

# Arnold Cooke

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Complete Music for Oboe  
and Sonata for Two Pianos



OBOE  
PIANOS

MELINDA MAXWELL  
HARVEY DAVIES AND HELEN DAVIES  
THE PLEYEL ENSEMBLE

# Arnold Cooke

## Complete Music for Oboe and Sonata for Two Pianos

### Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1957) pub. Novello & Co Ltd.

- |   |                             |      |
|---|-----------------------------|------|
| 1 | i Andante – Allegro vivace  | 6:29 |
| 2 | ii Andante                  | 6:35 |
| 3 | iii Rondo (Allegro giocoso) | 6:28 |

### Sonata for Oboe and Cembalo (or Piano) (1962) pub. OUP

- |   |                            |      |
|---|----------------------------|------|
| 4 | i Lento – Allegro          | 6:19 |
| 5 | ii Adagio                  | 7:09 |
| 6 | iii Rondo (Allegro vivace) | 4:10 |

- |   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 7 | <b>Intermezzo for Oboe and Piano</b> (1987) pub. A-AMP | 3:38 |
|---|--|------|

### Quartet for Oboe and String Trio (1948) pub. Novello & Co. Ltd.

- |    |                          |      |
|----|--------------------------|------|
| 8  | i Allegro non troppo     | 6:04 |
| 9  | ii Allegro ma non troppo | 5:53 |
| 10 | iii Allegro moderato     | 4:40 |

### Sonata for Two Pianos (1937) pub. OUP

- |    |                     |      |
|----|---------------------|------|
| 11 | i Andante – Allegro | 5:12 |
| 12 | ii Larghetto        | 7:35 |
| 13 | iii Molto vivace    | 5:12 |

Total Playing Time: 75:48

### THE PLEYEL ENSEMBLE

Melinda Maxwell **OBOE**

Harvey Davies **PIANO**

Helen Davies **PIANO**

Sarah Ewins **VIOLIN**

Susie Mészáros **VIOLA**

Heather Bills **VIOLONCELLO**

## Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1957)

The *Sonata for Oboe and Piano* was composed for the great English oboist Léon Goossens who gave the first performance in 1958 at the Cambridge Festival<sup>1</sup>. Goossens recorded the work for broadcast with the pianist Clifton Helliwell on February 17th 1959 and it went out on the BBC's *Third Programme* two days later. Novello published it in 1963, the oboe part edited by Goossens, and the review in *Music & Letters*<sup>2</sup> is unreserved in its praise for the work and I quote:

'The sonata by Dr. Cooke was composed in 1957 for Léon Goossens, and a very fine piece it is. The ambivalent major and minor third of a triad is at the root of all three movements - a relationship which, after all, has occupied many twentieth-century musical minds. Yet Dr. Cooke creates out of it new, striking and highly individual ideas which are worked out intensively without ever losing the lyrical quality which so well suits the combination and the composer's creative gifts. Not only does it have the obvious unity of thematic interconnection but a true compositional unity, and it must be counted among the best things he has done.'

A slow introduction to the first movement begins with a lyrical oboe melody accompanied by rocking, Walton-esque chords in the piano before the piano takes the melody, embellishing it expressively. Piano and oboe vie in gentle canon before a short oboe cadenza leads into a forthright *Allegro vivace*. Both first and second subjects of this sonata form movement are derived

rhythmically and topographically from features within the introduction, and instead of the traditional development section, Cooke reintroduces the opening material with a re-composed accompaniment. Recapitulation is imaginatively wrought, Cooke displaying his considerable contrapuntal technique throughout, and the movement concludes, after a pause, with a three-bar reminder of the introduction. Now the accompaniment is in fourths rather than minor sixths before an ecstatic G major chord dispels any lingering modal ambiguity.

The *Andante* second movement consists of a succession of long melodic lines worked into contrasting sections and the structure of the movement is ternary. Melancholia is never far from the surface and the music betrays Cooke's love for baroque music with a second theme played in canon between piano and oboe. Accompanied by spread chords in the pianist's left hand, the music reflects a reserved regality before moving into a more urgent central section. The movement concludes quietly with a varied version of the opening.

