



Catherine Tanner Williams

OBOE

Christopher Williams PIANO

Arnold COOKE

Richard Elfyn JONES

# Oboe Sonatas



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## **ARNOLD COOKE (1906-2005)**

**Sonata for Oboe and Harpsichord or Piano (1962) 16:25**

1. I. Lento - Allegro 6:05
2. II. Adagio 6:12
3. III. Rondo: Allegro vivace 4:08

**Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1957) 19:27**

4. I. Andante - Allegro vivace 6:10
5. II. Andante 5:37
6. III. Rondo: Allegro giocoso 6:40

## **RICHARD ELFYN JONES (b. 1944)**

**Sonata for Oboe and Piano - Viva Altea! \* 13:10**

7. I. Fiesta en la Playa 5:15
8. II. Meditación 3:35
9. III. Barullo! 4:20

## **CATHERINE TANNER WILLIAMS (b. 1973)**

10. Luminous \* 6:20
11. Darkness Falling with Birdsong \* 9:59

\* World premiere recording

**TOTAL TIME: 65:19**

In the process of making this disc of unrecorded or neglected works for oboe and piano, intriguing connections began to surface between three composers. In 1973, the year I was born, the organist Richard Elfyn Jones gave the premiere of Arnold Cooke's Organ Sonata No.1 in the presence of the composer, in Cardiff University's Concert Hall, and 46 years later in 2019, I premiered Richard Elfyn Jones' Oboe Sonata in his presence. At Cardiff University while I was an undergraduate, I studied Harmony and Counterpoint with Richard Elfyn Jones, and performed the Oboe Sonata written by Cooke's teacher, Hindemith, in my Final Recital, in the same hall, standing next to that same pipe organ which 46 years earlier was used to premiere Cooke's Sonata.

Born in Gomersal, Yorkshire, on 4th November 1906, **Arnold Atkinson Cooke** was the second son of Reginald Cooke who worked in the family owned carpet manufacturing business in nearby Liversedge. Influenced by his violin playing grandfather, Arnold began playing the piano at the age of 7 and whilst studying at Repton School in 1921, he took up the cello and was first taught composition. In 1925 he went up to Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, to read History. Influenced by the newly appointed Professor of Music, Edward J. Dent, Cooke switched to the music course, and in 1929, with his BA in music and a recommendation from Dent, he went to study piano and composition with Paul Hindemith for three vital years at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. Returning to Cambridge, he began his professional career, firstly as musical director of the Festival Theatre, and shortly thereafter Professor of composition, harmony and counterpoint at the Royal Manchester College of Music in 1933. It was at this time that Cooke's music began to establish a reputation, and in 1934 his first Concert Overture was presented by Sir Henry Wood at a Queen's Hall Promenade Concert. His instrumental and chamber music also began making appearances in concert programmes, such as his first String Quartet in 1935 and Harp Quintet in 1934. From there, in 1938 and with the intention of furthering his music career, he moved to London. It was here that he wrote a Piano Concerto, which several

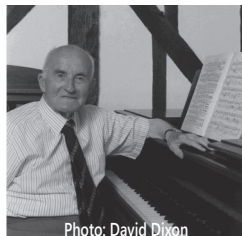


Photo: David Dixon

years later after its completion in 1940, would be performed and broadcast by the BBC. These intentions were short lived however, as his career was interrupted by the war, and he joined the Navy as liaison officer. Cooke continued to compose, and produced his Sonata for Cello and Piano Trio during this time. After demobilisation in 1945, Cooke worked on his First Symphony, which would receive its first performance by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, and continued to survive on various freelance opportunities and commissions. Taking up a professorship at Trinity College of Music in 1947, teaching harmony, counterpoint and composition, this would prove to be his final post until retirement in 1979. This seemingly settled period in Cooke's life saw him at his most prolific, with five Promenade concert premieres, including the Oboe Concerto in 1955, and many other commissions, a substantial amount of chamber and instrumental works, including 2 Organ Sonatas, the first of which received its premiere in 1973 at Cardiff University played by the composer and organist Richard Elfyn Jones who recalls the experience:

