic pace doesn't let up although Cooke's clever use of metric modulation allows for a slight breather before the music hurtles to a *prestissimo* conclusion.

Quartet for piano and strings (1949)

This work was written to a commission from Patrick Hadley. It received its first performance and simultaneous BBC broadcast on 11 August 1949 from the Hall of St. John's College, Cambridge during the Cambridge Summer Festival of Music and Drama. The performers were Alfred Cave (vln), Watson Forbes (vla), John Moore (vc) and Alan Richardson (pf). The three string players were all members of the Aeolian String Quartet and the pianist, Alan Richardson was also a composer, later to marry the oboist Janet Craxton. Evidence of further performances after the première is scant, however it was broadcast again on BBC Radio 3 on 27 November 1987 by Roger Garland (vln), Brian Hawkins (vla), Roger Smith (vc) and Anthony Goldstone (pf). The MS is one of a few important works missing from the Cooke collection in the RNCM archive and, to all intents and purposes, the work was considered lost until 2015, as it had never been published. However, when I rang Tony Goldstone to ask if he remembered broadcasting the work, he not only remembered it but, amazingly, still had a photocopy of the MS which he sent me. Dr. Andrew Mayes and Roger Turner, previously the Librarian of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, set the music and together we made the first edition. The copy now resides in the Cooke Collection at the RNCM.

This is a substantial piece of music cast in four movements. The writing is typical for Cooke at this period: strong melodic ideas abound within Brahmsian textures and harmonically, there is always a question mark over whether the tonality is major or minor. Rhythmically powerful, the first movement is a sonata-form construction with strings set against the piano in a



concertante manner albeit sharing the principal material equally. Its beautiful opening melody is presented by the cello accompanied by the piano and is highly chromatic, although always drawn back to its tonal centre. Cooke weaves a lyrical movement with much imitation and there is a hint of Hindemith about the shape of the melodies and harmony. The second

movement is a whirling Scherzo in a quick one-in-a-bar. Light-hearted in nature, Cooke nonetheless builds a technically accomplished movement with two themes, both of which are ultimately and cleverly worked into fugato passages.

A beautiful, melancholy slow movement follows showing Cooke at his imaginative best. This is true chamber music with equal parts for the four instruments and again, Cooke delivers a movement of consummate skill that is both melodic and contrapuntal without ever sounding academic. A virtuosic, neo-classical romp serves as the Rondo finale bringing the work to a close with another fugato derived from its main theme.

I shall be forever grateful to the late Tony Goldstone for the rediscovery of a fine piece of music and a valuable contribution to the piano quartet repertoire.

Quintet for piano and strings (1969)

By 1969 and in his seventh decade, Cooke had a rich and varied body of compositions to his name. The list boasted three symphonies, five concerti, three string quartets, many chamber works, songs, choral music, a three act opera, a ballet, organ music and a series of works for recorders and harpsichord written for Carl Dolmetsch. Many of his works had been taken on by major British publishers, O.U.P., Novello and Peters Edition amongst them, and he had written for many fine performers: Dennis Brain, Yfrah Neaman, Louis Kentner, Thea King, Léon Goossens, the Griller Quartet and the Royal Ballet. Through his work at Trinity College of Music, Cooke had become acquainted with the Welsh composer Alun Hoddinott (1929-2008) who was an external examiner there. In turn, Cooke was appointed an external examiner for the University of Wales and the contact with Hoddinott proved fruitful in other ways. Hoddinott was Professor of Music at the University of Wales, Cardiff and, in 1967, had co-founded the Cardiff Festival of Twentieth-Century Music with the pianist John Ogden. The Festival was to commission some seventy new works and two were from Cooke; the *Sonata no. 1 for organ* (1971) and the *Sonata for solo violin* (1969). In addition, Hoddinott commissioned the *Quintet for piano and strings* for Cardiff University Music Department. The work received its first performance on 13 October 1970 in the Reardon Smith Lecture Theatre with the Cardiff University String Quartet and Valerie Tryon replacing the indisposed Eric Harrison. A first London performance was given at the Purcell Room on 14 May 1971, again by the Cardiff University Ensemble and

it was first broadcast on Radio 3 by the Alberni Quartet and Iris Loveridge on 5 March 1978. The Quintet was to remain unpublished however until 2007 when Anglo-American Music Publishers brought it out.

Cooke's musical language is generally a little starker than in the *Trio* and *Quartet*. The shadow of Hindemith is present at times in the music but more so, that of Shostakovich, particularly in the Scherzo. Certain passages remind the listener of Hoddinott's own music leading one to wonder whether this a musical 'thank you' from Cooke to the younger composer. I am thinking especially of the piano's canonic passage in the first movement which follows the angular second subject and the double octave exclamation from the piano near the end of the movement. Indeed there are other comparisons to be drawn with Hoddinott's music in that Hoddinott was also something of a magpie, musically speaking. A very fluent musician and composer, Hoddinott, like Cooke, drew upon the many powerful influences around him; Bartók, the Polish School and, of course, the Celtic culture of his native Wales. Other similarities between the two men's music include a high degree of technical accomplishment, the use of tone rows without resorting to strict serialism and a tonal centre.

As so often in Cooke's works, the slow third movement contains some of the most beautiful music in the *Quintet*. Canons and other contrapuntal devices abound in its masterful construction yet the complex instrumental texture never feels thick or overlaid. The funereal character of the music is enhanced by ominous dotted rhythms and an exaggerated 'Scotch snap' feature.