Cooke's finale is a Rondo marked *Allegro giocoso* and is that most English of dances, a jig. Of equal length to the first movement, it contains the most technically difficult music of the sonata. Formally, again Cooke uses a contrasting middle section but in simple time, a sort of grotesque dance caricaturing the oboe's sound in a tune reminiscent of clucking and pecking hens! An altered version of the jig returns and the sonata comes full circle, ending peacefully with the music from the very opening, the cadenzas given instead to the piano.

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1 I have been unable to confirm the pianist's identity at the time of writing.

2 *Music & Letters*, Vol. 45, no. 3 (July, 1964), p. 299

## Sonata for Oboe and Cembalo or Piano (1962)

Composed for another important English oboist of the last century, Evelyn Rothwell, wife of Sir John Barbirolli, the sonata's dedication is shared with her harpsichordist partner, the Australian, Valda Aveling. Aveling was equally at home on piano or harpsichord and something of a pioneer in the renaissance of the latter. The duo worked together for many years and also inspired the *Three Bagatelles* from Elizabeth Maconchy in 1972. The sonata was first played in Huddersfield in 1962 by the dedicatees, who gave the first broadcast the following year on Radio Hamburg and on the 26th February 1964 for the BBC. Subsequent broadcasts were given by the oboist Sarah Francis with Millicent Silver and later, Richard Nunn. *Oxford University Press* published in 1963 and the reviewer in *Music and Letters*<sup>3</sup> warns that 'it would be a pity if the simultaneous appearance of an earlier sonata for oboe and piano were to cause either to be neglected since they are both important, large-scale works and should be seriously considered for the duo repertory.' However, this is precisely what has happened, with neither work gaining a strong foothold on the concert platform.

Given that Cooke has authorised performance on either keyboard instrument, we decided to record the work with piano rather than harpsichord, having played it with both. The writing feels generally better-suited to the piano with Cooke's numerous dynamic indications impossible to manage effectively on a harpsichord. Furthermore, there are passages where the judicious use of sustaining pedal helps achieve the musical effects for which the composer

seems to be asking. That same first reviewer also has some reservations: 'But I would venture to criticize some of the harpsichord writing on the following grounds: that there are too many left-hand octave passages; that the composer does not always remember that there is no sustaining pedal and that two-handed chords cannot be made to sound legato in big jumps, or indeed that they tend to sound snatched in such a context, legato or not; and, most important of all, that thickness of chords is inescapably connected with dynamics.'

Nonetheless, the sound-world is radically different with piano and, we admit, not the composer's first intention.

As with the earlier sonata, this is in three movements and opens with a slow introduction. An energetic *Allegro* follows with melodic and accompanimental features subtly derived from the preceding *Lento*, creating real integrity to the movement. A brief 8-bar reminder of the *Lento* leads to an emphatic coda confirming its Phrygian modality. Whilst melodic, the *Adagio* 2nd movement is mysterious and dark, essentially in the key of E flat minor. Its anxious middle section increasing the tension with unstable, chromatic harmony and an agitated exchange between the oboe and the keyboard player's left hand. Cooke combines all the motivic and rhythmic ideas to close the movement uneasily and enigmatically. The final movement is subtitled *Rondo* and retains the more dissonant world of the *Adagio*, albeit with an overlay of jollity. Highly chromatic, the music lurches from key to key, never settling anywhere for long, and it abounds with skilfully-constructed contrapuntal textures.

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1



## Intermezzo for Oboe and Piano

This 28-bar miniature was composed in 1987 for the 90th birthday celebration concert for Léon Goossens at the Wigmore Hall, where it was first performed by its dedicatee, Nicholas Daniel, and the pianist Julius Drake. Cooke was aged 80 himself and was to write but a further seven works before retiring from composition in 1991. The recorder player John Turner tempted him out of retirement to write two slight works in 1993 and 1996 respectively, both composed whilst he was already in his nursing home in Kent. This work is typical of Cooke's late music in that it is simple and concise yet no less interesting for that.