*"In 1973 I gave the first performance of Arnold Cooke's first Organ Sonata in Cardiff, at the University's Concert Hall. I remember the work as being beautifully written for the instrument and a joy to play. I was aware previously of Cooke's reputation as a British composer influenced strongly by Hindemith, with whom he had studied in the 1930s. (One recalls that Cooke was unkindly described as a Hindemith 'clone' by one critic.) The Sonata certainly confirmed the Hindemithian influence. As a student I was very taken by Hindemith's great orchestral works, like the Mathis der Maler Symphony and Nobilissima Visione. When we talked after my recital I remember Cooke's comments about his teacher and how he regretted that by then, the 1970s, he had fallen rather out of fashion despite his unchallenged greatness among 20th century composers. Meeting Arnold Cooke was an honour for me as a young composer and organist and I recall him as being a very modest, self-effacing man."*

Cooke's legacy for the oboe includes two sonatas, a concerto and quartet for oboe and strings. The two sonatas were each dedicated to prominent oboists of the time: Leon Goossens and Evelyn Rothwell (Lady Barbirolli), and seem tailored to their individual playing styles.

The **Sonata for Oboe and Harpsichord or Piano** (1962) , dedicated to Evelyn Rothwell and Vera Aveling, is in three movements. The opening *Lento* starts with a gloriously bluesy spread Cm<sup>7(9)</sup> chord held for the whole bar, over which the oboe's high D initially floats before descending into the baroque overture-like rhythms of the piano. It is this use of long held chords which makes this sonata so interesting to play with the piano, with its longer sustaining power. Even though the baroque flavour of this sonata is clearly influenced by the harpsichord repertoire, played on the modern grand piano, the spread chords become a richer wash of colour; the baroque rhythms and counterpoint sound more reminiscent of the way Cooke's teacher Hindemith layered his scores, and the single line duets between instruments sound more balanced. After the introduction, the piano's ascending chromatic scales take root in the oboe line at the start of the *Allegro*, which is full of rapid *staccato* in the piano, under precisely articulated oboe lines which twirl and dance above. The movement almost ends as it began, with another *Lento* bluesy chord and oboe high D, but at the last moment Cooke pulls the rug out from under our moment of calm and we rush to the finish.

The slow movement is an extraordinary structure; the Shostakovich-like intensity is rarely heard in the oboe repertoire. Just like the *Lento* of the first movement, the *Adagio* starts with spread chords, and sudden shifting harmonies in the piano introduce the oboe's mournful melody, chromatically meandering its way to the bottom of the register. The mood suddenly lifts, and like an orchestral solo, the oboe, now in a higher register, floats a softer theme which rapidly crescendos to a section of mordent embellished melody. In the central *poco più mosso ed agitato* section, there is a sudden outpouring of symphonic textures and orchestral power which can only fully be realised by using a piano. The oboe line frantically leaps and dives as it tries to evade the onslaught of the piano's percussive bass chords. The aggression quickly dissipates and echos of the piano trills continue as the oboe line fades into the distance.

The third movement *Rondo*, with its syncopated oboe melody, lightheartedly romps to the end, briefly relaxing into triplet figures before the pianist's virtuosic solo recapitulation of the second subject propels us almost to the end. Yet just as in the

first movement, there is one final surprise shift in tempo before the final piano flourish.

The **Sonata for Oboe and Piano**, written for Leon Goossens in 1957, is a testament to Goossens's vocal style of playing, and is the third work Cooke wrote for him. The opening *Andante* begins with a chordal figure in the piano which gently oscillates between G major and minor before the oboe enters with a long tender melody. After the piano restates this melody in embellished form, the oboe line drifts off into an *ad lib* while the piano tries to reassert the opening texture, before we suddenly change tempo into the *Allegro vivace*. The themes of this faster central section are a light *staccato* motif in both instruments, and a more *legato* drifting melody, but this momentum doesn't last for very long and soon we hear the opening tender melody from the *Andante* against a new triplet accompaniment. Following this brief *poco meno mosso*, the faster tempo returns and with it the *staccato* theme, now stronger in piano octaves. Cooke then combines elements of the *legato* triplet accompaniment figure and *staccato* theme to form a canon culminating in a bitonal fortissimo chord, before Cooke's structural trademark recap of the very opening, followed by a quick coda, now decisively ending in G major.

Like the major/minor oscillating start to the first movement, the *Andante* second movement also starts ambiguously, with the key of C major in the simple chordal piano accompaniment, against the C minor melancholy oboe melody. Gradually through the movement Cooke increases the emotion by the introduction of quavers, syncopated quavers and then semiquavers before the theme returns, this time with a baroque style dotted piano counter-melody underneath, ending in the more optimistic key of C major.