The virtuosic finale lifts the mood although its tone is still serious despite a veneer of frivolity and energy. Again littered with ingenious contrapuntal devices, the music tears towards a breath-taking coda, its seventy bars a continuous and mesmerising crescendo. The four movements have as their tonal centres G, B, E flat and G respectively, which together build an augmented triad, one of Cooke's favoured chords, and one which is triumphantly played at the climax of the slow movement.

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This CD was recorded at the Royal Northern College of Music on 30th August 2017 (Piano Trio), 3rd, 4th and 5th April 2018 (Quintet and Quartet). The recordings 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

This CD is dedicated to the memory of Gloria Bills (1924 –2018),
Heather's mother and Harvey's mother-in-law,
who passed away during the recording of the Piano Quintet.

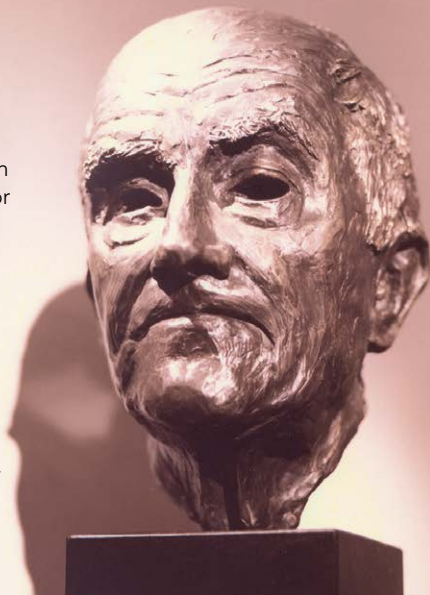
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Photo: George H. Singer



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.

Harvey Davies

Harvey Davies studied with Helen Davies and David Parkhouse, then Ryszard Bakst at the RNCM. Established as a fine chamber musician, he has worked with many eminent musicians including James Bowman, Alison Balsom, James Gilchrist, Guy Johnstone and Jennifer Pike. He has collaborated with the Alborni, Benyounes, Callino and Carducci string quartets. Harvey is Director of the Pleyel Ensemble, a busy chamber group which also runs concert series in Didsbury and Chapel-en-le-Frith. With his mother Helen, Harvey has commissioned and recorded many works for piano duet by British composers as well as championing much early Romantic duet music. Harvey is a Fellow in Historical Performance and Staff Pianist at the RNCM where he is studying the music of Arnold Cooke for his Ph.D..

Benedict Holland

Benedict Holland studied with Manoug Parikian at the RCM and Yossi Zivoni at the RNCM. An experienced leader, he has guest-led orchestras including the Hallé, RLPO, CBSO and BBC Philharmonic and has led Sinfonia Viva since 2001 where he is also Artistic Advisor. As a keen chamber musician, Ben is the violinist for contemporary music group Psappha. With Psappha he has collaborated with many composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Oliver Knussen and Sir Peter Maxwell-Davies. Ben is first violinist in, and founder of the Victoria String Quartet. He is also a committed teacher, being a Professor at the RNCM and teaching at JRNCM and Chetham's School of Music.

Sarah Ewins

Sarah Ewins graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 1989, continuing her studies with David Takeno and Grigory Zhislin. She was Leader of the Ballet Rambert Orchestra, a long-standing member of the Goldberg Ensemble and Assistant Leader of the English Sinfonia, with whom she played many concerti and recorded Holst's double violin concerto. In 1990 Sarah

joined Sir Yehudi Menuhin in Bach's triple violin concerto at the Royal Festival Hall. Since 2002 Sarah has been Associate Leader of the Hallé Orchestra and has appeared as Guest Leader with the CBSO and Manchester Camerata. A founder member of the Hallé Soloists and the Pleyel Ensemble she is a passionate teacher working for the education department at the Hallé and the NYO of GB.

Susie Mészáros

Susie Mészáros is violist in the world-renowned Chiligirian Quartet. She studied with Sándor Végh and was later a regular chamber music partner with him. She won the Gold Medal of the Royal Overseas League and aged 17, was a finalist in the BBC Young Musician of the Year. Susie made her Wigmore Hall debut in a duo with Yehudi Menuhin. She was leader of the Fitzwilliam Quartet, Katin Trio and Prometheus Ensemble, Concert Master of Kent Opera and has broadcast regularly on Radio 3 as both violinist and violist. Now a member of Psappha, the Pleyel Ensemble and Victoria Quartet, Susie also teaches at the RNCM and is regularly invited to sit on International Competition juries.

Heather Bills

Born in Adelaide, South Australia, Heather came to the UK to study at the RCM in London with Christopher Bunting and Amaryllis Fleming. In 1981 she won the Australia Prize of the Royal Overseas League competition. She attended various chamber music courses, working with such artists as Jacqueline du Pré, William Pleeth, and the Beaux Arts Trio. In 1983 Heather became Co-principal 'cellist of the Hallé Orchestra, staying until '91 when she moved to Anglesey. Here she joined Ensemble Cymru and became Principal 'cellist of the Welsh Chamber Orchestra. In 2008 she returned to Manchester where she continues to freelance and teach. With her husband, the pianist Harvey Davies, she is a founder member of the Pleyel Ensemble.

Artists: The Pleyel Ensemble – Harvey Davies: Piano (Tracks 1-11),
Benedict Holland: Violin (Tracks 8-11), Sarah Ewins: Violin (Tracks 1-11),
Susie Mészáros: Viola (Tracks 4-11), Heather Bills: Violoncello (Tracks 1-11).
Venue: The Carole Nash Room, Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester.
Dates: 30th August 2017 (Tracks 1-3), 3rd/4th/5th April 2018 (Tracks 4-11).
Producer: Mike Purton. Recording Engineer: David Coyle. Editing: Mike Purton.

Recorded at 24/96 resolution

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