The texture is polyphonic and bears the hallmarks

of Cooke's highly-developed craftsmanship. All in all, this work is a tiny summation of the composer's style.

## Quartet for Oboe and String Trio

This quartet was composed in 1948 in response to a commission from Mrs. Lys Hackforth, the wife of a Cambridge don, who ran the *Thursday Concert Series* in Cambridge. The first performance was given on the 1st December 1949 by Léon Goossens and the Carter String Trio, whose members were Mary Carter (vln), Anatole Mines (vla) and Peggie Sampson (vc). The *Thursday Concerts*

were continuous from two earlier series; begun as the *Informal Music Club Concerts* in 1920, the series was renamed the *Wartime Concerts* from 1939-45. The programmes regularly featured new British music and indeed Gordon Jacob's *Four Old Tunes for String Trio* (1949) were given another performance by the Carters in the same programme as the present quartet. Cooke himself was no stranger to the series having had his *Sonata for Two Pianos* performed by the Trimble sisters at a previous concert and his *String Quartet no. 1* (1934) played by the Weiss Quartet as far back as 1934. Of course, Cooke had been a Cambridge student in the 1920s and had performed as a 'cellist in the concerts himself, so his association was already a long one. We know that Cooke was delighted with the first performance because he says so in a letter to Eric Warr at the BBC dated 8th December 1948. The letter is asking if the BBC will broadcast the work on the *Third Programme*, and it received a favourable response, as the same performers gave the first broadcast on 9th October 1950.

Mrs. Hackforth was to commission two further works from Cooke for the Carters: the *String Trio* (1950) and *Arioso and Scherzo* (1955), a work written as a companion piece to Mozart's *Horn Quintet*, KV 407, for Dennis Brain and the Carters. The present work was published in 1956 by Novello & Co. Ltd. and is cast in three movements. As always, Cooke's prowess as a craftsman is in evidence from the outset. The work is skilfully constructed and absolutely typical of Cooke's music from this period with its imaginative counterpoint and economy of means. Thus the first movement is derived from a few melodic ideas woven together and shared equally between the instruments in a celebration of contrapuntal mastery. Its G minor tonality

inflected with modality lends a gentle English melancholy despite its cheerful veneer. An attractive aria serves as the slow movement; the oboe's lyrical qualities exploited fully by the composer, but even here, Cooke cannot resist adding textural interest by means of imitation and accomplished part-writing. The finale is the shortest movement returning to the mood of the opening. Its long, central oboe cadenza reminds the listener of each of the preceding movements in an improvisatory summation of the work and it concludes triumphantly in the major with a jig-like coda.

## Sonata for Two Pianos (1936-37)

The best-known Classical works in the two-piano genre are the examples by Mozart and Clementi. The 19th century offered many examples of works for two pianos mostly composed by pianist/composer virtuosi such as J.B. Cramer, I. Moscheles and C. Czerny, however these were often adaptations of works for piano and guitar or piano and harp. Mostly, they were single-movement pieces such as fantasies on operatic themes or sets of virtuosic variations on popular melodies. In any case, by the 1930s these works were all long out of print and fashion and extremely unlikely to have been known to Cooke. The best-known 20th century examples are also few and far between; Poulenc wrote a sonata in 1953 and Hindemith in 1942. Stravinsky's *Sonata for Two Pianos* also post-dates Cooke's, so few contemporary compositional models existed for him aside from Arnold Bax's example written in 1929. The Bax sonata was written for Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson and in a decidedly English pastoral vein. I have no evidence that Cooke knew Bax's piece but there are superficial similarities in that each work is in three movements, each composer's first movement

begins with a slower introductory section and both sonatas finish with a light-hearted, virtuosic tour-de-force. What Cooke did admit in a radio broadcast of 1966<sup>4</sup> was that Stravinsky's *Sonata for Two Pianos*, which had appeared in 1935, had made a considerable impression on him and that he had probably been influenced by it to some extent. However, the format and language are very different from Cooke's work, and any influence appears confined to a textural approach, although, even here, Stravinsky's writing is less obviously contrapuntal, except, of course, in the final fugue.