The *Allegro giocoso* Rondo Finale starts unambiguously back in G minor, with a rustic dance in 9/8 which sounds like the stamping of each foot as two short piano chords each bar introduce every short oboe reply. This rondo theme is alternated with toccata-like running triplets in the piano and a quirky section where the oboe plays ornamented triplets over a 4/4 *staccato* figure which reminds us of the first movement. However the final outing of the theme is subdued, and a rippling triplet

accompaniment replaces the foot stamping, the triplets slow down until the speed and theme of the *Andante* which started the whole sonata returns for the last time. But this time the piano is the instrument to play the *ad lib* passages, while the oboe waits, holding long notes, for the final quasi plagal cadence into G.

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After studying at the University of Wales, Bangor and King's College, Cambridge, **Richard Elfyn Jones** started his career as an organist (he was an FRCO Limpus Prizewinner at the Royal College of Organists); orchestral conductor (semi-finalist in the Cantelli International Conducting Competition, Milan 1980); and choral director (for many years conductor of the Cardiff Polyphonic Choir). But his main activity has been composition. He recently retired as head of composition at Cardiff University.



Richard Elfyn Jones is one of Wales's most versatile composers with an output that is very wide-ranging. He has written prolifically, mainly to commission, in all genres except opera. During the early 1990s his scores for the Maryland PBS television series *After the Warming* and *Timeline* gained him international recognition. Two large-scale choral/orchestral works by him are *Goroesiad Cenedl* (2000) and *In David's Land* (2006). Among the artists for whom he has composed are Bryn Terfel, Rebecca Evans, Dame Gillian Weir, Jack Brymer, John Scott, Llyr Williams, the Choir of King's College Cambridge, the Britten Quartet, the Debussy Trio and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. He is also the author of four books including *The Early Operas of Tippett* and *Music and the Numinous*.

Richard Elfyn Jones writes:

*"I have always shied away from linking my music to a non-musical programme of any kind, be that as an expression of something in nature or a reflection of some emotion that I have felt. I'm reminded of Schumann's answer to a question posed too him as to what was 'the meaning' of a piano piece he had composed. Schumann's response was disarming to say the least - he remained silent*

*and just played the piece again. Similarly for me the compositional process is fundamentally an abstract one, with the focus on balancing a musically coherent form with as wide a range of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic variety as seems appropriate within my avowedly neo-classical style. The oboe sonata is no exception to this rule, yet it has a programmatic title - Altea Sonata. This is because I have a lovely bolt-hole I can escape to on the seafront in Altea, Spain. Parts of the work were composed there as I sat basking in the sun and observing the different kinds of blue in the sky and sea. To the left is something else, the towering mountain 'as if in the sea' which is called Penon d'Ifach (Calpe rock). Does the argumentative character in my work reflect the craggy dramatic impression of that great rock? I don't know. It is for others to contemplate whether or not this can be found in the music. If so, it must be in a rather private way. There are certainly no Spanish rhythms here nor echoes of Valencian folk song. I feel that the music remains an abstractly conceived creation, but, I hope, no less appealing because of that.*

*After an expansive call to attention the main theme is heard in the oboe supported by a rich ostinato in the piano. The piano here has vibrant harmonies that are rather French in character (à la early Messiaen). The development maintains the jocular mood but in an argumentative way, while the reprise is signalled by the return of the piano's ostinato chords leading to a reflective coda.*

*The slow movement is a rather solemn song without words. It is a simple piece, imbued with a romantic, nostalgic quality. There is a central hiatus for piano which seems to question the prevailing mood but the original sense of repose soon returns in the varied repeat of the main theme.*

*The Finale bounces along in a playful manner, as the syncopations of its cakewalk rhythm suggest. Later there is a more expansive rhapsodic passage but the cakewalk soon reasserts itself. In the final section heroic triadic harmonies provide an inexorable culmination and, hopefully, a fitting close."*

© Richard Elfyn Jones



The Altea Sonata was first performed in St Woolos Cathedral, Newport, on March 21st 2019 by Catherine Tanner Williams and Christopher Williams, in the presence of the composer.

### ***Luminous***

Imagine standing alone at night deep in a forest.  
All around you fireflies suddenly appear in random patterns.  
The clouds part and reveal a full moon.