Probably begun in the autumn of 1936, Arnold Cooke's sonata was completed early the following year. It was composed in response to a request from the pianists Adolph Hallis and Franz Reizenstein. The sonata received its first performance on the 17th March 1937 given by Hallis and Reizenstein at the Aeolian Hall in a concert that was part of Hallis's series *The Seventeen Concerts*. Its probable first broadcast wasn't until 14th August 1953 given by Joan and Valerie Trimble for the BBC. Other enthusiastic performers of the sonata were Lucy Pierce and John Brennan in Manchester and the Peppin sisters, Geraldine and Mary. The work gained an almost immediate success in that it was one of eight selected, from a total of nearly seventy, by the Reading Committee of the I.S.C.M.<sup>5</sup> for inclusion in the British Section at their Festival in Krakow between the 13th and 21st April 1939.

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4 Arnold Cooke speaking as the subject of *Composers' Portrait* broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme on 30.11.1966. Transcript made by Harvey Davies.

5 The jury consisted of Gregoire Fitelberg (Warsaw), Desire Defauw (Brussels), Vojislav Vukovic (Belgrade), Roberto Gerhard (Barcelona) and Edward Clark (London). Gramophone, Jan. 1939.

Cooke's *Sonata for Two Pianos* was composed at the same time as his *Sonata for Viola and Piano* and the two works mark a distinct stylistic change from the works of the preceding few years. Cooke had felt a certain musical indigestion from writing, as he put it, in the 'very correct contrapuntal style'<sup>6</sup> which he had been employing in the mid-1930s. He went on to say that 'the desire (began to manifest itself) to explore and develop the possibilities of pianoforte writing, with its emphasis on harmony and configuration rather than on pure counterpoint. By this means I hoped to achieve a greater freedom and at the same time to aim at more melodic and lyrical content'. This, Cooke began to explore in 1936 and specifically with regard to the composition of the sonatas for viola and piano and for two pianos. Cooke says that he deliberately attempted to combine his new interest in piano writing with his contrapuntal techniques in the *Sonata for Two Pianos*. The resulting music is always melodically interesting, particularly in the beautiful *Larghetto* second movement, although the contrapuntal opportunities that two pianos offer are certainly also explored extensively. There is no doubt that Hindemith's powerful influence is still evident but it is one which Cooke subsumes into his individual and emerging style to great effect.

Cast in three movements, the work begins with a solemn, slow introduction to its sonata-form first movement. A quicker coda balances the opening and finishes the movement with a flourish. The two pianos are given equal weighting, sharing all of the musical material, and the writing is idiomatic for the keyboard at all times. The slow movement has an A-B-A structure,

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4

the B section retaining the same triple-time metre as the outer parts, but in compound as opposed to simple triple. This gives the effect of more movement despite the same pulse. To conclude, Cooke writes a very quick tarantella alternating it with an even faster galop: a tongue-in-cheek movement that provides the perfect balance to the lyrical slow movement and, at times, austere first movement.

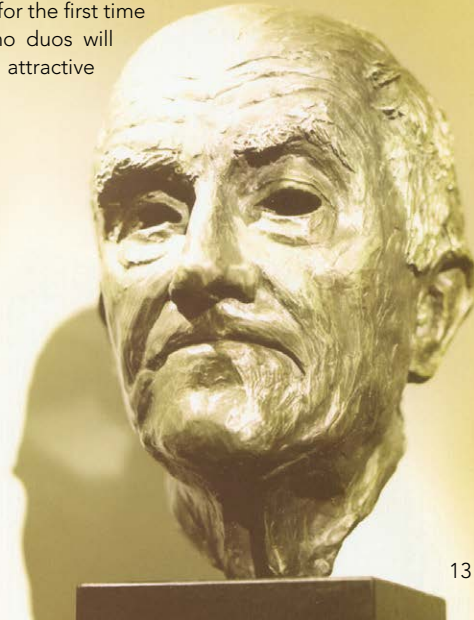
This fine sonata is recorded here for the first time and it is hoped that other piano duos will take up what is an engaging and attractive concert work.

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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.



### Melinda Maxwell Oboe

Melinda was born in London, read Music at York University and studied Oboe in Germany with Ingo Goritzki and Helmut Winschermann. She has performed as soloist at many British festivals including Edinburgh, Aldeburgh and Cheltenham and abroad at the Holland, Aarhus, and Oslo Festivals. Melinda has given many recitals and is frequently heard on BBC Radio 3. Over the years many works have been written for Melinda, including by Simon Bainbridge, Nicholas Maw,

Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Simon Holt, Howard Skempton, Anthony Gilbert, Robert Saxton, Jo Kondo, Philip Cashian, David Knotts, Wilfred Mellers and Larry Goves. Melinda is herself also an accomplished composer, among her pieces are *Pibroch* and *Song for Sidney* for solo oboe, *Crane Dance* (a work for double-reed ensemble) and various ensemble pieces with strings. A new work *Singla Rock* for mixed quintet was premiered at King's Place in June 2009. Melinda has made many recordings and her solo CD *Melinda Maxwell in Manchester: Music for Oboe from the RNCM*, released on Dutton Recordings in 2007, was CD of the month for BBC Music Magazine. Melinda's most recent CD features the first recording for Oboe Classics of Birtwistle's *26 Orpheus Elegies* and his arrangement of *Three Bach Arias* released in 2009 and was awarded the top rating in the Guardian and BBC Music Magazine. In addition to her work as a chamber musician and recitalist, Melinda is Principal Oboe of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, the Endymion Ensemble and the improvisation group Notes Inégales and also performs regularly as Principal Oboe with the London Sinfonietta and for film sessions with



the London Metropolitan Orchestra. Melinda has taught at the Royal Northern College of Music, the Royal Academy of Music and Trinity College of Music in London and has been giving master-classes at the Dartington International Summer School since 1992. She also coaches at the Britten-Pears and National Youth Orchestra summer courses and for some time was Consultant in Woodwind Studies at the RNCM.



### **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 Johnston and Jennifer Pike. He has collaborated with the Alberní, 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..



### **Helen Davies Piano**

Helen Davies was born in Southport, Lancs and studied in Vienna and at the RCM. She has a busy career as accompanist and chamber musician with many performances on Radio and TV. Helen was resident accompanist at the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition and Congress for 25 years, accompanying many of the world's leading violists and has accompanied masterclasses at the Britten Pears School at Snape. She has performed at UK festivals including Kings Lynn, St Asaph, the Two Moors Festival,

Banff, Buckingham Summer Festival, the Northern Aldborough Festival, the Glamorgan Festival and both the National and International Eisteddfods in Wales. Helen has been repetiteur and pianist for touring opera company Opra Cymru since its foundation in 2010. Her hands feature as a double for Dame Maggie Smith's in Nick Hytner's film *The Lady in the Van*.

Since 1992 Helen has played in a successful piano duet partnership with her eldest son Harvey. Many contemporary composers have written works for them, most of which they have recorded. Helen also played for many years in a duo with her husband Edward.



### **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 Chilingirian 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 and the Pleyel Ensemble, 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.

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Artists: The Pleyel Ensemble – Melinda Maxwell:  
Oboe (Tracks 1-10), Harvey Davies: Piano (Tracks 1-7,  
11-13), Helen Davies: Piano (Tracks 11-13),  
Sarah Ewins: Violin (Tracks 8-10)  
Susie Mészáros: Viola (Tracks 8-10),  
Heather Bills: Violoncello (Tracks 8-10)  
Venue: The Carole Nash Room, Royal Northern  
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Dates: 28th August 2017 (Tracks 11-13),  
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