The inspiration for ***Darkness Falling with Birdsong*** comes from Stackpole Quay in Pembrokeshire, which is one of my favourite places in Wales. The quay is in a small wooded valley, where as darkness falls, you can listen to birds singing and watch the stars twinkling through the leafy canopy. The form of the piece takes you on a walk down through the trees listening to a blackbird singing, to the water's edge - the central piano solo - at which point the sun goes below the horizon, and then back up the other side until finally looking down at the sea from the headland, the light has faded.

The pieces were first performed by the composer, with pianist Christopher Williams on October 31st 2004 in Llanelli, and given their English premiere in Cheltenham Town Hall the following year.

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Cornish oboist Catherine Tanner Williams studied Music at Cardiff University, where she met her husband, the pianist Christopher Williams.



They began playing together almost from the moment they met, and he accompanied her for her final degree recital, her ARCM (Performing) Diploma, and her final postgraduate recital at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. In their 27 years as a couple and duo, they have performed recitals across the UK.

Their world premiere recording of works by R. Strauss, Mozart and Glinka was released on Willowhayne Records in 2018.

While at university, Catherine gave the premiere of Anthony Power's *...further in shadow...* for oboe and orchestra, and won an award from The Countess of Munster Musical Trust to study with Douglas Boyd and Sophia McKenna. Her teachers also included David Cowley and Celia Craig. She has played principal oboe with many orchestras including Welsh Sinfonia, English Symphony Orchestra, Bath Philharmonia, Chamber Orchestra of Wales, Welsh Concert Orchestra, Orchestra de Cymru (with whom she recorded her own Oboe Concerto under Emmanuel Siffert), Festival Orchestra of Wales, Westward Chamber Orchestra, Burry Port Opera, St Woolos Sinfonia, Hereford Sinfonia, Cardiff Bach Orchestra (with whom she performed Bach's Concerto for Oboe d'amore), and also freelanced with Cardiff Sinfonietta and BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

As well as her *Oboe Concerto*, other compositions include *Darkness Falling with Birdsong* and *Luminous* which she premiered with Christopher Williams in Cheltenham Town Hall; *Hidden Birds* for trumpet and piano, premiered by Philippe Schartz and Christopher Williams in Columbus, Ohio, at the International Trumpet Guild; and the piano piece *Blue and White; Dreaming of Sleep* premiered in St David's Hall, Cardiff by her husband.



Born in Wales, Christopher Williams is a music graduate of Cardiff University and now leads a busy and varied professional life as a pianist, composer, conductor, teacher and arranger. He is currently assistant director of the BBC National Chorus of Wales and is a pianist for the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, with whom he has performed at the BBC Proms and recorded for the Chandos and Hyperion labels. A staff accompanist at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama since 1997, Christopher has taught piano at Cardiff University since 2001 where his own teachers included Richard McMahon, Simon Shewring and Martin Jones.

Influenced by his first teacher and mentor, Walter Ryan, Christopher developed a keen interest in the study and performance of works by undeservedly neglected composers and has since gone on to perform the rarely-heard piano concertos of Carl Reineke and Anton Rubinstein.

In addition to his work as a soloist, Christopher is in great demand as an accompanist and chamber musician, and has partnered many of the prominent instrumentalists of his generation including trumpeter Philippe Scharz, with whom he has recorded music by André Jolivet for Chandos; his wife the oboist Catherine Tanner-Williams, with whom he has recorded CDs of oboe transcriptions and oboe sonatas on the Willowhayne Records label; hornist Tim Thorpe, with whom he has recorded a CD of Schubert and Brahms for Naxos; David Childs, David Pyatt and Tine Thing Helseth.

He has also appeared on BBC TV and been broadcast on BBC Radio, Radio Luxembourg and NDR.

His recording of Brahms transcriptions for Naxos' Grand Piano label, released in October 2017, was featured as CD of the week on *NDR Kultur*.

### Also available from Willowhayne Records

*"The musical rapport and impeccable ensemble on this charming CD are testament to the long musical association of oboist Catherine Tanner-Williams and her husband Christopher Williams; they have been performing as an oboe and piano duo since meeting at Cardiff University 25 years ago.*

*The oboe sound is both warm and plangent, the piano perfectly balanced. Throughout, Catherine Tanner-Williams plays with an unaffected and direct musicality, accompanied with a deft and lucid touch by her husband, Christopher."*

David Cowley, Double Reed News





Recorded at 24-bit 96KHz resolution

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